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Introduction

“O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.”

Habakkuk 3:2

When people have a heart to serve God and build His kingdom, God puts them to work. More than fifty years ago, the young Sanford Shank had such a heart, and he sensed the need among conservative Mennonites for Biblical reading material and school curriculum for the growing Christian school movement.

Christian Light, which Sanford and his wife Merna began in 1969, grew out of Sanford’s efforts to bring that vision to reality. This book records only a tiny part of the development and results of that small beginning and only an infinitesimal part of the blessings of God on the work and on the men and women who helped to forward the work in the past fifty years.

Introduction

As the title of the early Christian Light social studies textbook *God's World—His Story* indicates, history is God's story. This history is also God's story. It is the story of thousands of believers, some who were employees or volunteers for the company; others who advised (or even critiqued), who contributed or loaned money, or who supported by praying for Christian Light over the years.

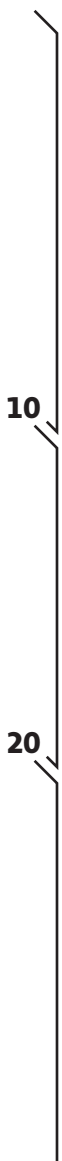
“The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it.”

Psalm 68:11

God in His Word “hath made his wonderful works to be remembered” (Psalm 111:4). This book records a few of His works related to Christian Light for the interest and encouragement of others.

God calls us to faithfulness. The generation that founded Christian Light and other conservative Mennonite publishers is passing. They, like David, “served [their] own generation by the will of God.” Now it is our turn. Let us be holy, faithful, and consistent as we proclaim God's words and works so that “the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children” (Psalm 78:6). Christian Light seeks to fulfill part of that calling through publishing.

Christian Light Time Line

- 
- 1969** Incorporation of Christian Light Publications
 - 1970** First issue of *Just for You*
 - 1971** First book published: *Allegheny Gospel Trails*
 - 1972** First Sunday school material produced
 - 1973** First Writers and Artists' Conference
First issue of *Companions*
 - 1974** First textbook: *Living Together on God's Earth*
 - 1976** Second textbook: *God's World—His Story*
 - 1978** First Bible school curriculum published
 - 1980** First year CLE curriculum available (100 schools and homeschools)
 - 1982** Christian Light began doing its own printing, sharing Park View Press's equipment
 - 1984** Star Revision of CLE began
 - 1985** Exhibits at homeschool conventions began
 - 1988** Extension Committee formed to handle requests for spiritual help and fellowship
Christian Light purchased printing equipment; Park View Press discontinued
 - 1990** Death of Sanford Shank, founder and director of Christian Light
 - 1991** Building 2 completed
 - 1994** Christian Light's 25th year
32,000 people using Sunday school material

Over 500 schools and 4,000 homeschools using
CLE curriculum

30

1996 First reader: *I Wonder*

1999 Sunrise Edition of CLE introduced

2008 First in a new series of social studies textbooks:
Neighbors in Latin America

40

Curriculum first sold in Australia

2009 Sunrise Second Edition revision began
Discontinued ISSL Sunday school outlines for
youth/adult lessons

2012 Training for schools in Papua New Guinea

2014 Building 3 completed—new warehouse in use
Christian Light Academy began providing
support to schools in foreign countries

2015 Eighth grade social studies textbook: *Changing
Frontiers*

2016 Second floor added in Shipping Department
Building 1 addition provided new offices for
curriculum workers

50

2018 Homeschool Plus accredited by the National
Association of Private Schools

2019 Christian Light's 50th year
49,633 Sunday school quarterlies sent out for
the March-May quarter
Seventh grade social studies textbook: *Across
the Ages*

The Vision and Founding of Christian Light

“The LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.”

Habakkuk 2:2

Christian Light is fifty years old. The story of Christian Light, however, began more than sixty years ago with a young farmer boy named Sanford Shank. Early in life he developed a vision for spreading the Word of God through Christian literature. Even as a teenager Sanford sensed a need in the Mennonite church for edifying literature for conservative-minded people. As he attended college, the need for God-honoring curriculum came into even sharper focus. Public school and college textbooks taught evolution, humanism, and patriotism. These unscriptural ideas and philosophies made their way even into church schools and influenced the church away from the truth.

The Vision and Founding of Christian Light



*Sanford and
Merna Shank*

In 1956 Sanford married Merna Brenneman, who shared his vision. In 1957 they ventured into the printing business. Sanford and Merna named the business Park View Press and built the original building in 1960, living in part of it. A second floor was added in 1970. Sanford's mechanical experience with farm machinery was not wasted. Although printing equipment was quite different from farm machinery, he persisted and learned how to work with printing equipment. His new work required hours of study, help from others, a lot of trial and error, and determination.

Park View Press printed brochures, pamphlets, booklets, and other material for customers in the Harrisonburg area and beyond. The work would



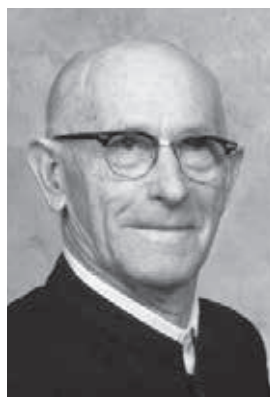
change as Sanford and Merna's vision for Christian literature grew. From this beginning, God eventually led them into Christian publishing.

The Beginnings of Christian Light

Sanford talked to others who had concerns about trends in the Mennonite church and the compromises showing up in some of its literature. They agreed that God-honoring literature to build up the church was needed.

In August 1965, Sanford called a meeting of concerned bishops, ministers, teachers, and writers to discuss the need for sound literature. Little did he realize this literature effort would eventually reach around the world to a far larger audience than North American Mennonites. Early on, Park View Press printed the Sunday school material *Sword and Trumpet* had begun producing. After Christian Light began, *Sword and Trumpet* soon turned the work of producing this material over to the new company.

With the encouragement and financial help of Ray Shenk, a Maryland minister, and after much discussion and prayer, Christian Light Publications was incorporated in June 1969. Ray, Sanford, and Merna made up the original board. Ray Shenk served on it until 1982.



Ray Shenk

The Vision and Founding of Christian Light

The board determined to develop literature and educational material that presented God's truth, applied the Word of God to practical living, and drew sinners to salvation through Jesus Christ—all for the glory of God and the building of His kingdom. In the early 1970s, the board added more members. From that time, Merna no longer served as a board member but continued as its secretary until 2015. (See Appendix B for a list of board members).

Christian Light received its tax exempt status in July 1970, making it possible for people to make tax deductible donations. Donations played a large part in the early development and expansion of Christian Light. They also helped make it possible to offer tracts and evangelistic literature free of charge.

The term *nonprofit* has often been misunderstood. Nonprofit status does not mean the business cannot make a profit or pay its employees. Rather, it means the profits go to further the company's objectives rather than being distributed to shareholders or owners. Christian Light's goal has always been to promote the cause of Christ and to use its profits to expand the work.

Christian Light established its payroll and began hiring employees in 1971. In the early years Christian Light Publications and Park View Press (PVP) worked closely together on the same premises. Christian Light employees often worked on PVP jobs and vice versa. The two organizations settled accounts monthly, each paying the other for

work done by the other's employees. Producing Christian Light material soon became a large part of PVP's work.

A Publisher, Printer, or Both?

Some find the distinction between publisher and printer confusing. PVP was a printer. It printed things for others. When it printed brochures for a local college or business, it did so as a service, and in no way promoted the organizations it printed for.

Christian Light is a publisher, producing Christian materials. Initially, PVP served as Christian Light's printer. Later Christian Light began leasing PVP's equipment and using its employees to do their own printing, while PVP continued to print for other customers. Then PVP closed entirely in 1988, selling its equipment to Christian Light. Thus, Christian Light became both publisher and printer. Now Christian Light sends some of its books to other printers, both in and out of the United States.

Christian Light cannot act as a printer for others, except for other nonprofit organizations. For many years Christian Light printed *The Sword and Trumpet* and *Reaching Out*. As Christian Light's work has expanded, it has chosen to do less printing for other nonprofit publishers.

The Vision and Founding of Christian Light

Relationships With Church Groups

Because Christian Light is headquartered in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and most of its early board and many of its workers were from the Southeastern Mennonite Conference, many have associated Christian Light with that conference. However, Christian Light is not affiliated with any church group. A self-perpetuating Board of Directors directs its work. Board members and employees come from other Anabaptist church groups.

The reasoning behind this approach was that the conservative Mennonite world would be better served if Christian Light was not guided by any one Mennonite church group, but was directed by a board with representatives from a variety of church groups.

The Christian Light Board maintains contact with leaders from various church groups across the United States and Canada. Advisors from many groups share their counsel with Christian Light. Advisors come to Christian Light for regular meetings and are kept informed of



developments, projects, and needs. Their input is helpful in giving direction to the work at Christian Light.

God's Word Central

The original Christian Light logo included an open Bible with rays of light streaming from its pages; often the letters CLP appeared below it. In 2019 Christian Light adopted a new logo—still an open Bible and light still streaming from it, but a version that appears more up-to-date. Now the name *Christian Light* is used instead of CLP.



The Early Expansion of Facilities

As Park View Press expanded its work and Christian Light developed, more buildings were gradually added to the original 55' x 60' flat-roofed building that housed PVP and Sanford and Merna's home.

The first addition, in 1965, on the back of the original building, housed the pressroom. This today holds the type-setting and art departments. In 1966 a bindery area was



added. This long narrow addition stretched between the press building and a former gas station owned by Merna's father Aldine Brenneman. In 1968 a door was opened through the wall into the service station building, and a large room in it began to be used for storage and mailing. Then in 1969, the year Christian Light Publications began, Park View Press started using most of the remaining space in the service station building for offices and storage. Later it became Christian Light's bookstore, library, and home-school offices.

In 1970-71 a second floor was added to the original building for offices and the order department. The secretary and bookkeeper's office in this addition is the only office area that has not changed location or size. As of 2019, Merna and Crystal Shank still work there with the assistance of others.

Two more additions to the main building, the first in 1972-73 and a second in 1979-80, provided space for storage, a workshop, a new pressroom, layout, and mailing.

Employees today know this complex of additions as Building 1. It served Park View Press and then Christian Light well until the early 1990s when more expansion became necessary. See the section entitled “More Expansion Into the Twenty-First Century” (pages 54-56) for more recent expansions.

