

TRINITY CENTENNIAL UNITED CHURCH

TODAY'S MESSAGE might be considered a history review while for some it will be an opportunity to learn about their roots at Trinity Centennial. Where did we come from and how did we get here?

ON SEVERAL occasions the story has been told about the amalgamation of the three churches, in other words the politics of our beginnings. Let me take you back to the day that could possibly be considered the first day.

MAY 7, 1966 was a beautiful day, the sun was shining and a gentle spring breeze was in the air. Yes, it was a perfect day for a clean-up and burning garbage...and when an increase of wind from the west picked up a spark, it landed on the wood shingled roof of the Mansfield United Church next door. It was early afternoon when a phone call came to our home from Mansfield asking John to come with the orchard sprayer to hopefully save the church. No doubt the call was made when it was believed there was still hope that a few sprays of water would kill the sparks. I remember well following John with the tractor and sprayer. As I came up over the hill at Perm, on the 4th line of Mulmur Twp. and looked to the east I saw the first glimpse of smoke coming from our church in Mansfield...the colour of smoke caused tears to roll down my cheeks as deep fear set in that our church could not be saved. The Alliston Fire Dept. as well as the Dept. of Lands and Forests were also there with their equipment and knowledge of the day. One fireman, who grew up in Mansfield and had attended the church, climbed a ladder to check the extent of the fire and was met by an inferno of flames...his direction was to shut down the water, a limited commodity in Mansfield even today, and save the water to protect the surrounding homes.

I remember as we arrived men and women were carrying church pews, boxes of books, furniture, the pulpit, the Communion table that so proudly stands at the front of our Church today which earlier had been presented in memory of the Hand family at Mansfield. I can remember a forgotten picture

swinging on the wall of the vestibule, no doubt as a result of the wall taking its first shift of movement before being pulled by the hand of fire. I can remember my heart sink to see the arch at the north end of the church being eaten up by flames and my research tells me that the beautiful scroll above the wooden arch read "WORSHIP THE LORD IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS".

LATE AFTERNOON we found ourselves leaving the site of fallen bricks and smoldering timbers...all that was left of a landmark in the hamlet of Mansfield, part of our heritage...our church. As we began to walk away the decision hadn't been made as to where or even if we would have a Sunday service the next day. Just then the Presbyterian minister and one of the elders arrived and early in the conversation came an invitation to use their church, situated on the south end of Mansfield, for the Sunday morning service, and I might add that it was used for several Sundays including our anniversary service held about mid-June. Yes, as we walked away to return to our homes on that beautiful Sat. afternoon in May none of us realized the work and decisions to be made...the emotions and later growing pains to overcome.

THE NEXT MORNING, May 8th, the sun was still shining, almost like a crutch of hope for our spirits, although our first real crutch may very well have been the opening remarks made by our much loved minister, Ray Edwards, who said with out stretched arms "The bricks have fallen but the church still stands". Everyone present knew exactly what he meant and it gave us a faith that we too must stand.

IN THE DAYS TO COME much work was done by all of the community to clean up the debri...the men came with their trucks as well as tractors and wagons to haul away the charred timbers, boards, bricks and plaster. It is believed that none of this rubble found its way to a dump, no tipping fees had to be considered in that era The stories are told how each load of bricks found its way to several back lanes, for added stability, loads of broken boards and timbers were taken to a well established burn pile usually found on most

farms at that time. As we reflect back on the clean up one could certainly call it a non denominational community effort, not uncommon after any disaster.

Soon after the fire a letter to the Editor appeared in the Alliston Herald. It was written by a young girl from Mansfield ...it reads as follows:

A TRIBUTE

The United Church at Mansfield has burned to the ground. To me it was the destruction of one of the few solid things in my life. This does not mean the religion it stood for, but rather the building itself. To me it was something solid, something with roots, and something serene and indestructable in this hectic irrational world we live in.

Often on a summer evening, when I needed to get away from the everyday problem, the rushing world, and the noise of modern society, I would enter its open doors just to marvel at its peace, its beauty which was created in turn by its serene simplicity. It was not a spectacular church, there was no great architect to design its framework, no intricate glass windows, no gleaming pipe organ. And yet it was more because of this. Its walls were only plainly papered, its floors were only painted wood, yet every board and nail were put in with the hands of our ancestors who gave freely of their time and skills.

Yes, we will all miss this church, for some as a place of worship, and for others as a reminder that there are still places where one may go to have a few precious moments of peace and to take a look at life away from the daily pressure and troubles.

This Tribute was written by Linda Ireland.

AFTER THE SITE was cleared and the insurance settlement underway then thoughts turned to the question "What did our future hold?" Two factors were soon realized, firstly knowing that the insurance money in the amount of \$17,000. was not sufficient funds to rebuild, even though we had our existing lot and foundation. Secondly, we were soon advised by Presbytery

that unless we rebuilt, the insurance monies plus the sale of the lot would have to be returned to the United Church of Canada Treasury. The latter certainly put a lump in our throat. Next came questions like...if we didn't build where would we attend church? Would Everett and Rosemont be able to continue as a two point charge? Many were torn with the idea to possibly join the local Presbyterian Church, well established right in our own community. I am sure the possibilities were discussed at the corner store, the local garage and no doubt at every kitchen table...it certainly was at ours. Knowing that many of us had strong Presbyterian roots, neighbours and family were eager to make suggestions, some you heard and some ideas you didn't want to hear. It was not unlike preparing for a marriage, you had to let your heart as well as your head guide your decision.

THE NEXT POSSIBILITY was to perhaps add on to one of the existing churches, but neither Rosemont or Everett Churches had the land to allow for such a project. Emotions were once again tested...WOULD we let the insurance and lot monies leave our community? In other words, could we turn away from the blood, sweat and tears of our ancestors, who built the church in 1926.

IF I REMEMBER correctly by Sept. 1966 we were holding services in Everett and Rosemont, alternate Sundays. This was part of the transition that many of us made over the next few years. We also remember the joy of the new friendships we made as our church community became larger. Allow me to share two such experiences...We were walking towards our car following a service at Everett United Church when Dick Spurr began to tell us how their original log house had been purchased from a Mr. Hill and moved from East Luther Twp. Dick and Ruby had just learned that I grew up in that same area. Also I remember when I first realized that my father went to school with Russell Cowen's mother. Likewise, many of you could tell us your stories, truly an example of the bonding of many beautiful friendships.

NOW THE QUESTION is asked when did Trinity Centennial come in to the picture? It was during a very important meeting held in Everett United Church, perhaps in the fall of 1966 or later. Many suggestions were put forth hoping to find the solution for our future, some being put quietly on hold while others were shot down. During much of this discussion Harry Sawyers and Austin Rutledge were having their own little discussion. Seemingly, Austin made the suggestion to Harry that we should build a new church in a central location which would allow all of us to start anew. Harry agreed and he soon rose to his feet and presented the idea. The air became still...it appeared many were thinking of the same possibility but were afraid to make the suggestion. The minister, Ray Edwards, who had the perfect personality to walk a Pastoral Charge through such a transition, asked the meeting to be adjourned. This allowed all to return home with their thoughts to prepare for the big decision.

After many meetings and working closely with Simcoe Presbytery, the Everett, Mansfield and Rosemont Congregations became Trinity Centennial United Church on May 28, 1967.

The story of how this site was chosen and how it all unfolded to open the doors on Christmas eve. 1968 with the official opening taking place on June 1st, 1969 has been written in great detail. A story which has been told several times and can be shared again. However, today I choose to share with you some of the heart wrenching emotions some of us experienced.

HOPEFULLY MY STORY will help many to understand why some of the charter members have been, perhaps, too over protective during the years. There is no doubt in my mind that each one of you are well aware of the hard work and great determination it took to make the new Church become a reality, but unless you have had a similar experience I don't expect you to feel the emotions felt by those who lost their church by fire or by amalgamation. Believe me I would never want to again witness a church to burn down, on the other hand I am thankful that I was here for the birth of Trinity

Centennial. Many of our charter members are no longer with us, many new families have joined over the years giving with that same hard work and determination. Let us hope and pray that all of us with that same determination, love and faith that was planted here 31 years ago, and nurtured by many of you, will keep Trinity Centennial alive, not only now, but for future generations.

TO QUOTE FROM a much loved book "I kept my Powder Dry"... "The real church is indestructible"... I believe Trinity Centennial is living proof.

Thank you.

Isabel Ireland

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June 7, 1998