

# History of Brentwood Park Alliance Church

From its founding in 1914, the story of Brentwood Park Alliance Church testifies to the work of the Spirit and dedication of its people through both the exciting and difficult times in their journey. While hardly complete, the following summary of the history of the church is presented with the hope that it will encourage, inform and serve as a catalyst to propel the church forward as we seek God's direction for the future on a new generation.

## **PHASE 1 Beginnings 1914 – 1931**

The church marks its beginning on Sunday, October 25, 1914, with the first official service at Howard Avenue School in the Capitol Hill area of North Burnaby. It represented the natural progression of an outreach to children started the previous year due to the efforts of Miss Minnie Turner. The services Miss Turner hosted in her home, prior to the first service in the schoolhouse, incorporated Anglican liturgy. Help with this new church came from various faith groups, including Anglican, Methodist, Baptist, Congregational (Union), and Salvation Army. While different individuals would preach, the focus remained the Sunday School.

More often than not, weather, distance, other commitments and war conscription resulted in Miss Turner being the only constant. The Sunday School returned to her mother's home in February 1917 when a lack of funds meant they could no longer pay for the school. But faithfully, she continued to manage the Sunday School and fledgling church for several years.

The fact that this small group collected \$250 to purchase a lot from the Municipality of Burnaby speaks of their dedication. An abandoned Methodist Church building a few miles east in Hastings Grove was cut into sections and moved onto the Capitol Hill lot for reassembly. On Sunday, November 6, 1921, the Rev. A. E. Cooke, Pastor of the First Congregational Church, and the Rev. J. H. Wright, President of the British Columbia Methodist Conference, inaugurated the building under the name Capitol Hill Union Church.

Five months later, on April 26, 1922, Miss Minnie Turner would exchange vows with Mr. Eric Collinson, the first wedding performed in the church for which she was largely responsible. It appears Eric Collinson squired away his bride to his church, as her name rarely appears in records after her wedding. However, the church continued to be served by various individuals representing different denominations over the next five years until the Rev. John E. Fee, a retired missionary to China, became the first permanent pastor on January 20, 1926.

## **PHASE 2 Affiliation 1931 – 1951**

The Rev. John E. Fee served as the first permanent pastor of Capitol Hill Union Church in January 1926. Five years later, a congregational vote approved an affiliation with the Christian & Missionary Alliance Church, where the church would contribute to Alliance missions and the Alliance would help supply pastors.

Why Rev. Fee left early in 1933 is not known. He may have felt his role in enfolding the church into the Alliance fold was complete, and it was time to move on,

or he may have been making room for Rev. W. H. Newman, who desired to serve with SIM (Sudan Interior Mission). Within the Alliance, a mission candidate needed to serve at least one year on the home field. Rev. Fee may have been making that possible. Ironically, when Rev. Newman moved to Toronto in July 1934, before heading to Africa, he was told that he was too old to be a missionary candidate at thirty years of age.

Under the leadership of Rev. Newman, construction of a room at the rear of the building began and was completed during the brief tenure of Rev. Wm. Newcourt. Eventually, John Fee returned to pastor the church in December 1935. When he left in May of 1938, the Rev. Newman again returned to follow Pastor Fee, only to leave a second time in July of 1940 to enlist in the Army. While the Rev. Nathaniel Strain served just one year, it was during this time the relationship with the Christian & Missionary Alliance was formalized, and the name of the church was officially changed to Capitol Hill Alliance Church.

The next decade witnessed the Rev. Fred Hargreaves, the Rev. Fred Lowe, and the Rev. Gord Chapman provide pastoral leadership. During this time, a second room was added to the building. This represented a period of establishing the church. Begun as an outreach to area children, the Sunday School ran strong between 120 and 140. Morning worship grew slowly from the handful who started the church to sixty in 1951. Attendance was growing, but already membership was failing to keep pace.

### **PHASE 3 Growth 1951 – 1979**

During a succession of nine pastors over the previous twenty-four years, attendance showed incremental growth. Perhaps the arrival of the Rev. Pennard Hauge in September 1951 represented the marriage of a church founded on a children's ministry to a leader who loved children. In his first five years, attendance at the worship service doubled to 120, and the Sunday School mushroomed to over 200 children weekly. These numbers fluctuated little over the remainder of his time at the church.

Within the small space that defined Capitol Hill Alliance Church, every nook and cranny was pressed into service on a Sunday. The facilities were used throughout the week for kindergarten pre-daycare. The space and layout of the building initiated conversations about seeking new property.

When he left at summer's end in 1965, his thirteen-year tenure represented the longest anyone had served the church to that point. Church attendance was the largest it had seen. There remained hope and vision for the future. His warmth encouraged the congregation, and his wife's strong discipline, especially with the children who were in awe of her, helped keep things on track.

But Pennard Hauge proved a difficult act to follow. George Magnus held a brief interim role. Rev. Henry Young, Mr. Al Torhjelm, and Rev. Peter Wittenberg served two, one, and three years respectively. While the decline in attendance over those six years was not significant enough year-to-year to be noticeable, by the end of 1972, the worship service averaged less than 100 each week, and there was a 30% drop from the best years of Rev. Hauge. The Sunday School was half of what it had been at its height.

Peter Wittenberg showed himself to be a visionary. Under his leadership, he spearheaded the re-location plans, buying and paying off the property. But toward the

end of his time, several families moved away, and others chose to worship elsewhere, leading to his resignation in 1972.

The Rev. Elmer Thiessen arrived on February 4, 1973, and transitioned the congregation from Capitol Hill to Brentwood Park. The official sod-turning ceremony took place on June 9, 1974. There were lots of challenges in building the new church facility. A contractor was released, and individuals within the congregation stepped up, offering their gifts and abilities to finish the job. Still, the construction and financial pressures on the church during a time of extremely high interest rates created significant stress. The faithfulness of his six-and-a-half-year ministry stabilized the congregation, but the strain of the building made everyone weary.

The incredible Sunday School ministry and sheer numbers of the Hauge years remained within recent memory, reminding the congregation of the current losses of families from the church. The consuming focus and commitment of all to the construction of a new building and the financial pressures meant that not only was the pastor exhausted, but everyone else was as well.

#### **PHASE 4 Renewal 1979 – 1997**

Arriving on the first of August, 1979, the Rev. Arden Adrian quickly sensed the need for a ministry of encouragement to a group stretched to their limit from the demands of building a place of worship and grieving the loss of families who had moved on. Pastor Arden's warmth and heart in building up and training others began to reinvigorate the people of Brentwood Park.

Rev. Adrian envisioned utilizing students from Bible College as interns, and a succession of candidates served a practicum within the church under his mentorship. Many of these interns remained connected to the church and supported during their time in foreign missionary work: Herb Klassen serving among Muslims, Mike Sohm in Thailand, and several others.

Attendance consistently climbed during Pastor Adrian's tenure. While it included area families, youth and college ministries played a significant role. Simon Fraser University and BCIT provided an annual influx of students. These young people were discipled, given ministry opportunities, and grew spiritually. A number headed to pastoral ministry and missions, and others became significant local church leaders. But with the completion of their education, they moved on. This period in BPAC represented a time of developing and sending out leaders.

By the conclusion of Rev. Adrian's time, many of the families were finding it beneficial to take advantage of high real estate prices in the city and move further east. His ministry rebuilt the heart and passion within the people of Brentwood Park. But demographic changes and shorter pastoral stints would lead to another downturn in attendance.

The Rev. Dan Wolfe followed Pastor Adrian. In just under three years, between 1991 and 1993, he performed thirteen funerals as elderly members of the congregation passed. Still, more families were leaving. Declining attendance resulted in reduced funds, and staff was let go. Some felt alienated and didn't appreciate his preaching style. Eventually, there was a parting of ways.

Following a seven-month interim with Pastor Ken Cooke, the Rev. Ralph Rintisch arrived on July 1, 1994. From the approximately 150 who gathered for Sunday

worship at the height of Pastor Arden's time, weekly attendance now ran under 100. It was not long before tensions and trouble surfaced, leading to his resignation and departure in October of 1996. Rev. Arden Adrian had provided a glimpse of renewal, and the church longed and prayed that they might see the Spirit breathe new life once again.

### **PHASE 5 Community 1997 – 2022**

Don Dyck, the son of missionaries to Ecuador, returned to Canada, where he completed high school. After he married, Don and Diana started attending Brentwood Park during the ministry of Pastor Adrian. Sensing God's call on his life, Don headed to Bible College. Eventually, searching for a new pastor led BPAC to extend an invitation, and the Rev. Don Dyck returned in June 1997 to shepherd the church.

Under Pastor Don's patient tutelage, people were encouraged to engage with the community and empowered to lead ministries and activities connected with the neighbourhood. This value was proclaimed in the motto that Brentwood Park Alliance Church would be "*a church without walls.*" Over time, it led to five significant initiatives:

***Harvest Party:*** Judy Friesen first presented the idea of an alternative to Halloween, and the initial Harvest Party was held in 1999. The community was welcomed in for treats, games, and a fireworks display.

***Canada Day Celebration:*** The following year, the first Canada Day Celebration brought the neighbourhood together with activities and food. Initially conceived by Anessa Simpson, this annual event has welcomed thousands of guests to our church property.

***Cuba Mission:*** Pastor Don's fluency in Spanish fostered a connection in Cuba. The initial trip to Cuba in May of 2009 was to discern where BPAC could best serve on a continuing basis. Annual trips to help the church and hold a Pastors and wives retreat happened until COVID-19 halted travel.

***Connections Coffee House:*** Brenda Mitchell first conceived the vision for a local coffee shop to establish a community hub. It opened in September 2011 and closed on May 26, 2019. Connections Coffee Shop required significant support from church members and was effective in building community relationships.

***Living Room:*** Living Room began as an initiative to support individuals with mental health issues. While not started as a church ministry, BPAC has provided support and a place to meet since its inception in 2000.

Pastor Don served until he felt it was time for new leadership in a new era. During the last sixteen years of his service, the Rev. Ron Hunka ministered alongside as associate pastor. Further migration from Burnaby to points east and the Fraser Valley facilitated a decline in attendance over the past few years.

In September 2023, Pastor Kirk Ehrhart and his wife, Abby, accepted a call to serve as our new lead pastor, moving here from Stratford, Ontario.