

**CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY (1907-1965) - BELMONT EVANGELICAL CHURCH  
(1966-1994)  
BELMONT ASSEMBLY OF GOD (1995-PRESENT)**

**The Origin of the Italian Pentecostal Movement**

The Italian Pentecostal Movement has its origin in Chicago in 1907. This movement had its roots in the larger Pentecostal Revival which began in the United States in 1900. By 1906, the Pentecostal Revival spread to Chicago, the home of Italian Evangelicals who at that time were a group introduced to the Pentecostal Revival, and subsequently pioneered the first Italian Pentecostal Church in the United States. Two principal leaders of that Italian Evangelical Community were **Luigi Francesconi**, saved in 1891, and **Peter Ottolini**, saved in 1900. Ottolini later became an elder among a group of Italian Evangelicals in Chicago.

**The Beginning of an Italian Church in Chicago**

As accurately as can be ascertained from available data, it appears that the earliest beginnings of an Italian Church in Chicago was about 1892, after the conversion of **Luigi Francesconi** in 1891. Under the ministry of Michele Nardi, an Italian evangelist, the Italian Presbyterian Church was born.

About the year 1900, **Peter Ottolini's** wife **Emma** obtained a copy of the Bible from Guiseppe Beretta. Under the spiritual guidance and instructions of Guiseppe Beretta, the families of Peter Ottolini and Peter Menconi were led to the Lord. Soon thereafter, they joined the Italian Presbyterian Church where the **Reverend Phillip Grilli** was the pastor.

During this time, the Lord spoke to Luigi Francesconi while reading Colossians 2:12 and impressed upon him the need to obey the model of water baptism according to Scripture. Before this, the sprinkling of children had been the custom observed by the church. Some time passed and finally on September 7, 1903, those who accepted this latest teaching were baptized by immersion in Lake Michigan. Among those baptized by **Guiseppe Beretta** were the families of Luigi Francesconi, Albert DiCicco, Peter Ottolini, Peter Menconi, N. Moles and others, about 18 in all.

In 1903, Francesconi and Ottolini, together with a substantial number of families withdrew from the Italian Presbyterian Church fellowship. Meetings were now held in the home of Francesconi. They were under the leadership of Francesconi and Ottolini, with Ottolini and Menconi as pastors for about a year.

**"The Mission"**

In 1904, a storefront was rented at 1139 West Grand Avenue and was given the name, **"The Mission"**. **Reverend Menconi** conducted services six nights a week. The church became a Pentecostal church when this group of evangelicals was baptized in the Holy Spirit while attending revival meetings held by **William Durham**.

### **"The Mission, cont'd."**

The first Italian Pentecostal Church in America was born marking the beginning of the Italian Pentecostal Movement, which rapidly spread throughout the Chicagoland area and ultimately throughout the world. **Reverend Peter Menconi** was installed as the first Pastor in July 1907. Many have since gone out to preach the Gospel throughout the country. Textbooks of church history document that The Mission began at least thirteen churches throughout the United States including Belmont Assembly of God. Others had gone back to several foreign lands including Italy and among the Italian populations of South America.

### **Assemblea Cristiana**

In 1914, The Mission purchased a building at 1350-52 West Erie in Chicago and remained in these quarters until 1958. It was given the name, "Assemblea Cristiana". It was during those 44 years that the Lord performed great miracles among the Italian people, establishing and strengthening them in the Pentecostal faith. Many missionaries were called from among this group and did their part in spreading the Gospel throughout the United States and the world.

**Reverend Peter Menconi** continued as Pastor of Assemblea Cristiana with **Reverend Andrew Parenti** as Associate Pastor. He ministered to this congregation until 1936, when he was killed in an automobile crash on his way to do missionary work in Southern Illinois. Upon his death, Brother Andrew Parenti became pastor of the church. The leadership of these two pastors spanned the first 60 years of the church's history. There were two associates, **Salvatore Cutrona** and **Luigi Biasco**. Brothers **Angelino** and **Vittorio Giometti** were the song leaders.

### **Two Great Revivals**

Never to be forgotten are the two great revivals of 1928 and 1948. In 1928, 60 were baptized over several weeks and again in 1948, 37 were baptized. They spoke in tongues as the Spirit of God gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). The Lord's presence was so great that there were times when **Reverend Menconi** was unable to preach.

### **Our Missionaries**

Among our first missionaries was Sister **Lucia Menna**, who went along with Sister and Brother Luigi Francesconi to Italy and South America. The other missionaries who went to Italy were **Eugene Palma**, **Giacomo Lombard**, **Roberto Christiani** and **Joseph Tessitore**.

### **Christian Assembly**

In order to accommodate its growing congregation, Assemblea Cristiana built a new building on a vacant lot at the corner of Belmont and Nagle Avenues. The church also adopted the name, "Christian Assembly", reflecting its desire to reach out to those beyond the Italian speaking population. Property was purchased at 6435 West Belmont Avenue, and a very beautiful edifice was erected to the glory of God. **Reverend Andrew Parenti** continued as pastor until 1964. **Reverend Anthony Caprino** became the next Pastor.

### **Belmont Evangelical Church**

In 1966, Christian Assembly entered a time of transition. The building was sold to a congregation known as Good Shepherd Church and a new facility was built at 6120 West Belmont Avenue. The church adopted the new name, "Belmont Evangelical Church". This new building was certainly a giant step of faith as it cost nearly \$250,000 to build. Reverend Caprino served the congregation for five years.

### **Reverend Michael Ciociola (1970 - 1976)**

In 1970, **Reverend Michael Ciociola** became the Pastor of Belmont Evangelical Church. Under his leadership, the church became a member of the Illinois District Council of the Assemblies of God. Belmont Evangelical Church had been a member of the Italian Assemblies of God, an organization related to the Illinois District Assemblies of God, which served various ethnically-oriented churches including Italian churches **Pastor Doug Carroccio** was the Youth Pastor.

### **Reverend George Cope (1976 - 1985)**

In 1976, **Reverend George Cope** became Pastor of Belmont Evangelical Church. **Reverend Jim Dycus** became the Associate Pastor. During Reverend Cope's time of leadership, it became apparent that more space was needed to accommodate the growing congregation. Various avenues to acquire additional building space nearby were pursued. However, it was not yet God's timing. **Pastor Richard Valkanet** was the Youth Pastor followed by **Pastor Perry Bryant** and **Leo Pier Dominici**. **El Calvario** was planted at this time.

### **Reverend Greg Cox (1985 - 1990)**

In 1985, **Reverend Greg Cox** became Pastor of Belmont Evangelical Church with **Reverend Malcolm Burleigh** serving as Associate Pastor. The congregation continued to grow in numbers. The search for additional space continued. **Pastor Iddo Vanspall** was the Choir Director. **Pastors John Cosma, John McKenzie** and **Doug Harris** were Youth Pastors.

In 1988, Brown's Bingo Hall at 6050 West Belmont Avenue was purchased. The building was completely renovated to serve as a worship facility. The new **Worship Center** was dedicated on April 30, 1989 - a great day of celebration!

### **Reverend Bill Henneberg (1990 - 1992)**

From August 1990 to April 1992, **Reverend Bill Henneberg** served as Pastor. Under his leadership, **Immanuel Fellowship** was planted in the Humboldt Park neighborhood and **Belmont Christian Day Care** was established.

### **Reverend Paul R. Martin (1992 - 1996)**

In September 1992, **Reverend Paul Martin** became the Pastor. Months after he began serving as Pastor, Reverend Martin called the church to a 10-day prayer and fasting vigil which concluded on Pentecost Sunday. As a result, more than 20 new ministries were born and some that were waning began to flourish. The **Belmont Pregnancy Center** was established, **Logan Square Assembly of God** was planted, and the Day Care became **Belmont Christian School and Day Care** (an accredited school offering as many as seven educational programs for children from preschool through 3rd grade). Under the leadership of Reverend Paul Martin, the church Constitution was revised and approved by the congregation (February 1995), and Belmont Evangelical Church changed its name to **Belmont Assembly of God**.

**Reverend Ken Martin** was hired as Music Minister and later became the Associate Pastor. He also developed and staged a Pentecost production that ran every Sunday night from Easter to Pentecost Sunday. This production touched many lives, a number of souls were saved, and many seeds were planted in the hearts of the people.

**Pastor Joel Labertew** became the Youth Pastor and **Pastor Angela Labertew** as Care Pastor took leadership roles in multiple church ministries. **Pastor Don Thorsberg** led the Children's Church and various Children's Programs.

From June 1996 to March 1997, Reverend Ken Martin served as Interim Pastor as Reverend Paul Martin became the Illinois District's new Superintendent. Under his leadership, Belmont Assembly of God continued to be a vibrant, growing church effecting surrounding communities.

### **Reverend Earl Wetter (1997 - 2002)**

In March 1997, **Reverend Earl Wetter** became the Pastor. **Pastor Bill Bandlow** served as Music Minister. **Pastor Jeff Stender** served as Youth Pastor followed by **Pastor Eddie DeLaRosa** who joined the staff in July 1999. **Pastor Keith Shelton** served as both Associate Pastor and Principal of Belmont Christian School. **Pastor Julie Zowaski** served as our Children's Pastor. **Lincoln Park Assembly** and **Christ Community Church**, which later changed its name to **Chicago Tabernacle**, were planted.

The church continued to grow and the stewardship campaign "God's Mercy...Our Ministry" was conducted to raise funds to help with the purchase of additional strategic property as it becomes available. Increased giving and additional steps to lower expenditures and refinance both mortgages has contributed to the strongest financial health that Belmont has enjoyed in perhaps its 100 year history.

**Reverend Carlos Paniagua (2003 – Current)**

In September 2003, **Reverend Carlos Paniagua** became the Pastor, coming to Belmont Assembly of God from Christ Tabernacle in New York City, a church pioneered by the well-known Brooklyn Tabernacle. Along with his wife, Yvonne, Pastor Carlos brings to Belmont Assembly ministry experience from a church of over 2,000 and a definite heart for the City of Chicago. **Reverend Thomas Stack** joined the staff as Associate Pastor in August 2004. **Pastor Brandon Holt** served over the Music Ministries followed by **Reverend Esther Faith Rogado**. **Pastor Eddie DeLaRosa** served as Student Ministries Pastor followed by **Pastor Joe Wyrostek**, followed by **Reverend John Velsor**. **Pastor Julie Zowaski** served over the Children's Ministries followed by **Reverend Ric Laboy**.

From a humble beginning, Belmont Assembly of God now ministers to more than sixty ethnic origins and supports more than 80 missionaries and their families as well as various ministries worldwide. The Lord continues to raise up people to do His work in Belmont and has faithfully provided great men and women of God to lead this church fully committed to our mission:

**"We make passionate followers of Christ".**