

Southminster United Church – A History

During the 1950's, Niagara Falls was changing quickly. Hydro tunnels under the city were being constructed. There was an influx of workers that made for a shortage of living accommodations and new subdivisions were developed in the southwest part of the city.

Niagara Presbytery felt that there was a need for a building to act as a worship center and Sunday school in the south end. Property was purchased and ground broken for the Margaret Street Hall on April 15, 1953. United Church members banded together and donated their time and talents to erect a building. Faith was behind the construction as there was no congregation or minister in place.

Representatives from the five United Churches in the Greater Niagara area formed a Board of Management. The Board of Management appointed an executive and they decided to hold the first service in the new hall on the first Sunday of Lent - March 7, 1954. Useful and necessary items were donated from the other United Churches in the city. About 175 persons, mainly people from Lundy's Lane and St. Andrew's churches, attended the first service. Rev. Harold Watts, the Industrial Chaplain for the Hydro Project was willing to be the first Minister of the church with Walfrid Leman a student minister as his assistant. Aileen Hodgson volunteered to play the music for that day only. Eleven years later she retired as organist of Southminster United Church.

The dedication of those first leaders led to the constituting of Southminster as a congregation of the United Church of Canada on Sunday, May 16, 1954 with 88 charter members being received by transfer or profession of faith. The name "Southminster" was chosen because it was erected to "minister" the "south" end of the city.

As the congregation grew, we knew that we needed to expand our facility so as to accommodate all the activities of the congregation. However, the finances were not there to build a permanent sanctuary. For the interim, the foundation for the sanctuary was built and services and meetings were held there as well as the Margaret Street Hall. This was our church for several years. Our country's centennial year was fast approaching and building a permanent sanctuary was to be our project. The present Southminster (Centennial) Sanctuary was dedicated on October 15, 1967. In order to make Southminster accessible an elevator, new entry and specially equipped washrooms were added in 2000.

The following Ministers have served Southminster United Church:

Rev. Sherry Fugard - present

Rev. Dwain Ketcheson, 2008 - 2012

Rev. Carl Emke, 2003 - 2008

Rev. Don Glennie, 1994 - 2003

Rev. Jim Gibson, 1989 - 1993

Rev. Paul Grassie, 1982 - 1988

Rev. Dale Allison, 1975 - 1982

Rev. Michael Mandich, 1968 - 1975

Rev. Grant Dunning, 1972

Rev. Harvey Allen, 1964 - 1968

Rev. Gord Hume 1960 - 1964

Rev. W.D. Stenlake, 1954 - 1960

Rev. Walfrid Leeman, 1954-1955

Rev. Harold Watts, 1954

Three members of our congregation felt the call to become Ministers. They are Marjorie (Smith) Vipond (1990), Mel Sauer (1989) and Cathy McCallum (1986).

A Brief History of the United Church of Canada: Southminster is a congregation of The United Church of Canada, which is the largest Protestant denomination in Canada. The United Church ministers to close to 3 million people in over 3500 congregations across the country. Ours is a rich history closely entwined with the development of Canada itself.

The United Church was inaugurated on June 10, 1925, when the Methodist Church, Canada, the Congregational Union of Canada, and 70 per cent of the Presbyterian Church in Canada entered into union. Joining as well was the small General Council of Union Churches, centred largely in Western Canada. It was the first union of churches in the world to cross historical denominational lines and hence received international acclaim. The United Church declared on its 10th anniversary in 1935, that it was not merely "a united, but a uniting church." In 1986 the members of the Evangelical United Brethren joined The United Church of Canada. For more information about the United Church of Canada click on the link.

Representatives of Southminster United Church participate in Presbytery - a gathering of local churches. Representatives from Niagara Presbytery meet with members from other Presbyteries to form Hamilton Conference. Hamilton Conference is one of 13 Conferences that make up The United Church of Canada. For more information about Niagara Presbytery or Hamilton Conference click on their links.