

## **An Oral Reflection on the History of the United Church of Saint Paul and St Stephen**

*Offered as a speech at the Decommissioning Service held on August 17th 2014 by the newly ordained (and the Church's sponsored Discerner and Candidate) Rev. Krista Anderson BSc. MDiv. This presentation of stories is collected from researched works by Horce Dickey, Helen Hansford and John Cochrane.*

I was honoured to be asked to give a brief 95 year plus history of the United Church of St Paul and St Stephen...in 5 minutes ☺. We can't hope to fit in all families and individuals who gave items and time, wood work, furniture, display cases, communion tables and ware, baptism fonts. Much of which continue to be cared for by our loyal trustees. Outside this 5 min or so ☺ look back we will still have time to reminisce tonight and into the future years as we go forward as an Orchard Valley community.

I enjoyed reading and picking out some interesting stories. What I realized in the information that I read, is that we are but a 95 year chapter in a larger history of churches in this area, buying and selling land and buildings. We are in a long line of local Christians before us who embraced change and modification of God's house to fit the needs of the times before us.

What I found out is that the challenges we are facing are not new. We have shrunk and grown and changed before. For over 200 years we were doing union before united was even proposed. We were a very ecumenical area.

Congregationalist from approximately 1762 started a church at Chipman's Corner. There was no minister available so, an Anglican minister from Halifax used to come in to do services. The church was one of the first protestant churches in Western NS. A Congregationalist minister came from New England but there was an issue with the minister, he purchased and sold property of the church and kept the proceeds personally. A fiery Baptist minister then started preached occasionally at the church. Many left at this time of conflict and moved to the Baptists for the development of a Baptist church. It was impossible to get a Congregationalist minister to come so...

Two Presbyterian ministers came to help out and over 2 hundred years ago (1785) the Presbyterian Church really began. A hundred years later it grew and divided into Kentville, Wolfville, Canard and Woodville and Waterville.

In Kentville, the first place of worship of any denomination was a Methodist chapel built in 1821 (east side of Prospect Ave near the Anglican church is now). Itinerant ministers served as traveling preachers there. With Acadia University beginnings the Baptist ministry students offered services there too. Then they moved to the corner of Academy Street with hopes that it would become a Union Church with many denominations worshipping there together. It maintained a Methodist heritage but burned down in 1860. It is not clear where they worshiped after that but it was about the same time that the Presbyterians built a church at the corner of Aberdeen and Webster in Kentville. (1859) so one might assume they worshiped there.

During this time, church was an all-day affair with 15 min to eat lunch in between. There is record of a new Methodist Church being built at the turn of the century.

The Presbyterians sold their church after 50 plus years late in 1912 to the Royal Bank. They then worshiped in the Methodist Church while their new church was being built. This sharing of space laid the groundwork for seeds of union.

Rev RB Layton was the Presbyterian Minister during this time, construction on this site was completed in 1914.

1923 at a Trustee meeting , a bases for union was agreed to. I bet this was a celebration and a tremulous time. Both the Presbyterian Minister Rev Layton and the Methodist Minister Rev Porter resigned and in 1925 Rev. AA MacLeod became Minister of the new church. Under his guidance, the church became more united in friendship.

According to one of the biographies of our United Church women collected by Helen Hansford, during this time of union there was a woman in town named Elizabeth Ann Turner who moved to Kentville with her husband who was a Minister. He died and she lost her house. She had 4 children between 10 and 2. She worked any job she could, some preaching and church work. She was cared for when 4 of her children caught diphtheria and the eldest died. They were quarantined and cared for by the church. She taught Sunday school and in 1925 with union she was right there becoming the first woman elder in Kings County and possibly in Canada.

Elizabeth was one of so many women who were the backbone of the church especially with regards to outreach as the Women's Missionary Society and then the UCW collected communal energies to make our community and the world a better place fulfilling mission needs. Under this roof many worked in the great service to our Christian faith.

And referring to this roof... in this 5 min ..or so ☺... I could not possibly include a history of all the men and recognize the comradery and volunteer efforts they made to building maintenance.

It must have been very hard in 1940 when they experienced a fire and more renovations were made to the church especially with regards to organ and choir placements.

Rev McLeod had increasing pressure with Aldershot as the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war was underway. He lost his son and soon after his wife. This must have been very hard on him and the congregation. He moved to St John's in 1943.

For 5 years Dr Fraser Munro stayed until he left to edit the United Churchman, in Sackville NB. When entering union, the Methodist church had a church and parsonage. The church (Main and Marsters) was used as a hall but later sold.

1948 saw Rev Emmerson Curry's service begin. He served in the 1<sup>st</sup> WW and as Chaplain in the 2<sup>nd</sup>. During his 3 year stay he helped raise attendance and started the building of the church hall.

Rev Kenneth Sullivan came from Summerside PEI and helped complete the hall by 1954 and added classrooms. He stayed on as Minister for about 23 years. History book says he was not wanting for energy or in devotion to duty. He was honoured with a Doctorate conferred upon him by Pine Hill Divinity Hall.

Rev. Ian K MacDonald accepted a call in 1975. 52 years of harmony prevailed says Horce Dickey in his history of our church union.

Since then, we have had the blessings of Rev. Ron Dempsey who recently passed away, Rev. Boyd Vincent, Rev Nancy Price and of course our current minister Rev Dr Randy Crozman. We have also supported a number of internships and students in their ministry endeavors.

For efforts of beautifying the sanctuary, we have seen donations of stained glass windows. John Cochrane offered a history of the stained glass at a 1998 Sunday service. Most of the side window were donated by families in the 1960's and 70's. They were made by Cuppens Studios in St John, NB. They are wonderful ways in which show indebtedness to those who passed before us, they will be removed and cared for by our Orchard Valley congregation to find new homes for them again. We see the...

- Jacque 'manager scene' window, a former farmer from Port Williams,
- The MacLeod 'let the children come to me' window (Rev AA MacLeod) who remember was the 1<sup>st</sup> minister of the UC of ST P and St S.,
- The Borden 'fishers' window remembering a man who was an officer commanding the NS highland Brigade in WW1,
- The Campbell and Shaffner window of 'Jesus the healer', Anna left in her will a print shop and beauty parlor to the church upon her death in 1956 and also for Mary the wife of a lawyer Will Shaffner.
- The Gallagher 'Jesus triumphal entry' window in remembrance of and ol' Scotsman head gardener of the Experimental farm who served our church with kindness and support of youth,
- The Newcombe 'praying' window after Robert who was a well known farmer and agricultural leader in Port Williams,
- The Phinney 'passion' window after Lewis a merchant and longtime Elder and activist for the church, and
- The Thompson 'tomb' window manager of the Royal Bank, serving as treasurer for decades.
- The Rockwells (1940) 'St Paul and St Stephen' window,
- The Wightmans (front door),
- The Ells (front symbol windows)
- The Calkins, Bishops and (point to front)
- The congregation for the 'war efforts' window

It is with the help of many patrons like Lewis and Hilda Chipman, that we were able to sustain ourselves as a congregation. Mr Chipman owned Apple Valley Products Ltd. He used to invite the minister over and write cheques to cover any yearly deficits. They contributed with substantial and generous bequests for general purposes of the Church in the late 70's.

We are grateful to the Chipmans and to so many others who knew that the church is more than a building but that in order to worship we needed healthy building maintenance over time. This funding lives on and will help contribute to our new home as it develops as a larger congregation of Orchard Valley. Ongoing support and philanthropic provisions from church visionaries have helped keep our church alive over the last 200 hundred years in this area.

Like so many residents in Kentville, I grew up hearing the bells and the carillon bell music remind me to take time to pray. It went off hourly and pealed to come to Sunday services. Organist Moira Crawford Booth played "O Canada" during Remembrance Day services. It gave a touch of European culture and made a significant statement within the downtown area of Kentville. I miss that sound.

One example of woodworking skills was attested to in 1996, we had to cut down the beautiful elm trees that once graced the front of the church. From this wood, Arlie Wynn had the wood milled and made a beautiful confirmation bench and Lois Tracey upholstered the kneeling pad. Carol and Steward Beck were the first to use it in 2000 when they were confirmed by Rev Vincent.

I remember my father Rick Johnson pouring over architectural plans of the building committee working to make this building accessible with the additions of the elevator. I remember kitchen and bathroom renovations. All the diligent efforts of so many people to build a structure to house our church home in beauty and style and that also would be accessible to people with disabilities. This demonstrated our value of being open to all.

Pouring over church newsletters from the past, I noticed that the majority of information refers to the church identity, its activities within a community and the works of so many groups and individuals.

This beautiful place is but a structure in which Christ's love was expressed. I hope the building continues to serve our community in whatever capacity comes.

As we move into ending our time in this building, we pray to God in thanks for the generosity that allowed a rich history of church life to grow in the hearts of those who called this place home. I was confirmed, married, and commissioned here. I grew up spiritually in this place, and I do feel torn about the sale of this building. But more importantly, I hold dear the spirit of this place in my life. As our forbearers taught us, in our rich Christian history of this community, I believe we will all carry on our rich history to build memories within us that need not be contained by any particular concrete and wood.

For the specific childhood memories of the church building as a structure - I willingly share memories with those who grew up spiritually here in in St Paul and St Stephen building on Sunday mornings in the 70's and 80's. I sit, imagine and list the sensations of the building. I wonder if others will remember....

- trailing fingers along the spirals at the end of the pews
- pulling pens from the comment card boxes to doodle
- creeping under the benches along a red carpet investigating people's shoes
- jumping at the clicking of radiators coming on
- resting my head back to watch the fans go round and round
- sitting on the front steps listening to children stories of Jesus as parents held their breath that we would not trip and fall
- holding onto the pulpit edge as we nervously shared our reading skills and learned to talk in front of a crowd
- the clang of the coat hooks as people hung up their jackets and shook our small hands
- bravery to climb the dusty stairs to the church belfry
- time spent in the basement, graduating from laying on the cool floor, carpet pieces, rocking chairs and sitting on those small colourful children's chairs and finally realizing you had outgrown them and now sat in the stacking chairs.
- learning to close the folding book shelves that housed books, crayons and toys without catching your fingers
- sitting on Santa's lap on the stage each Christmas to get an orange, chocolate and candy cane after the relief of Christmas pageants was done.
- moving those large hall wall dividers around and sometimes, when no one was looking, getting a run on and taking a joyful ride on them
- taking care not to get fingers caught in the fold up tables while setting up for teas
- outlining with crayon, our whole bodies, on large newsprint paper and posting the pictures around the gym with sayings on them like Jesus loves me,
- running up and down the wheelchair ramp
- trying to balance on the white rocky ledge of the front wall while our parents talked on the front lawn
- countless piano recitals in the church that brought lovely clapping noises for our small gifts of music
- learning to hold the thin candles on Christmas eve so the wax did slip through the round cardboard and burn your fingers
- the smell of boiled hotdogs from large metal pots
- the joy of apple juice and cookie snacks
- the temptation of finger swiping large cakes on display in the middle of the hall while all the adults were busy worshipping

For all those times and memories of childhood spiritual development, in this safe place we called the United Church of St Paul and St Stephen, I thank you God.