



Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren

Joel Kline, Pastor
Jeanne Davies, Pastor



Located at 783 W. Highland Avenue, the church was constructed in stages over many years.

Since 1899 the story of the Church of the Brethren has been interwoven with the history of Elgin. That was the year church elders accepted an offer to relocate the Brethren Publishing House from Mount Morris, Illinois, to here. The church-owned press printed the denomination's books, periodicals, hymnals and instructional materials. The new home for the printing house was an impressive brick building located near the southwest corner of State and Chicago streets.

The publishing house employees were also church members, and in October 1899 they organized a local congregation. Services were initially held at the printing plant. The following year the congregation began to look for a more suitable place to worship. With many church members moving into Elgin's near west side, the congregation decided to purchase a recently constructed "but still unfinished" church located on Highland Avenue. The sellers were members of another faith that had fallen on hard financial times and were unable to complete the building.

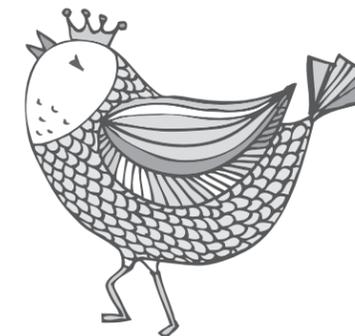
Over the years the Brethren constructed many additions to the building, including one designed in 1932 by noted local architect Ralph Abell. Despite these changes, portions of the original church building remain within the present day structure. The most prominent feature of the building today is the sanctuary, which was constructed in 1951-52.

The Brethren Publishing House (renamed Brethren Press in 1957) became an important center for the denomination's business and spiritual affairs. Soon after opening in Elgin it also became the church's international headquarters, known as the General Offices. The consolidation of activities in Elgin brought Brethren from around the world to our city.

In 1958 the new General Offices building and printing plant opened near Route 25 and the toll road. The offices remain there today, although the printing operation closed in the 1980s.

Along with the publishing house on State Street, the Highland Avenue Church became an important anchor for Elgin's near west side. Several church members lived and worked within walking distance of these two centers of activity. The high concentration of Brethren created what was almost a community within a community on Elgin's west side. In the days before commercial home mortgages were readily available, church members helped finance one another's home-buying efforts. The story behind many of the homes in the vicinity of this year's tour have connections to the Brethren.

Central to Church of the Brethren tradition is a deep commitment to peacemaking, nonviolence, and non-resistance. Along with Quakers and Mennonites, these three faiths have been labelled "historic peace churches." They believe that following Jesus includes intentionally working and praying for peace and reconciliation in the



world. Beginning during World War II, and following though until the end of the military draft, these faiths worked with the federal government to create programs of alternative service for those conscientiously opposed to participating in warfare but willing to serve in compassionate and peaceful ways. During World War II and the Korean War young men served at many different sites nationwide performing public services ranging from conservation work to direct care of the ill and infirm. Elgin State Hospital, now Elgin Mental Health Center, was one such site. The churches funded all the costs associated with alternative service. The Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren provided moral and social support for those assigned to the psychiatric hospital. The service tradition continues today through Brethren Volunteer Services, a denominational program for young adults who offer 1 to 2 years of service in hundreds of communities worldwide.

The Highland Avenue Church has long been an Elgin-area community-focused congregation. The commitment to peace and social justice led to involvement in the antiwar and civil rights movements of the 1960s. The church assisted with immigrant resettlement after the Viet Nam War and during political upheavals in Latin America. In more recent decades, the church has been an active participant in PADS, the food pantry, and Soup Kettle.

Two church members are remembered today for their founding work with Elgin social service agencies. Those organizations now bear the names of these men. Aldene Ecker started the Ecker Center for Mental Health in 1955. James Renz founded the Renz Addiction Center in 1961. Mr. Renz just passed away in May of this year. While these names are perhaps the most visible, many other church members have held leadership roles in civic groups, such as the Kiwanis and Lions clubs, helping to promote the general welfare of the community.

ELGIN KNIT WORKS	Nº 8	
CLASSES AVAILABLE	<i>Make time to knit</i>	
KNITTING CROCHET SPINNING FELTING		
8 DOUGLAS AVE ELGIN IL 60120 847.627.4700 shop@elginknitworks.com www.elginknitworks.com		

Karena Jager
President

75 Market Street Elgin, IL 60123
(Off Larkin-Behind Jewel)

847-695-2255 Fax: 847-695-4532
www.KarenasSalon.com

Karena's
SALON & SPA
For a More Personal Touch