

How it all began

(Mrs. Phyllis R. Meadows, U.S.A.)

February 2, 1881, was a bitterly cold winter day in Portland, Maine, U.S.A. Young people from the Mizpah Mission Circle were invited to the parsonage of the Williston Congregational Church for tea.

Williston Church had recently had a revival and many of the youth had made a commitment to Christ. Pastor Clark was anxious to harness their enthusiasm; he had experienced youth quickly falling by the wayside because there were no activities to challenge them. Francis E. Clark planned to propose a new group to his young people and was busy preparing the constitution. When he shared this idea with his wife her first reaction was that it was asking too much of the youth and they could not do it.

Following the tea Pastor Clark presented the constitution for the new group, which he called the Williston Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor. The essence of the society was to provide a weekly prayer meeting led by the young people. They were asked to promise to attend and to take some part, however slight, in each meeting. The constitution spelled out the purpose of the group: "To promote an earnest Christian life among its members, to increase their mutual acquaintance, and to make them more useful in the service of God." It also included a list of officers and their duties and guidelines for the prayer meeting and the committees.



Williston Congregational Church

This was a major commitment. There was much soul-searching before 57 young people and their leaders signed the constitution. A prayer-meeting held two days later was the forerunner of regular weekly meetings. The first meeting of the month was an experience meeting, later called the consecration meeting. Incorporating the ideas of the constitution, the Christian Endeavor Pledge was born, beginning “Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I promise Him that I will strive to do whatever He would like to have me do.”

This society proved so successful that Francis Clark wrote an article for his denominational paper in August 1881 titled “How One Church Cares for Its Young People.” This article was reprinted in other papers in the United States and in England. It described the methods and plans of the Williston Society and emphasized the success of this new organization in reaching and holding the church youth. Before the end of 1881 a second society was formed in Massachusetts and in short order groups sprang up in Rhode Island, Maine, and Vermont.

Annual conventions began in 1882 with six societies representing 481 members. Each year the numbers increased until at the 1885 convention in Old Orchard, Maine, approximately 15,000 members in 253 societies were recorded. By this time a society had been organized in New Brunswick, Canada, and a Junior society in California. Also groups had begun in Hawaii, then an independent monarchy, in China, and in Ceylon, giving the first indication of Christian Endeavor’s worldwide appeal. Many young people from the CE societies followed Christ’s call to become missionaries abroad and introduced CE in their mission fields. Dr. Clark made great efforts to visit the new CE unions and to further spread CE around the world. Some of his journeys were:

1888 to Europe

1891 conducting meetings in Great Britain

- 1892 a world trip
- 1896 to Europe, India and Africa
- 1900 to Japan and China, return via Siberia
- 1903 to Australia, New Zealand, Asia, South Africa and Europe



The 1887 Convention was very significant because the CE emblem (an “E” encircled by a “C”) was adopted there along with the motto, “For Christ and the Church.” The Quiet Hour pledge to spend 15 minutes in daily devotions was introduced. Dr. Clark was elected president of the United Society, a position he held until

1925. Another important decision was the adoption of the weekly *Golden Rule* magazine as the official publication.

This 14th convention 1895 in Boston was especially noteworthy because the World’s Christian Endeavor Union was organized there, with Dr. Clark as its president.

The 15th convention in Washington, D.C. in 1896 was combined with the 1st World’s Convention. The great numbers continued, with a hymn sing on the east front of the Capitol with an estimated 75,000 participating. There were representatives from England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Australia, Persia, China, Japan, India, Mexico, and Africa. To begin the new century the 19th convention combined with the 2ⁿ World’s Convention was held in London, England. Dr. and Mrs. Clark returned from their second journey around the world to be present at these meetings. There were 500 societies in London alone and 27,000 delegates attended the opening session of the convention.

Dr. Clark certainly had no vision beyond his local church youth on that historic day in February 1881. The unprecedented growth of

Christian Endeavor around the world was only possible because the Lord was in it.

Christian Endeavor in North America

(Mrs. Phyllis R. Meadows, U.S.A.)



Dr. Francis E. Clark

Francis E. Clark's article written in 1881 was reprinted in other papers in the U.S.A. and in England. It described the methods and plans of the Williston Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor and emphasized the success of this new organization in reaching and holding the church youth. Soon a second society was formed in Massachusetts. Then societies were organized

in Rhode Island, Maine, and Vermont. The work spread and multiplied until Christian Endeavor societies were formed in many different denominations and locations as well as in different countries.

Annual conventions began in June 1882 in Portland, with six societies representing 481 members. By 1885 at the convention in Old Orchard, Maine, approximately 15,000 members in 253 societies were reported. This was an epoch-making convention for the United Society of Christian Endeavor (later known as the International Society) was organized and W. J. Van Patten elected as its first president. A general secretary was employed and a headquarters established in Boston, Massachusetts. Its purpose was to be responsible for publishing literature and promoting the movement. As the number of societies grew, they joined together to form local, regional, state, and provincial unions.

The 1892 Convention in New York City with its 30,000 delegates was the first to make a noticeable impact on the convention site.

Here the first denominational rallies (20 in number) were held. Junior meetings were also inaugurated.

The movement mushroomed so much that in 1895 over 50,000 delegates traveled to Boston, Massachusetts, for the 14th International Convention. In 1896 the 15th International Convention, was combined with the 1st World's Convention in Washington, D.C. It was reported 75,000 took part in a hymn sing on the east steps of the Capitol. In 1897 25,000 traveled to the San Francisco convention and almost swamped the railroads. International Conventions beginning in 1901 were held biennially.

CE also experienced rapid growth in Canada, where Francis Clark was born and lived for the first 8 years. In 1883 the first Canadian CE society was organized in Germain Street Baptist Church of St. John, New Brunswick. By 1894/95 there were 1,476 societies in Ontario, 200 in Quebec and 110 in Manitoba Province. The first convention outside the USA was held in Montreal, Quebec in 1893.

In the early years of the twentieth century this new movement experienced phenomenal growth. Books and literature were published and a staff employed. In 1919 the beautiful Christian Endeavor Building in downtown Boston was dedicated. Dr. Clark continued to serve as president until 1925.

During this period the growth peaked. A number of denominations had organized their own groups, often called youth fellowships. In the 1940's World War II decimated groups as many young men and women entered the service. A whole generation was lost to the leadership of Christian Endeavor. The headquarters moved to Columbus, Ohio, in 1946. Dr. Daniel A. Poling succeeded Dr. Clark as president and served in that position until 1949. After that time term limits were imposed and a number of dedicated leaders have since served as president.

The later half of the century was a time of retrenchment. An effort to unite Christian Endeavor and the denominational groups in one

youth organization was not successful. As societies dropped out the local and state unions weakened. Today there are few societies and even fewer unions. The headquarters moved to New Jersey and back to Ohio before moving to its present location in Edmore, Michigan.

Recently the state unions in Ohio and Oregon had to close down. In the US CE state unions and local CE societies are presently active in Pennsylvania (now called CE Mid Atlantic), Texas, Tennessee and some other places in the US and Canada.

The International Society, which now operates under the name Christian Endeavor International, includes groups in the United States plus the unions of Canada, Mexico, and American Samoa. The current leadership has inaugurated the use of web sites and new materials. The Internet was used to launch "Endeavor: The Student-led Ministry." The name is updated, but the Pledge and the four principles continue to be emphasized. New churches are being reached, but it is a slow process. God continues to use Christian Endeavor to challenge young people in North America "For Christ and the Church."

Christian Endeavor in Latin America

(Rev. Eliseo Vílchez-Blancas, Peru)

The Christian Endeavor movement was introduced in Latin America by North American and European protestant missionaries in the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. It was a time in which missionary activities benefited from the new political and legal conditions that allowed freedom of worship and conscience. In its beginnings the Christian Endeavor was not a denominational movement. It was planted at the same time in Congregational, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and autochthonous churches,

becoming one of the most important platform of evangelical integration and cooperation. However in its development, after the 1950s it became part of specific denominations. Following, we will highlight some characteristics and historical data of the Christian Endeavor in its relationship with the modern missionary movement and its institutionalization within some denominations.

Christian Endeavor and the Protestant missionary movement

After the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865), the protestant churches from that country and Europe experienced revivals that were characterized by massive prayer and evangelization meetings and a new drive towards missions. In this context, in 1881 the Christian Endeavor was born and it became within a short time the largest non denominational youth movement of international expansion and introduced young men and women to missionary tasks. These men and women from different denominations departed as missionaries towards many countries in Latin America and the world, and in their mission work, they also established the Christian Endeavor Societies.

In this way, James D. Eaton and his wife Gertrude C. Pratt arrived in Chihuahua in 1882, sent by the Congregational Church, to establish the evangelical work in the north of **Mexico**. They established the Congregational Church in Chihuahua, and founded the first CE society in the Church of Chihuahua, in the beginnings of 1890, and in very little time Mrs. Gertrude became the main promoter of the movement in Mexico and initiator of the first conventions. That same year, three more CE societies were established: in the Theological Presbyterian Seminary of Tlalplan, in the City of Mexico; in the Congregational Church of Parral and in the Theological School of Juarez, both in the State of Chihuahua. In the following years the number of CE societies grew, and in the first national convention in 1895 they

had “twenty four societies in the country registered, with more than five hundred members”.

The same happened with other missionaries in Mexico. The Presbyterian missionary societies began, in 1887 to promote news in their newspaper *El Faro* on the “societies of young Christians” in other countries, and years later, many of their members would be involved in the establishment of CE societies in their mission fields. This way Missionary C. Scott Williams. in 1895 became the first president of the United Society of Christian Endeavor – the first interdenominational body of the CE in Mexico. In a similar manner, Samuel Guy Inman, another missionary was appointed president of



Newspaper “EL Faro” in 1897

the United Society of Christian Endeavor in 1911, and later on became executive secretary of the Cooperation Committee of Latin America (CCLA) – the first evangelical organization at a Latin American level that fostered the integration and cooperation of protestant missions and churches in the subcontinent. Also, the Association of Friends (Quakers) which was established in 1871 in the city of Matamoros, years later had missionaries committed to the Christian Endeavor. In 1922, this mission and church had a total of seven CE societies,

out of which five were youth societies and two were children societies.

In **Chile** the insertion process was similar. In 1896 we have news of Presbyterian missionary James F. Garvin and his activities with the CE society of Valparaiso. Also in **Brazil**, where the missionary presence began earlier, the Christian Endeavor had a similar growth and expansion as Mexico, in 1911 there were already ninety three

well organized CE societies. In **Colombia**, in the decade of 1920, many local Christian Endeavor conventions took place, which involved other CE societies. There, in 1926, the Evangelical Convention of Colombians encouraged the formation of the United Society of Colombian Christian Endeavor. In **Guatemala**, in 1924 the Presbyterians established the first CE society in the church of the capital. The founding missionaries were the Sullenbergs and Miss Ella Williams. The Friends or Quakers did the same that year, in Chiquimula with missionary Helen Kersey.

In **Peru**, the first CE society was established in the Evangelical Church of Negreiros in Lima, in 1907. Its main promoter was Scotsman John Ritchie, missionary who had participated in the Christian Endeavor of Glasgow. In a similar manner, other British missionaries established other CE societies: Jorge F. Sears the CE society of Arequipa in 1912; Guillermo T.T. Millhan and Miss Joyce M. Baker the CE society of Cusco in 1922; and Misses Annie Soper and Roda Gould the CE society of Lamas, in the Eastern department of San Martin. The first integrating step in this country was promoted by the Synod of the Peruvian Evangelical Church in 1934. It formed a commission which was in charge of promoting the idea and convening the First Congress of Young People, and appointing the first board of directors of the Union of Christian Endeavor (UDEC). This national organization, unlike that of Mexico in 1895, was made up by Peruvian converts and one Bolivian, and its first president was former Bolivian priest Walter M. Montaña.

In cooperation of the Christian Endeavor with the missionary movement the Pan American Convention of Christian Endeavor took place in 1922. This was carried out in the city of Sao Paulo, Brazil, with the participation of delegates from many countries; among its speakers were missionaries - in those days, continental leaders from the Protestant movement - such as doctor Samuel G. Inman, executive secretary of the Cooperation Committee in Latin America

(CCAL), and Wenster E. Browning, representative of the Christian Endeavor in Peru.

It is also important to mention that the Christian Endeavor participated in a direct and indirect manner in other organizations. In **Argentina** they were part of the Argentinean Federation of Evangelical Youth Leagues (FALJE), which in 1928, in their national conference had as brotherly delegates young people from Chile and Uruguay. Likewise, in **Colombia**, they participated in the first National Convention of Evangelical Youth, in 1939, which a year later became the Evangelical Youth Federation of Colombia (FEJECO). In a similar manner, in August 1940, the first Congress of Evangelical Youth of **Cuba** took place, where the Federation of Young Evangelicals of Cuba was created. Another larger organization, the Latin-American Union of Evangelical Youth (ULAJE) was established in Lima in 1941, during the First Latin American Congress of Evangelical Youth. On this occasion 20 denominations from 11 countries were represented, with a total of 30 delegates. The Christian Endeavorers – especially from countries of the Southern Cone- were the main promoters of this process, although we must also recognize that in the following decades the Christian Endeavor and the ULAJE drifted apart.

The Christian Endeavor and its denominational constituency.

Today the situation of the Christian Endeavor in Latin America is different. One of its main characteristics is that they are part of some pioneer denominations of Protestantism, without interdenominational interaction at a local, national and even less at a continental level.

Beginning in 1930 the Latin American churches underwent a process of nationalization and institutionalization. In this way, the pioneer denominations institutionalized their ministries in departments, little by little losing the links with other groups and focusing their efforts on themselves.

In the 1950s this became apparent also in Christian Endeavor. By then in Mexico the United Society of Christian Endeavor no longer existed, therefore in 1955, the CE societies of the Presbyterian National Church established a larger body confined to the societies of this denomination: the National Union of Christian Endeavor Societies (UNSEC). The Conservative National Presbyterian Church did the same years later. In Guatemala something similar happened that same year in 1955 as the National Union of Christian Endeavor (UNEC) was established within the National Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Guatemala.

In Peru a previous interdenominational organization did not exist, although there were attempts to establish one. The body that brought together the CE societies of the country was the Union of Christian Endeavors (UDEC, today UNDEC). Although it was a part of the Peruvian Evangelical Church, it managed to convene representatives from other denominations as the CE societies of Huaraz and Lamas. The later one had been organized by missionary Annie Soper in April 1931. Delegates from this society were sent to the Second Congress of the UDEC in 1941 and to the Assembly-Convention in Huancayo in 1946. In the following years this relationship was lost because the CE society of Lamas joined the Association of Evangelical Churches of North Eastern Peru and the UDEC the Peruvian Evangelical Church.

Today, in Mexico, the National Union of Christian Endeavor Societies (UNSEC) is part of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico, while the Union of Christian Endeavor Societies of the National Council of the City of Mexico (USECPNCM) belongs to the National Presbyterian Conservative Church of Mexico. In Guatemala, the National Christian Endeavor Union (UNEC) is part to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Guatemala. In Peru, the National Union of Christian Endeavor (UNDEC) belongs to the Peruvian Evangelical Church. We understand that other national or denominational unions

exist in other countries of Central and South America, however at this moment the author does not have any specific information.

Christian Endeavor in Australia and the Pacific

(Mrs. Joyce Spicer, Australia)

In Australia and the Pacific islands CE was introduced between 1883 and the early 1900s. In Australia CE commenced with information from Colonel Kensel who had experience of the new CE movement in America. His daughter Mrs. Thurgood began 'The Young Ladies Society of Christian Endeavour' in Geelong, Victoria in 1883, thus commencing the first CE Society in Australia.

Australia

After the Geelong Society began, subsequent CE Societies commenced in the State of Victoria in Melbourne and other towns over the next seven years. In 1890 the Victorian CE Union was formed and conducted the first Convention in Melbourne.



In 1891, it was reported that there were 65 Societies, with a membership of over 3000. Dr. Clark came to Australia and the third Convention in 1892 had 205 Societies attending. CE flourished in Victoria with the big highlight being when they hosted the 10th World's CE Convention in 1938 with thousands present. CE in Victoria declined after more than a century and the State Union folded in the late 1990's.

The first **Queensland** CE Society was commenced in 1888 in the capital city, Brisbane. Several churches of the Congregational and Baptist denominations quickly commenced CE and the State Union was formed in 1891. Christian Endeavour grew strongly in city and country churches and by 1935 there were 721 Societies with 15125 members in the State. Since the 1980's the numbers have declined