

Northwest Christian University

By Timothy Bergquist, PhD

Northwest Christian University (NCU) was founded in Eugene in 1895 by Eugene C. Sanderson, a preacher and educator in the Christian Church. He served as its first president from 1895 to 1929. The school has been known by a number of names, including Eugene Divinity School (1895-1908), Eugene Bible University (1908-1930), Eugene Bible College (1930-1934), and Northwest Christian College (1934-2008). Sanderson was a prominent preacher and educator in the Christian Church, having pastored many churches in the Pacific Northwest. .

Eugene Divinity School was established to prepare Christian Church ministers in the Pacific Northwest as part of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement. Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell started the movement in the early 1800s as a way to restore Christian unity by abolishing creeds and focusing on the principles of the early church as shown in the New Testament. Sanderson strongly believed that ministers should have a solid liberal arts background as well as a strong ministerial foundation. He located Eugene Divinity School next to the University of Oregon so students could take advantage of the liberal arts program there, while the divinity school focused on such courses as theology, bible study, oratory, and music.

During the 1920s, Eugene Bible University, as it was then called, expanded to include a number of other enterprises. Pacific Christian Hospital (now the PeaceHealth Sacred Heart Medical Center University District) was opened in March 1924. Eugene Bible University offered a nursing program in conjunction with the hospital. It also organized several schools, including Kansas Bible College (now Manhattan Christian College), Minneapolis Bible College, Colorado Bible College, and Missouri Christian College, which were considered extensions of Eugene Bible University. During the Depression, Eugene Bible College scaled back its operations to the Eugene campus. In 1934, the college merged with Spokane University, a school associated with the Christian Church in Spokane, Washington, to become Northwest Christian College.

Many Christian Church ministers and missionaries have been educated at NCU, including Everard Roy Moon, who with his wife Bessie served in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 1909 to 1923. The Louis H. Turner Museum at NCU holds a large collection of items from the Congo and East African countries, where many NCU graduates served. Another prominent alumnus is Frank Morse, former president of Morse Brothers construction company and an Oregon state senator from Albany.

The university occupies two and half blocks between the University of Oregon and PeaceHealth Sacred Heart Medical Center University District, centered on East 11th Avenue and Alder Street in Eugene. The campus includes the Martha Goodrich Administration Building, constructed in 1908 of volcanic stone from southern Oregon. It is the oldest building on campus. Other facilities include the Edward P. Kellenberger Library, the Lottie Price Music Building, the Burke-Griffeth Residence Hall, the Morse Event Center (with athletic facilities), and the Pomajevich Faculty Building.

In the twenty-first century, Northwest Christian University continues to prepare students in ministry, liberal arts, business, education, and counseling programs. Bachelor's and master's degrees are offered in traditional undergraduate, adult degree, and graduate program formats, with courses offered on campus, online, and in hybrid formats. The university began with five students in 1895 and one faculty member. In 2014, there are over 700 students taught by over 25 fulltime faculty.

Northwest Christian University has been regionally accredited since 1962. The school is a member of the Oregon Alliance of Independent Colleges and Universities, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, the Council on Undergraduate Research, and the Cascade Collegiate Conference of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics.

Sources

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The Oregon Encyclopedia

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