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Weatherford Federated

Della Barnwell Whisenhunt

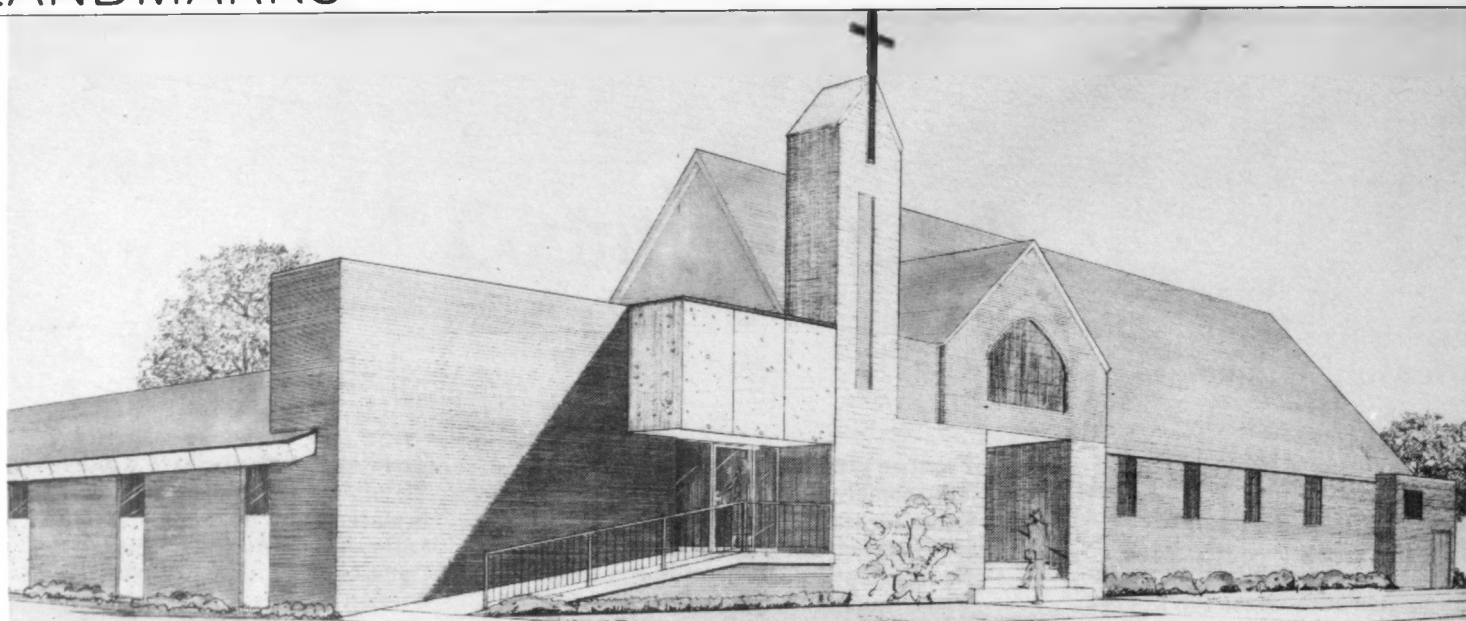
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Weatherford Federated

The first building of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Weatherford, Oklahoma Territory, was constructed in 1898. It was the first church in the town, which boasted 14 saloons at that time. It is also interesting to note that the first Congregational Church in Weatherford was organized the same year.

Furthermore, it was a part of the Ecumenical Movement, even though it did not become so close to us out here on the Western plains until one century plus 18 years after it began and until a few weeks before the Armistice was signed ending World War I. It was on Sunday, September 23, 1918, that the local Congregational Church joined forces with the local Christian (Disciples of Christ) Church. The state of Oklahoma was only 11 years old when this union of the two churches took place; thus, the Federated Church has grown right along with the young 46's state.

The Articles of Federation were drawn up (by members from both churches), and each congregation ratified the Articles which have formed the basis of the mutual agreement throughout the years. As the need arose, the Articles were amended. . . and more changes updated them about a half century after the original federation when the local congregation of the Presbyterian Church USA joined the two-church federation (in 1968). The Rev. Tom Jolly was instrumental in bringing the Presbyterians into the fold. With the three churches in one, the name continued to be the Federated Church; the Articles were expanded to include the Presbyterian contingent.

Each of the three churches has maintained its own denominational organization. The governing board of 20 members is chosen from all three groups; the monies are divided equally, including the outreach money, which is sent through the proper channels to each church benevolence.

The following is from the Statement of Beliefs as printed in a recent church brochure:

The Federated Church believes in the Bible as God's teaching and His revelation to newness of life in Christ. We believe in Christ as God's Son, the Trinity as God's expression of Himself to man, and the celebration of two sacraments: the Lord's Supper, which we celebrate each Sunday, and baptism. Individual interpretation of the Scripture and freedom of expression are encouraged in all areas of faith and practice.

Membership in the Federated Church may be received by a person's own statement of faith or by a letter from another congregation.

At the present time, most of the members are from one of the three churches in the federation; however, there also are members from the Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopal, Catholic, Baptist, and Church of Christ. Some of these people joined before there was the church of their choice in town. After their churches did become a reality, most of them chose to stay where they were.

by Della Barnwell Whisenhunt

From the beginning, the financing of the Federated Church has been under the control of the official board. As an aside, we think we should say that financing the Federated Church has not been the major problem. Several of the ministers have from time to time also commented on this observation.

In the early years of the federation, the board had general supervision of all Sunday school work and teachers; however, that duty somewhere down the line was done away with, and the teachers since then have been appointed on the basis, more or less, of whether they would be able to serve.

The Federated Church works with both the large churches and the small ones and takes an active part in the inter-church work and in civic responsibilities. For example, the minister takes an active part in the City Ministerial Alliance; the Chancel Choir sings in all inter-church and community-sponsored activities; the members cooperate in the World Day of Prayer, and the men play inter-church softball in the summer.

Besides the Sunday school, the auxiliaries of the Federated Church are about the same as they are in any other Protestant church. The women are organized into the Christian Women's Fellowship of which there are three circles. The men call themselves simply the Federated Men's Club; there are different interest and age groups among the youth. Even the adult singles have their organization.

The Federated Church is a living, loving, and growing church. We welcome visitors.

(From THE OKLAHOMA CHRISTIAN — December, 1983)