



HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL USHERS FELLOWSHIP

In the year 1939, the first meeting of the National Ushers Fellowship was held at the Detroit Church of God, Detroit, MI. The church was then located at Chaney and Jay Streets and Rev. Charles White was pastor. Mrs. Bessie Wilson, Rev. C.A. Craig, and a few others saw the need for more efficient ushering at our National Association of the Church of God (NACOG) conventions and volunteered their services. It was evident that they were fulfilling a real need and their service attracted much attention.

The next year (1940), Rev. White recommended to the trustees and ministers of NACOG that a national usher president be selected. Mr. Daniel S. Phillips, a deacon from Sharon, PA, and Rev. L.M. Turner, then pastor of the Church of God on Cedar Avenue in Sharon, PA recommended Sis. Esther B. Culp for that position. Sis. Culp had worked for a number of years as a youth worker at West Middlesex Campground (headquarters of NACOG), and pioneering a number of projects. Sis. Culp was elected as the first national usher president in 1940. Since that first election, Sis. Culp said, "...there have been many struggles and many changes. We feel that these changes have been helpful, and that our National Ushers Fellowship has developed into a much more efficient organization. Where there is no struggle, there is no active development."

The annual camp meeting of the National Association of the Church of God is the high point of service, and has been throughout the years. At the West Middlesex Campground, known as Zion's Hill, uniformed ushers served at every service of worship and classes were also taught by the president, Mrs. Culp. These courses provided new materials for those who attended from year to year and as a point of training for new ushers coming into the National Ushers Fellowship.

Sis. Culp decided since she was being elected every two years, she must improve her leadership in order to hold a high standard of ushering. She therefore, began to do research on the field of ushering. She collected many resources, and subsequently was brought into contact with the School of Ushering at the University of Nebraska. Upon completing the courses offered in this school, she was awarded her certificate, and the Gold Master Ushers' Key in 1956. The Gold Key was presented to her in a special service held in her local congregation in Sharon, PA.

In early 1957, Sis. Culp led the National Ushers Fellowship in a drive to recruit and train new ushers. "Captainships" as they were called formed in many states. Enthusiasm grew by leaps and

bounds, and soon different teams of ushers were being used daily during our national camp meeting every year. The National Ushers Fellowship has witnessed much progress within the National Association of the Church of God (West Middlesex, PA) for that we are truly grateful to God.

Words are inadequate to express the valuable contributions of the late Rev. Gabriel P. Dixon, the then pastor of the Cote Brilliante Avenue Church of God, St. Louis, MO. He was the first teacher of the National Ushers Fellowship. In those formative years his words of wisdom and encouragement were indispensable. Rev. Dixon recommended to the National Ushers Fellowship the late Rev. Raymond S. Jackson, of Detroit, MI, who for years was Chairman of the (NACOG) West Middlesex Ministerial Assembly. His fatherly counsel and sympathetic guidance meant much to the National Ushers Fellowship during difficult years. Sis. Culp, in her kindly way would say of him, "He not only taught us, but he put on his tuxedo and showed us how." The national ushers felt that he was the 'Head Usher'. His untiring efforts and encouragement meant everything to us. With his fatherly care for us, the National Ushers Fellowship made great progress.

It was in 1952 that Sis. Daisy Davis had a vision of a National Ushers Convention and brought it to the attention of Sis. Culp and Rev. A.R. Cochran. It was in 1954 in Sharon, PA that suggestions were first made to have a Spring National Ushers Fellowship Convention. There was such enthusiasm that in 1955, Rev. Cochran, then pastor of the Cedar Avenue Church of God, Cleveland, OH hosted the first annual National Ushers Fellowship Convention. From the beginning, it has been a rich spiritual retreat for all who attend. The 1965 convention held in Columbus, OH marked the tenth consecutive year of the national convention. Each year an annual banquet with program and speaker has been held; there has been the crowning of a "State of States queen", Ushers Workshop, a guided tours; and inspirational worship services that thrill all who attend the annual convention.

Year after year, many churches joined and the ability to bring quality ushers training began to spread across the country through the National Ushers Fellowship. It reached international dimensions when the Angle Street Church of God in Hamilton, Bermuda became a member. Plans were then made to go to Bermuda for the 1966 Annual National Ushers Fellowship Convention.

The National Ushers Fellowship is an integral arm of the work and ministry of the National Association of the Church of God (NACOG). The ushers have made their contribution in both spiritual and financial ways. The national ushers paid for the concrete floor of the Raymond S. Jackson Tabernacle on the NACOG Campground. The ushers also donated monies for the purchase of the folding chairs at the time. The front altar of the tabernacle is always graced with flowers and ferns placed there by the National Ushers Fellowship. Over the years the National Ushers Fellowship have raised and given faithfully to the general work of the National Association of the Church of God.

In 1976, the first ushers' choir was organized by Sis. Luesther Pierce (Linden, NJ). We have had an ushers choir at our national convention ever since. Also in 1976, the first youth minister was used at one of our conventions, in the person of Min. Timothy J. Clarke now Bishop Timothy J. Clarke, pastor of the First Church of God (Columbus, OH).

By the year 1985, many of the pioneer leaders in the National Ushers Fellowship had gone on to receive their great reward. They have given us a good beginning to a great work. They have made the ministry of ushering known far and wide. By having such a ministry, the Church has been helped and we as ushers have received great blessings, and spiritual development as Christians. The ushers have served at the campground, field days in their states, funerals, and in their local congregations.

Our current and past president and all the present and former ushers are humbly proud to have had the opportunity of serving the Church on a national scale. In the words of our first leader, the late Sis. Esther B. Culp, the one who is most responsible for the years of progress and growth, the feeling of the entire National Ushers Fellowship can be summed up when she said, "We are happy to be a part of the National Association and members of the great team of national workers!"