

HISTORY OF HILLCREST

"Together we did, together we can"

This was the statement which appeared on the church's banner expressing the theme for the 40th anniversary of the founding of Hillcrest. What were the sentiments behind that banner, and why was it chosen? Hillcrest is not an old church, compared to many churches in Saint John, but it does have its own unique history in the west end of this Loyalist city.

The church originated on June 29th, 1959 when three churches, namely, Ludlow Street Baptist, Charlotte Street Baptist and Fundy Heights Baptist voted to combine and form one new Baptist church. Each of these churches had its own special history. Ludlow Street Baptist was formed in 1841, Charlotte Street in 1855, and Fundy Heights in 1951. Although Ludlow Street and Charlotte Street Baptist churches were only a few blocks apart, each sustained an active and vital ministry in the community throughout the latter 19th and early 20th centuries. Fundy Heights Baptist, located in what was then considered Lancaster, served the growing community of Fundy Heights, especially in the area of Sunday School outreach. However, by the mid 1950's, because of changing demographics, and aging buildings, it was obvious that three separate churches were no longer viable. The entire community would be better served by one new centralized church. Thus the three churches agreed to work together under one umbrella.

Putting the three churches together was not an easy task. Much prayer and consultation took place even before the plans were drawn up. Old loyalties die hard, but the majority of the faithful folks from each of the three churches agreed that forming the new church would better accomplish the Lord's work in the West Side and Lancaster. A Stewardship Committee was formed under the leadership of Mr. David Stilwell, and a campaign to raise funds was initiated. So it was on June 29th, 1959 that the new Hillcrest United Baptist Church began worshipping together. Because there was not yet a new building, worship services were held in the Charlotte Street facility.

Where would the new church building be located? After much prayer and searching, a parcel of land became available on Lancaster Avenue known as the Thomas Nagle property. It was more or less equidistant from the three original churches. This property was purchased, along with a parcel of land from Mr. George Chittick, to provide access to Buena Vista Avenue, and a Building Committee formed under the leadership of Mr. David Stilwell. Mr. Keith Pickard was engaged as the architect, and Mr. B.D. Stevens as the funding of the new building was a major task. Men such as Mr. Harold Mills and Mr. Scott Roxborough offered their expertise and spent many hours arranging financing. Also many of the faithful people signed personal promissory notes as part of the fund raising project. Finally, in 1960 a mortgage of \$90,000 was obtained along with a few other smaller loans and the erection of the new building was started. It was to be a contemporary design, with the sanctuary seating 560, the choir loft seating 40, and lots of facilities for Sunday School classes and youth groups.

Finally, on September 24th, 1961, dedication services were held marking the opening of the new church. Rev. Dr. Murray Armstrong, the first pastor of Hillcrest, led in the act of dedication. Rev. Harry Renfree, general secretary of the (then) Maritime United Baptist Convention, presented a sermon entitled "For Times Like These". This service was broadcast over radio station CHSJ, and special services were held all that week. There was an excitement in the air, and a proud feeling of accomplishment in the hearts of all the members of this new and beautiful church building. To bring this project to fruition took much prayer, time and effort on behalf of many people. In addition to those already mentioned above, there were dozens of other lay people who worked together to realize their God-given dream of a new church building. As time went on,

other notable events took place at Hillcrest. In Nehemiah 4:6 we read "The people had a mind to work". This was indeed the case at Hillcrest. On February 13, 1977, they were able to burn their mortgage during the ministry of Rev. Layne Daggett. Dr. Murray Armstrong brought the message at that service with the theme "Congratulations! But Don't Park Here". By 1979 another loan was taken out to purchase a new Allan organ. Shortly thereafter the Hunter property next door became available and was purchased to provide additional parking space and subsequently paved in 1989. During the mid-1980's, under the ministry of Dr. Darrell Pond, the congregation was introduced to the concept of senior housing, which culminated in the construction of Hillcrest Village on the former New Brunswick Protestant Orphanage property on Manawagonish Road. It was obvious that the church "didn't park here" as Dr. Armstrong admonished during the mortgage burning service in 1977. The church continued to grow in all ways and reach out and become a "beacon on a hill" ministering to the community and beyond. People came to Hillcrest from further afield, and they adopted the slogan "the difference is worth the distance".

Another slogan which came into regular use was "The Singing Church" because of the emphasis on gospel music both in worship, seasonal cantatas, family musicals and at various community outreaches. During the past few years Hillcrest has also made progress in the area of traditional versus contemporary worship music, realizing there is great spiritual value in all forms of gospel music.

During the past two decades Hillcrest has experienced several mountain top and valley experiences. With changes in leadership, differing expectations of today's society, challenges in the areas of youth ministry, finances, new technology, worship styles, and outreach into the community and beyond, Hillcrest still maintains a vital ministry in the west side of Saint John. Such initiatives as the Spot Ad Ministry and Dial-a-Prayer ministry have been in place over the years. Ministries such as the Caring Closet and Soul Food have arisen, and several people have dedicated themselves to faithfully serve those in the community who are in need. The Benevolent Committee is another form of outreach to the local community. The church realizes that often they have to meet people's material needs, before presenting the Gospel in some form. There has also been a strong youth ministry over the years, including many mission tours as far afield as Mexico. As a result, many young people have remained committed Christians as church members in adulthood and even serving on the mission fields for various periods of time.

It is interesting to contemplate that Hillcrest has come almost full circle in the past 50 years. Some of the facilities are now being stretched or need upgrading, maintenance work on the building is ongoing, and other demands and opportunities are knocking at the door. The church is now facing some of the same challenges faced by the original three churches. What will Hillcrest look like into the 21st century? The church family is committed to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit in order to maintain a viable ministry in West Saint John and beyond as long as Christ carries!

No history of a church would be complete without acknowledging the prayers, work and financial support that has been given by hundreds of people down through the years. Some have gone on to be with the Lord, others are still living and serving. Some served in high profile positions, others behind the scenes, but each one's efforts have equal value in the sight of God and man. Hillcrest today continues to have a solid ministry because of the strong foundation that was built over the years. To complete this history is a listing of staff members who have served over the years:

SENIOR PASTORS:

Rev. Dr. Murray Armstrong 1961-1965; Rev. Eugene Thompson 1965-1968; Rev. Reginald Panter 1968-1971; Rev. Layne Daggett 1971-1978; Lic. Mae Robbins Todd 1978-1979; Rev. Dr. Darrell Pond 1979-1989; Rev. William Powell 1991-1999; Rev. Don Krause 1999-2008; Rev. Buck Booker 2009-2013; Rev. Andrew Morse 2013 – Present

ASSOCIATE/YOUTH PASTORS:

Rev. Daryl Porter 1980-1984; Rev. Bret Robbe 1984-1987; Rev. Garth McGinn 1988-1990; Rev. Buck Booker 1994-1996; Rev. John Martin 1997-2001; Lic. Jayme Hall 2002-2006; Lic. Nick Doyle 2006-2013; Lic. Stuart Duff 2013 – 2019

INTERIM/PART TIME/VISITATION:

Lic. Doug Carter; Mr. Allan Huskins; Mr. Karl Conrad; Lic. Brian Barr; Rev. Doug Hapeman; Lay Pastor Sterling Huskins; Rev. Dr. Bob Berry; Miss Leah Richardson; Rev. Dave Young

SECRETARIAL/MUSIC:

Mrs. Ethel Mills; Mrs. Barbara Huskins; Mrs. Nadine Lane; Mrs. Wendy Greer; Mrs. Sharon Stout; Mrs. Jackie Armstrong; Mrs. Jeanette Higgins-Heans; Mrs. Chanda Sleep Klassen; Mr. Wayne Richardson; Mrs. Callie Cobham; Ms. Kathy O'Connor

To God be the glory!