

Chapter 10

Conference in Baltimore Appointed to Gettysburg Circuit

Leaving my horse with my father-in-law, I took the train for Baltimore, where conference met in March, 1866. At this conference I was appointed to Bendersville, Adams County. The circuit was called Gettysburg circuit – but why I do not know, as we did not preach within ten miles of Gettysburg. It is now very appropriately called Bendersville circuit.¹

Rev. J.M. Young² was presiding elder on the district. He was a very fine Christian gentleman. This made us a move of one hundred and seventy-five miles. I returned from conference to Wyoming, and we shipped our goods to Carlisle, Cumberland County, by rail. From there to Bendersville, eighteen miles, they were hauled by wagons. My family then accompanied me by rail to father-in-law's in Evansville, Columbia County, where they remained while I mounted the sulky again and drove down to the new field of labor. On my way I took sick with dysentery, and it was with difficulty that I proceeded on my journey. The first day I drove to Port Trevorton, Perry County. The second to Newport, in the same county, and the third day to near Mount Holly, Cumberland County.

The fourth day about noon, I arrived on the field and stopped at the house of an old class leader, to whom I had been directed by my predecessor. It was rainy and muddy, and I was sick, tired and very much discouraged – the country and all being entirely new and strange to me. Then too, unfortunately for me, this man was one of those growling fault-finders who always look on the dark side of things and never see anything good or cheering. And by the time he had told me his tale of woe, I was completely discouraged. He could not see why conference had sent me on that circuit to starve. He said my predecessor had no family but himself and his wife, and they could hardly live there – that everything had gone down on the circuit during his stay among them – and that I had a family of wife and four children, and we certainly could not live on that circuit. In short, everything was wrong – according to that class leader. I shall never forget that wretched old class leader. It

¹ The name Gettysburg was probably applied to the large two-man circuit that covered everything west of York circuit because that was the largest town in the area and was a recognizable name that would immediately identify the approximate territory covered by the circuit. In 1864 it was decided "that Gettysburg circuit be divided and that Bermudian [Bowers] church, Kralltown appointment, and all the appointments west and north be formed into a one-handed circuit and retain the name of Gettysburg circuit." This was the circuit to which Dietterich was assigned. The remaining appointments to the south and east formed the Conewago Circuit. The Gettysburg circuit was renamed Bendersville circuit in 1870.

² Jeremiah M. Young (1806-1876) was the presiding elder for the Baltimore District 1866-68. He was born in York PA, received his first appointment in 1846 and served continuously until his retirement in 1873.

is a pity that such men should be elected to any office in any church, and he was never elected to any office again while I was there – though he tried hard for it.

The next morning being Saturday morning, I proceeded to within one mile of Bendersville and stopped with brother Daniel Peters,³ where I remained overnight. Brother Peters was from home and did not return until evening. And as I sat in his parlor alone part of the time, thinking of the new field as represented to me by one of the officials, and the rain continued to pour down, I made up my mind fully that I would fill my appointments on Sabbath – and on Monday I would order my goods back to Columbia County, return to my family, and engage in some other business. If conference would send me on a circuit to starve, as that old class leader had said I would, they had sent the wrong man and would be disappointed in the end – as I could maintain myself and family at something else.

But in the after part of the day brother Peters returned home, and by the time I had spent the evening with him I had concluded differently. This was truly a good brother, and looked at things quite differently to what the old class leader did. He told me things were not so bad after all – that no one had ever starved there yet, and he knew I would not. He said that conference had done right in sending me there, and that they had rented a fine home for us in Bendersville. The next morning he would hitch up, and take me to me appointments, and I should return and stay with him over night again. And Monday morning he would take me to town and show me the new home – and he was satisfied it would be all right. And so it was.

On Sabbath morning he hitched two horses to his buggy and took me seventeen miles to the Bower's⁴ church, where I preached to a large congregation at 10 a.m. The Lord was with us, and blessed us, and I felt as did St. Paul when he "thanked God and took courage."⁵ We returned to the home of brother Peters in the evening, as I had but one appointment that day. The next morning we went to Bendersville, saw the new home, and made arrangements to have our household goods hauled from Carlisle, eighteen miles. Tuesday morning I took the train and returned for my family in Columbia County. We spent a few days together in visiting friends and relatives, and then left for the new home in Bendersville.

The morning of the day before we left, I went alone from father-in-law's to spend a short time with my aged parents, and to take my final leave of them. As I was on foot and alone, I took time for reflection on the way. I followed up the little brook which led to my father's house. I sat down on a log by the way in the woods, and thought of my childhood days. I thought of the time when as a boy I used to catch trout and minnows in that little stream. But O what changes had taken place.

³ Daniel Group Peters (1824-1891) was an active layman in the Bendersville class. He later (1874) received a preacher's license. While he never served under appointment, he was quite useful in the work of the church. His then 14-year-old son John H. Peters (1851-1909) became an ordained elder in the Evangelical Association.

⁴ This the is Red Mount Church, in York County, just east of Lake Meade.

⁵ Acts 28:15

I thought I was now perhaps treading these banks for the last time. I then knelt down there by that log in the woods, alone, and in earnest prayer to God I thanked him for kind parents and friends, for childhood and youth, and for all his goodness in leading me safely into the way of life and salvation – and especially that he had accounted me worthy of the office and work of the Christian ministry. I also prayed him for his guidance in the future, and that he would give me success in winning souls for Jesus. After spending some time in weeping and praying in the woods by the side of that log, and reconsecrating myself, and mine, to the Lord, I arose and proceeded up the stream to father's house – the home of my childhood.

I spent some time with my parents, took dinner with them, and then stated that I must now proceed on my journey. Father then said to me, "Get the Bible and read a chapter, and have prayer with us before you go, for we may never meet again in this world." I read and prayed with them, and we had a solemn parting – so much so that when we bade each other farewell, neither could speak. It was a simple warm shake of the hand – and "The eyes spake a gentle good-bye."⁶ And it was the last time I held my mother's hand in mine, or that my hand was pressed by hers.

I took across the fields to my sister's, Mrs. James Kocher. When about a half mile from the house, as I climbed the last fence on the old homestead, being on an elevated spot, I looked back once more to take a last view of the old home – the home of my childhood. The door was wide open, and I saw mother standing in it, still looking after me. We looked at each other for a few moments, when I waved her a final adieu. It was the last look. We never saw each other again. In July I received a letter from my brother Samuel⁷ stating that mother had taken suddenly ill, and died in a few days, and was now buried. Mother – Dear Mother!

She had been a good mother to me. She had given me much good counsel and advice. She always admonished me to "be a good boy." But now she is gone to return no more – forever. But I hope to meet her again, where parting will be no more. Among her last words spoken to my sister, who watched by her side to the end, were these: "I have finished the work he gave me to do" – words so like the words of our blessed Savior when he cried on the cross, "It is finished," and like the apostle Paul when he said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course. I have kept the faith." Thus she died in peace, aged seventy-one years.

After staying with my brother Samuel at Centreville overnight, we took the train for Carlisle. We had a long a tedious journey to Bendersville. The eighteen miles from Carlisle, where we left the cars, were made on a farmer's spring wagon loaded with plow shares and furniture – and nearly the whole distance after night,

⁶ This line is from a quite popular secular song of the day which read in part
 "But the heart feels most when the lips move not, and the eye speaks a gentle good-bye –
 And the eye speaks a gentle good-bye – and the eye speaks a gentle good-bye;
 But the heart feels most when the lips move not, and the eye speaks a gentle good-bye."

⁷ Samuel Dietterich (1818-1886) and wife Elizabeth are buried in the Fowlersville Lutheran Cemetery.

and part of the road was terrible indeed. My wife and the children were entirely worn out by the time we arrived at brother Peters', where we stayed overnight.

But in a few days we were rested up and nicely fixed in our new home. Miss Sallie Evans,⁸ my wife's sister, made her home with us. In the fall I started a milliner shop which she carried on for me. On this circuit I labored alone, as I did on the mission, and by some means – I cannot tell why – I was so sorely tempted and tried as never before. Satan tried hard to drive me from the field and abandon the ministry. He would tell me that my want of education disqualified me entirely for the ministry, and that I had never been called of God to the work. Indeed I was so tempted to doubt my call to the ministry that I consented to retire from the active work and farm for father, as he was now alone. Mother having died, he desired me to come home, farm for him, and attend to his business – and I thought that would be the end of my ministry. Then, too, under this depression of spirit I labored until fall without any visible results of my labors.

But in the fall and winter, revivals broke out at the different appointments and great and lasting good was accomplished. The work broke out at three of my appointments at one time – and I was obliged to preach nightly at two of them for some time, and the third being at a distant point I left in the care of the membership. At Whitestown⁹ and Bendersville,¹⁰ two of them, we had a number of conversions. The third was at the Bower's church, where a few were converted. One of whom was a young man who afterwards attended Dickinson Seminary in Williamsport, Lycoming County, for some time, intending to prepare himself for the ministry, but his health failed and he was obliged to give up school and went west for his health – and I have lost track of him entirely.

Upon this outbreak of the work I was greatly encouraged, and wrote father requesting him to excuse me from coming home on the farm – as I now preferred continuing in the active ministry. But he insisted upon my coming, stating that it was hard when a father had labored hard all his days, and raised a large family, and then had no one to take care of him in his declining years. Being the youngest of the twelve children, and the son of his old age, I felt that I should comply with his wishes and again promised him to do so – but it was not what I now desired. I now preferred preaching.

⁸ Born in 1843, Sarah Jane Evans was two years younger than Mrs. Dietterich.

⁹ This is Idaville, Adams County, where the Evangelical church building was erected in 1850. There was also a United Brethren church erected here in 1859, but that congregation sided with the Old Constitution faction in that denomination's 1889 split and is no longer within United Methodism.

¹⁰ The Evangelical chapel at Bendersville was dedicated in 1857 and stood on Main Street, the exact location given in the 1872 atlas of Adams County. This, and all Evangelical work in Adams County except for Idaville, ceased as the result of fallout from the 1894 denominational split. The property was sold to Montana Lodge #653 of the I.O.O.F. in 1895 and is now an empty lot. The congregation is the subject of an article in volume XVIII (spring 2007) of *The Chronicle*, pages 34-39.

In December I held a meeting in a small, old school house known as the “Cranberry School House”¹¹ – where we had preached for a number of years, and had no organization and but a few members. It was located between two churches – one a United Brethren church¹² a short distance down the road, the other a Lutheran church¹³ just across the way. I said I would hold a meeting, and if I succeeded in effecting an organization I would continue the appointment – if not, I would abandon it.

We had a good meeting and sixteen young persons made a profession of religion – but their parents being members of one or the other of the churches nearby, they joined the church of their parents. And I advised them to do so, believing it to be the best for them, and I abandoned the appointment. Among the converts at this meeting were two young men who united with the Lutheran Church and are now most worthy and able Lutheran ministers. The one is Rev. E.D. Weigle,¹⁴ at present pastor of the First Lutheran Church in Altoona, Blair County, Pa. The other is Rev. D.A. Day,¹⁵ Lutheran missionary at Monrovia, Liberia, Africa, where he is doing a great work – and has been for years. These are most worthy and able ministers of the New Testament, and I refer to them with a little spiritual pride as the brightest trophies of my ministry.

In my desk among my carefully preserved and highly prized letters are several from Brother Weigle in which he refers very feelingly to the meeting in the old school house. He closes a letter to me, bearing the date of November 13th, 1883, in the following language. “How I thank you for pointing me to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, in the old school house at Cranberry. May

¹¹ This building, shown on the cover of this volume, is still standing on Cranberry Road in Tyrone township – but in very neglected state – about one mile from its western terminus with Old Carlisle Road.

¹² This was the Bethlehem United Brethren Church in Butler township, Adams County – on the Old Carlisle Road, just north of Centre Mills, near the western terminus of Cranberry Road. The church building was erected in 1860, but the congregation never recovered from the 1889 denominational split and the Mount Olivet UB Old Constitution Church erected about a mile away, between Centre Mills and Biglerville. By 1952 the building was badly in need of repair, and the remaining 25 members were transferred to the Centenary congregation in Biglerville. The building collapsed during a winter storm in 1968 and was razed. A model of the building was placed on a marker in the cemetery, which is maintained by the Biglerville congregation.

¹³ This is the Upper Bermudian Lutheran Church in Huntington township, Adams County – still an active congregation. This building was dedicated in 1837 and originally known as the Huntington Lutheran Church

¹⁴ Elias Daniel Weigel (1848-1923) successfully served Lutheran congregations in central Pennsylvania and is buried in the Biglerville Cemetery at Biglerville, Adams County PA.

¹⁵ David Alexander Day (1851-1897) joined the Union Army (illegally) at age 13 and fought to the conclusion of the Civil War. In 1869 he entered the Missionary Institute (now Susquehanna University) in Selinsgrove. He served with distinction at Muhlenberg Mission in Monrovia, Liberia, despite great hardships and offers of a position in the mission board home office, from 1874 until 1897. He died aboard ship while returning home for health reasons. He is buried in the Union Cemetery, at Selinsgrove, Snyder County PA.

God bless you and yours.” How cheering such language, from such a brother, in my declining years.

Another letter carefully stowed away and highly prized bears date as follows: “Muhlenberg Mission, August 7th, 1890. Rev. H.A. Dietterich, My Dear brother...” And in the course of his letter he says, “Yes, I too will never forget the meeting in the little country school house. I remember the sermon, even some of its divisions, but I have forgotten the text. I went to that meeting with no thought of going to the altar, but God brought the truth home to my heart, and that night I took my first stand for Christ.” In closing his letter he says, “Write to me when you can find time. There is no one I would rather hear from than you. Yours in Christ, D.A. Day.”

O, who would have thought that the influence of that little meeting would be so powerfully felt – even in Africa. Surely great things may come from small beginnings. When I remember that these able ministers were brought to Christ by my feeble efforts, I feel to thank God and take courage. And when I consider the success of these brethren, and especially that of Brother Day in a foreign field, I do not wonder that Satan tried so hard to drive me from the field before they were brought to Christ – especially if he has the power of foreknowledge, for both are doing a great work for Jesus.

During the meeting our third son was born December 26th, 1866, and received the name of George Henry – being named after both of his grandfathers, and Henry being my name also in part.

I preached at Clear Springs during the summer months, and under the locust trees in the yard surrounding the house of brother Jacob Brandt¹⁶ – hence called the Brandt appointment. I also held a woods meeting in his grove, in August. In the fall they kindly offered me the Strayer school house, nearby, for preaching and I continued the appointment during the winter – which resulted in the building of a good church the following summer, which I helped to dedicate. It is known as “The Union Church” – and I have been informed that they now have a good congregation there.¹⁷

¹⁶ Jacob Brandt (1827-1893) was a farmer in Franklin township, York County. He is buried in the (Lutheran) Franklin Church Cemetery at Clear Springs.

¹⁷ This paragraph refers to Clear Springs in Franklin township, York County. The Union Church erected in 1867 was a joint venture of the Evangelical Association, United Brethren Church, German Baptists and Church of God. Located at 1048 S. Mountain Road, it was commonly known as the South Mountain Union Church. The Evangelicals maintained an appointment there well into the 1900’s. Always a community church, it “reorganized” as a United Brethren (Old Constitution) church in 1925. In 2008 South Mountain Church merged with Celebration Community Church (a 2006 church plant of the Assembly of God denomination that had been meeting at the Range End Golf Course ballroom) and added a family life center to become Celebration Community Church meeting in the South Mountain building.

At the Bowers church we had a good brother and his family, of whom I was very fond and whom I visited frequently. He was a good, jolly fellow – but lived some three miles from the church, and was the village blacksmith. When I went down to that meeting I said to my wife, “Now I will have a good time with brother S.” But I preached on Saturday evening and he was not there. On Sabbath morning and evening he still was missing. So Sabbath evening I enquired of the class leader, who was a near neighbor to him, “Where is brother S? I have not seen him at our meeting yet. Is he sick? Or why is he not here?” The reply was, “O, he’s got into his old evil habit again.” “Indeed, what is that?” “O, he was drunk again.” “Why, I did not know he was given to drink. Is he?” “Yes, he was, and he has joined church several times and always fell back again. But this time he stood longer than ever before, but now I guess he is gone.” “Well,” I said, “I must go and see him tomorrow. I can not give up on him yet.” His reply was, “I guess it will be of no use, but you can go and see him.”

The next day I drove to his shop and we greeted each other as usual. After a few words together, the following conversation took place.

“Well, dear brother, I was very much disappointed in not seeing you in church.”

“Yes, I have not been there, and I suppose you know the reason. I was away and got into bad company – and I got drunk. And now if I go to church the people will laugh and say, ‘There he is in church, and he was drunk again.’ So I don’t like to go.”

“Well, that is just the reason I came to see you – not to give you a scolding, but to urge you to come. You have given the people reason to talk, and they will talk whether you go to church or not. But you do not intend to stay away, to go back to your old evil habit again and ruin yourself and your family – and to be lost in the end – do you?”

“Oh, no. I don’t want to do that.”

“Well, then the best thing you can do is to go with me to the church this evening and take your seat as usual among the members. And after preaching I will give an opportunity for any to speak who feel like doing so. And you get up, acknowledge your fault and ask for forgiveness – all will cheerfully do it – then go ahead and do as you did before.”

“I know it would be the best, but I don’t like to do that.”

I insisted. “It is your only safe way,” I urged. He finally consented, went with me, got up, made the acknowledgment with tears, and asked forgiveness. Nearly the whole congregation was in tears by the time he sat down. That was the last time. I saw him in Harrisburg in 1887, and he was yet happy and on his way to Zion. But if I had not gone to him as I did, he might perhaps have filled a drunkard’s grave. O how important the exhortation of the apostle, “Brethren, if as man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, let thou be tempted. But bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” – Galatians 5:1-2. How many who are lost might have been saved if this were always done to the weak.

At the end of the conference year I finished my work on the charge, having preached one hundred and ninety-four sermons – and by God’s blessing, accomplished a good and lasting work. I now sold my milliner shop to my sister-in-law, and amid the regrets of the people left for conference – which met in New Kingston, Cumberland County. My family had moved in the month of February to my father’s in Columbia County. This was the circuit where the old class leader said we would starve. But brother Peters said we would not, as no one had starved there yet, and we did not. We had a very pleasant home, kind friends, and received nearly five hundred dollars salary.

On this charge I learned, as I have often since experienced, that our greatest blessings, brightest days, most joyous seasons and successful efforts, are often preceded by the most trying times, dark seasons, and sore temptations.

“After clouds, sunshine”¹⁸

“Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face.”¹⁹

“Even so, Father, for so it seemeth good in thy sight.”²⁰

Amen.

¹⁸ This was a popular proverb of the day, apparently from an ancient Latin source.

¹⁹ This is a line from William Cowper’s hymn text “God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform” - #91 in the old Evangelical Hymnal.

²⁰ Matthew 11:26