

CMJ Comes to America

By Dr. Theresa Newell

In the Beginning . . .

CMJ was founded in 1809 in London by Joseph Frey, a Jewish believer from Prussia. Frey had come to faith in his own country and travelled to London with the intent of training for service with the Missionary Society there. He planned to go to Cape Town province, South Africa, but when he saw the plight of his Jewish brethren in East London, his heart was moved to reach out to them with the Gospel of their Messiah Jesus.

After beginning his mission among the Jews in 1805, he soon realized that a new work would need to be set up to minister particularly to the Jews. And by 1809 a group was formed which took the name of *The London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews*.

To the New World

News of this well-subscribed society soon found its way across the Atlantic. Ms. Hannah Adams, the first woman professional writer in the United States and a distant cousin to President John Adams, had authored "The History of the Jews" in 1812. In 1816 she published "Concise Account of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews" in Boston. She believed this work was "not generally known in New England . . . and she indulges the hope that the attention awakened to the welfare of the 'lost sheep of the house of Israel' will be extended to America." (Printed by John Eliot, 1816).

One result of Adams' article was that the *Christian Herald*, published in New York, recommended that a Society of Christians be formed "to digest a plan of operations, to open a correspondence with the Society, and enter immediately upon the work in which they are engaged." On June 5, 1816, "after supplicating the throne of grace for direction and a blessing," the Female Society of Boston and vicinity formed for promoting Christianity amongst the Jews. Thus began the first organized prayer group interceding for the salvation of the Jews of America.

In the Meantime . . .

This same Joseph Samuel Christian Friedrick Frey travelled to New York that same year and assisted in the formation of a Presbyterian missionary society for the evangelization of the Jewish people. Many encouraged Frey to follow his call to Jewish mission. As a result, on April 14, 1820, The American Society for Meliorating the Condition of the Jews was chartered. By this time Frey had published a best-selling missionary biography and was known as a charismatic leader. While this Society was not directly connected with The London Jews' Society (LJS) as CMJ came to be known in England, its intents were very similar and its outreach with the Gospel to Jewish people was paramount in its aim.

Among those serving on the Board of the newly formed Society was another Adams – president John Quincy Adams, son of John Adams. Even though Frey left the Society in 1826 seeing no real progress being made in the work he was devoted to, he continued to preach extensively across the United States calling the church to its responsibility to his Jewish people. Women's group spread from

Boston to other major cities on the Eastern seaboard – all committed to prayer for the salvation of the Jewish people and for workers to be raised up for this ministry.

Other Episcopal Missions to the Jews

In the mid-19th century another group, The Protestant Episcopal Association for the Promotion of Christianity Among the Jews, was formed as a local work in Philadelphia in 1859. Following its “21st Annual Report” in 1880, the Society ended. That same year the Rev. Louis C. Newman, a Jewish believer in Jesus, who had been the Society’s main evangelist and worker died.

Our brother, Dr. Jim Sibley, alerted me to this group when he received copied of two sermons preached before this Society in Philadelphia in 1869 and 1872, respectively, with the following titles: “Judaism and Christianity” by Rev. Edward A. Washburn, Rector of Calvary Church, New York, and “Israel, Jehovah’s Witnessing People” by William Newton, Rector of the Church of the Nativity. (An email sent to the author October 14, 2011). Jim asked, “Are you familiar with this society? How long did it last?” which began my search.

CMJ Comes to the USA

In 1878, CMJ, under the name The Church Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, was incorporated in the state of New York. In their first annual report, the organization references the confusion regarding the group’s name so closely resembling the name of the Protestant Episcopal Association work which had been “conducting for twenty years a local work in Philadelphia, under a Missionary, the Rev. L. C. Newman.” The new Society’s first report in 1879 noted the similar names “has been confused by some with that of an organization known as the Protestant Episcopal Association for the Promotion of Christianity Among the Jews, conducting for twenty years a local work in Philadelphia, under a Missionary, the Rev. L. C. Newman.”

This American CMJ Society, based in New York, was recognized as an auxiliary to the Board of Missions of the national Episcopal Church in 1883. It was subscribed by every bishop of the Church at that time, including Bishop **Joseph Schereschewsky**, a Jewish believer from Lithuania who went on to become the Bishop of China and first translator of the entire Bible into both Mandarin and Wenli.

In the Seventh Annual Report of the Church Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews (1883-1884), the organization reported that, “in consequence of the disbandment of the former Society in Philadelphia for work among Jews” its remaining funds were turned over to the new Society as recommended by the bishop of Philadelphia.

By 1892 the Society reported that it “had missions and schools in New Orleans, Baltimore, St. Louis, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York.” The group published a newsletter,

Gospel of the Circumcision, and eventually moved its headquarters from the Society house to the Church Mission House of the national [Episcopal] Church.

As church giving decreased, especially in the special Good Friday collection which was stipulated by the Episcopal Church to go to Jewish missions, all but the New York and Philadelphia centers remained open. In its 26th and final annual report in 1904, the Society's Board of Managers attributed the closing of the Society as follows: "It seems a reflection upon the Church to abandon this work among God's ancient people when it is borne in mind that within the last century some 224,000 Jews have been Christianized through the efforts of societies organized for this special purpose. Of that, however, God will be the judge in due time." (Episcopal Church Archives in email to author dated 15 Nov 2011, Austin, TX)

Some Episcopal Jewish Workers in the USA

Andrew Jacob Weinstein, born in Kiev in 1850 migrated to New York in 1907. Having worked under the London Jews' Society in Port Said, Egypt as a colporteur, a distributor of books and tracts, Weinstein ministered in Baden, Switzerland and London before coming to the USA. In 1909 he served in Philadelphia, as port chaplain and assistant at St Peter's Episcopal Church which had run a Jewish mission since 1890 (supported by the Good Friday offering), to cater for the influx of Russian Jews into the area as a result of the pogroms, which intensified after 1905. As in England, their arrival was resented by the established and wealthier (German) Jewish community - some of whom had become Episcopalians at St Peter's! Another parallel was the stress on assimilation and becoming 'good citizens' made by some of those, both Christians and Jews, working with immigrants - Weinstein himself achieving citizenship in 1914. He ran English classes, with over 800 attendances in his first year and was at pains to show that Christians revered the Hebrew Scriptures. At Christmas 1910 St Peter's choir sang hymns for his students, six of whom were presented with Yiddish bibles.

It is recorded that in 1910 he met 74 ships bringing 5,379 immigrants. His Rector said that Weinstein spoke "seven languages besides twelve dialects is of untold assistance in this work; it is sometimes said that he is the only person able to understand the speech of the foreigners who come to the port, and therefore the only one able to help relieve their needs on arrival in a strange country."

Mark Levy, who attended the first Hebrew Christian Alliance meeting in July 1903 in Mountain Lake Park, Maryland, was an Episcopal priest in New York City who "advocated the idea that Jews who accepted Christianity could, if they wished to, retain Jewish rites and practices. . . . Levy had more success in advocating his cause with the leadership of his Episcopalian church, which approved of Jews retaining their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness while practicing the Christian faith." (Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2000, p 49).

Levy was one of the earliest in the USA to put forth the concept of Messianic Jewish worship practices.

Fast Forward to 1976

CMJ's General Secretary, the Rev. Walter Barker, was invited to attend a conference in Amman, Jordan in June 1976 under a program of the Episcopal Church called Venture in Mission (VIM). At that meeting the Rev. Sam VanCulin, then head of Mission for the Episcopal Church in the United States, extended an invitation to Barker to bring the ministry of CMJ to the United States. In that same week, I was in Jerusalem for the first time where I received my call to the Jewish people at the Western Wall. I knew nothing about the existence of CMJ or its history. Walter told me later that since 1948 after the devastation of CMJ's enormous work in Eastern Europe, the London CMJ HQ team had prayed seeking the future of the work of CMJ. They had turned their eyes to the six million Jews in America, he said, but waited for an invitation to be extended.

In 1977, Barker made his first trip to the USA. The only phone number in the greater Washington DC area that he had was for a pastor Ellen Blackwell whose Assembly of God fellowship had sent a couple to work at CMJ's Beit Immanuel Guest House in Jaffa. Ellen Blackwell was my Bible teacher! I was introduced to Walter Barker after the Sunday evening service where he preached. In September 1979, Barker returned to the USA with the Chairman of CMJ UK Council, Maurice Garton, to present a CMJ booth at the Episcopal General Convention, held that year in Denver, Colorado. On his return east, Barker was invited to preach at Truro Church in Fairfax, Virginia – the church where my family worshipped. He was again introduced to me and asked at that time if I would act as a liaison in the USA for CMJ. Walter was told that I had recently returned from a second trip to Israel – this time for a month as a teaching team of high school students from a Fairfax Christian school, among them my older son.

By 1980, a Board had been set up which installed me as National Coordinator and Truro Church as the first welcoming and supporting church for CMJ USA. The rest is history, as they say. After several successors as CMJ USA directors, the present director is the Rev. Daryl Fenton. CMJ USA's goals remain the same as its parent organization – to take the Gospel to the Jewish people, to educate the Church about its obligation to the Jews and to support Jewish believers. Now after 35 years of service in the United States, by the grace and mercy of God, CMJ USA has outlived its earlier attempts to establish its mission among the cities in America.

Its present vision is working in the 35-40 cities in the USA with a Jewish population of over 25,000 where there is little or no outreach to the Jews in those areas. Teaching and training members of co-partner churches and messianic congregations has opened outreach centers in areas such as Cleveland, Dallas, Philadelphia and the Seattle areas.

For years after opening the office of CMJ USA in Virginia, we were referred to as “the first CMJ office in the United States,” but as I researched the archival material, I knew this was not so. This is what I have hoped to document in this report. I am happy to stand with my historic sister, Hannah Adams, as a woman who moved this ministry among the Jewish people in America down the road at least a little. To Him be the glory!