

PARKDALE UNITED CHURCH – FIRST 85 YEARS

Parkdale United Church, a Christian landmark located in the central west end of Canada's capital city, has a rich history as a centre of biblical and spiritual teaching and learning that dates back to 1931, when it was founded through a merger of two then-existing Presbyterian and Methodist churches.

Although our history as a formal United Church congregation spans 85 years, our roots as a pioneering family of faith go back to 1889, when a small group of Presbyterians in the community of Hintonburg (which was annexed to the city of Ottawa in 1907) established a mission. The following year they erected a small worship building at a cost of \$2,600 on what is now the southwest corner of Parkdale Avenue and Wellington Street. The congregation was created formally in September 1892 as Bethany Presbyterian Church, and a new brick/stone church building was erected in 1911 (at a cost of \$26,794) on what is now the corner of Gladstone and Parkdale avenues. When the ***United Church of Canada*** was created in 1925, Bethany changed its name to Bethany United Church and became part of the new United Church organization.

Meanwhile, a Methodist Mission had been established in the Hintonburg area in 1893, when a small frame building was erected that year – at a cost of \$1,300 - on Kate Street (later renamed Rosemount Avenue). Opening services of Rosemount Methodist Church were conducted in 1895. In 1900, a lot was added to the north side of the church property; and, some time later, land was purchased on which the Ottawa West End Library on Rosemount Avenue now stands. Another building on Fairmount Avenue was purchased in 1910 for use as a parsonage, and a new church building was completed in 1916 at a cost of \$25,000. Like their Bethany cousins, Rosemount also joined the national ***United Church of Canada*** in June 1925.

In 1930, both Bethany and Rosemount decided to pool their resources and combine into a single congregation under the new United Church banner. The Bethany building at Parkdale Avenue and Bethany Road, which by then had been renamed Gladstone Avenue, was considered to be best-suited as the central home for the new church. Renovations and expansion were undertaken at a cost of approximately \$52,000, which effectively doubled the size of the existing sanctuary. The renovations included removing and extending the east wall of the original building by 36 feet, reusing salvaged brick, matching the stone masonry of the lower level, copying the design of windows and doors, and respecting the cornice lines.

The modernization also included the installation of a Woodstock pipe organ at a cost of \$11,000. This first organ was replaced in 1982 at a cost of \$120,000. It included a Rogers hybrid electronic/wind instrument incorporating some of the principal ranks of the original windpipes with a three-manual, 75-stop console and more than 800 pipes. At the time of installation, it was the first of its kind in eastern Ontario.

During the work on the late Gothic Revival structure, which took more than a year, the new united congregation operated from the Rosemount church building.

The cornerstone for the new Parkdale United Church, laid in September 1931, is but one of the five that mark our history and denominational roots. Another three were for the Hintonburg Methodist (1903), Bethany Presbyterian (1911), and Rosemount Methodist (1916) churches. These are embedded in the exterior of the north wall of the sanctuary. The fifth cornerstone is located at the entrance to the Memorial Hall, dedicated in 1951 to honour the service of 394 Parkdale members who had served in uniform in World Wars I and II, including 19 who lost their lives.

The formal dedication service of the new combined Parkdale congregation was held on January 29, 1932. The inaugural membership totaled 839, representing 359 families. The new congregation was faced with a carry-over debt of more than \$50,000, but during the next 14 years it was paid completely and the mortgage was burned in March 1945. By comparison, the existing Parkdale complex has a replacement value of almost \$5 million.

The formation of the new amalgamated congregation involved decisions regarding the selection of a minister. By coincidence, Rosemount's minister had recently accepted another position and had transferred to the Montreal Presbytery. At the same time, Bethany had a vacancy in its pulpit, but it had postponed filling it in view of the impending church merger. Consequently, the process of recruiting and staffing became relatively straightforward. A committee was created to invite ministers to "preach for a call" to the new congregation. This resulted in Reverend Norman Coll – 36 years old at the time – being selected, and he was inducted formally at a ceremony on September 17, 1931. Dr. Coll went on to serve as Parkdale's minister for the next 30 years, excepting six years on leave as an overseas Canadian Army chaplain during World War II.

Through the Depression years, congregational membership rose to 1,100, with a Sunday School of some 700 children. A Young Peoples Union (YPU) flourished, along with the Canadian Girls In Training (CGIT), and the 15th Boy Scout Troop. Membership reached 1,753 by 1951, eventually growing to a peak of 1,895 in 1966.

Since that era, all Ottawa churches have been impacted by the city's expansion to the west, south, and east, and the concurrent trend to more suburban lifestyles has contributed to a decline in the membership of most mainline churches. Our existing congregation includes approximately 298 members and 180 adherents or supporters. Although the church is located centrally, many of our members live a considerable distance away.

Parkdale has supported faith formation in numerous ways over the years, for example, through small groups, decades of bible study - including the very well subscribed Bethel Bible Series, Sunday school for children, Confirmation classes for youth, and facilitated faith and life discussions with young adults. Recently, between

2011 and 2013, Parkdale engaged almost 200 members of the congregation in the *Unbinding the Gospel*, *Unbinding the Heart*, and *Unbinding the Soul* initiative. Members of the congregation gathered in small groups to expand their prayer life, develop greater congregational intimacy and be encouraged to share their faith in sensitive and caring ways. It has had a profound effect on the congregation and attending adherents.

Our history of service

Our church has a proud tradition of providing programs and activities for all ages, both within our congregation and in the wider community. For example, in 1932 Parkdale United Church was instrumental in helping to establish Goodwill Industries, which eventually became Ottawa Neighbourhood Services. Many Parkdale congregational members have assisted in collecting, repairing, and selling clothes, as well as household articles and appliances under these programs.

Parkdale and five neighbouring Ottawa west-end churches have collaborated for almost 50 years in supporting and managing community outreach programs to help families meet pressing financial and social needs. This joint effort is the Queensway Social Action Group, a registered charity established in 1968. Among other things, it manages the oldest continuous *Headstart Program* in the Ottawa area. Parkdale has been providing accommodation and other resources for this pre-school program since 1969.

Parkdale has been an active supporter of the Ottawa West Community Support Service, which began in 1977 with 15 volunteers and operated initially from Parkdale premises. It is located now at the corner of Wellington and Corruthers, managed by more than 20 Ottawa west-end churches.

Parkdale was also an enthusiastic participant in the national Project 4000 initiative, which helped to bring Cambodian refugees to Canada. A special dividend has been Mr. Khan Chao, whose immigration Parkdale sponsored and who, from 1981 to 2016, he was the building custodian and caretaker.

Since 1945, our church has been home to the Parkdale United Church Orchestra, the oldest continuing symphony orchestra in the city. This group of approximately 65 musicians was founded by Messrs. Cliff Templar (a previous Parkdale organist and choir director) and Stuart Morris. The orchestra presents public concerts in the sanctuary and occasionally performs with the Parkdale choir during regular worship and other special services.

Our *In From The Cold* program, which operates from October to March each year, provides hot meals and hospitality for up to 170 individuals per week. This activity is undertaken by volunteers from our congregation in collaboration with several neighbouring congregations of various faiths, other organizations, and local businesses that donate food and supplies.

Parkdale has been an enthusiastic supporter of several local organizations, including the *Families and Schools Together* program at Connaught School, the Parkdale Food Centre, and the Bethany Hope Centre.

Our facilities

We are fortunate to have large, multi-purpose facilities (36,000+ square feet of space) that are used extensively for our own programs and activities. In addition, several community groups and organizations rent space on both a short- and long-term basis for other purposes.

The church worship sanctuary, entered through either of the two main sets of double doors off Parkdale Avenue, is a high-ceilinged 78-by-79-foot theatre. The open pews, arranged in curved rows, have a seating capacity of approximately 500.

The basement area below the sanctuary contains the 47-by-76-foot multi-use Tape Hall (named in memory of Mr. Robert Tape, a prominent former elder and chair of the Board of Trustees), with a seating capacity of approximately 160 and an adjacent fully-equipped 19-by-26-foot kitchen.

The Memorial Hall, a 50-by-70-foot concert and recreational auditorium at the rear of the building, has seating for about 300 and includes an adjacent 10-by-15-foot kitchenette.

The 22-by-32-foot Coll Chapel, named in memory of Parkdale's first minister, is located at the northwest corner on the main floor, and it was converted in 1964 from a previous boardroom. It is graced by several stained glass memorial windows and features open-pew seating for approximately 50 people. The chapel is used for smaller worship services, some weddings, and communion services for those unable to attend regular services.

The area immediately next to the chapel is utilized by the Queensway Preschool (Headstart) program five days a week. The adjacent 18-by-34-foot Friendship Lounge is used for various meetings and activities, such as the Youth's Coffee Shop.

Rooms on the basement level for the nursery, Sunday School, and youth activities were renovated in 1986 and again in 2012. The Minister's Study and the church's main administrative offices were completely renovated in 1999. A 27-by-40-foot Ladies Parlour and adjacent kitchen, also located on the second floor, are used for many meetings and study events.

Parkdale United Church is affiliated with the United Church of Canada, which is the country's largest Protestant denomination. The United Church of Canada, inaugurated in 1925, was formed through a union of the Methodist Church of Canada, the Congregational Union of Canada, 70% of the Presbyterian Church of Canada, and the group of small General Council of Union Churches.