

# **A REPORT ON PHASE ONE OF THE TRANSITION PROCESS COVENANT CRC, WINNIPEG, MB**

**JUNE, 2009, BY PETER HOGETERP**

**THE PAST IS NOT REALLY GONE; IN FACT, IT ISN'T  
REALLY PAST; IT IS PRESENT IN OUR PRESENT, AND  
SHAPES OUR FUTURE**

## **A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW:**

Covenant CRC traces its history back 101 years, to the organization of the first CRC of Winnipeg in 1908, which eventually became College Ave. CRC. (Please see the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemorative Booklet for our fascinating history.)

The original Winnipeg CRC birthed three daughter churches, Transcona CRC in 1953, Kildonan CRC in 1961, and Good News Fellowship in 1989. Transcona CRC and Good News continue as our daughter/sister churches.

Covenant Church was created in 1993 as the result of a merger between College Ave. CRC of Winnipeg and the Kildonan CRC, while Pastor Gerrit Bomhof (1987-98) was pastor at Kildonan and Pastor Clarence Bishop (1980-96) was pastor at College Ave. These two pastors served as co-pastors until Rev. Bishop retired in 1996; Rev. Bomhof left for Ontario in 1998. Rev. Bill Tuininga served the church from 1999-2008. The new building at 653 Knowles Ave. was dedicated in 1996.

The formation of the Indian Family Centre and Hope Centre Ministries were and continue to be significant outreach efforts of the CRCs in Winnipeg.

## **OUR STORIES:**

Nearly 100 stories were written about how God shaped us by other people, ministries, and incidents we have encountered. These stories are accessible on the Internet at: [ccrcstories.blogspot.com](http://ccrcstories.blogspot.com)

Here is a summary of the stories, by decade, highlighting the themes that were found.

### **The 1930's**

I've been here since I was born; baptized, made confession of faith and married here. This was my church home, surrounded by friendly and caring people. Good preaching.

### **The 1940's**

A tiny church, meeting on Newton Ave., of some 26 families suddenly began to burst at the seams with immigration. This brought many marriageable young people into the church, though one gentleman married a Presbyterian girl (she became CRC). Discipline was often severe; one young fellow remembers the Sunday School teacher breaking a ruler over his head.

### **The 1950's**

Rev. A. Disselkoen (College Ave., 1939-53) conducted services in Homewood, then to Pilot Mound, and back to Homewood. He was succeeded by Rev. J. Rubingh (College Ave., 1955-61), who was called by some "the prince of the CRC; he served as fieldman, helping new immigrants in countless ways, including fixing cars. He officiated at countless weddings, often in basements of homes. Attending worship was the highlight of the week for many new immigrants, knowing the familiar melodies, hearing sermons in Dutch. The burgeoning congregation moved to a building on Elmwood Ave.

### **The 1960's**

In 1961 the Kildonan CRC was organized, known popularly as the "liberal" church, worshipping at first in a room at Calvin Christian School. Great initiatives were taken during the "Van Eek" years (Rev. A. Van Eek, pastor at Kildonan, 1970-78) in ministering to the city at Indian Family Centre and Hope Centre. At both College Ave. and Kildonan, people remember vibrant youth groups, Cadets, Calvinettes, Church Camps. This was the decade of new spirituality experiences, like communal prayer, and retreats.

### **The 1970's**

Rev. J. VanDyk was the cool College Ave pastor (1977-80) who rode a motorbike. And Kildonan's kids hung over the balcony pointing at their watches to remind the pastor he was preaching too long. There was no Sunday Scvhoool as children were expected to be in church; when it was

begun, mothers (who were the teachers) were expected to teach only every other week so they might be in church at least two Sunday mornings per month; and elders sat in on classes to monitor the teaching. There was Vacation Bible School for summer time fun, Cadets and Calvinettes for boys and girls respectively, and Youth Groups for young people throughout the year. Hope Centre became the focus of much outreach effort as the 2-storey house on Alfred Ave. was purchased (money following vision). We remember Rev. C. Tuininga's preaching and Opa's playing the organ. Calvinettes were only allowed to sing their songs outside on the front steps (not inside during worship). Garry Lissenberg played the organ, swaying to the music and the Koene sisters sang, also with some bounce. Young Peoples discussions were heavy, while impatient fun lovers couldn't wait for them to end so they could go to friends' homes for snacks. Coming to church after a 20-yr. old brother's death and singing "When Peace Like A River" became for someone one of those assurances that God is faithful throughout the ages.

### **The 1980's**

Special events expanded to include Youth Weekend Rallies in Emo, Ontario and College & Careers retreats. Many young people met future spouses at these "spiritual mixers." Mr. Beens became the CandyMan. Kids snuck around the balcony at College Ave. People moving into Winnipeg felt welcomed, becoming part of a "true community." Some people moved into the south end, and were instrumental in starting Good News Fellowship, which also attracted many University students. Shawn Sikkema came as a seminary intern and had a great rapport with the kids at catechism. Coffee Break, GEMS, Cadets, Camps, continued to be vibrant parts of both churches lives. Victor Anderson taught us how to sing and say "Amen." People found much joy in serving in leadership capacities, being members of prayer groups. Denominational issues, especially around "Women in Office" and "Creation/Evolution" took root in Winnipeg, and the beginnings of major divisions were being felt.

### **The 1990's**

Though none of the stories tell of the separation of members leaving for Providence Reformed Church, this had to have been a painful time for the churches. Yet, God was faithful. One new adventure was Mission Trips, to countries in Central America. Another was the beginning of Alpha courses. Pastor Gary Bomhof's "Rainbow Sermon" was remembered. There were church camps and church picnics to bring people together. Mr. Harris was a

great catechism teacher. Deepening friendships with fellow Christians. Death of a spouse and remarriage. Serving on Council especially during the merger talks. Serving at Bible Camp. Going to Willow Creek. Passionate Worship. All part of who we were in the 90's.

### **The 2000's**

Our current decade is filled with stories of new people finding a sense of community at Covenant. A military family thanks God for 8 years of being at Covenant; she was from non-CRC background and remembers feeling intimidated by the Transcona consistory when she went to make Profession of faith. Another family had met people from Covenant in Honduras, and when they returned to Canada chose to settle in Winnipeg and join Covenant. Another person was led to Covenant by the Lord and found wonderful people here; she has since served on Council. Another family moved from Edmonton and received an impromptu invitation to a Halloween party; they met so many people their own age and have become fast friends. Pastor Ken's energy and commitment to youth is celebrated; kids love his cabin, enjoy interacting with him. People who were young people in the 1960's organized a rally in 2001 to which people came from all across Canada. Babies were baptized and young people made profession of faith. Spirituality was moving into a "closer relationship with the Lord" direction. Children's sermons were introduced; Mr. Harris brought kittens. Our youth Group went to the Billy Graham Festival, and washed cars for "Love Winnipeg." They participated in SERVE projects, experiencing their first big "God Moment in their lives." Saturday Night services were introduced and became meaningful for so many. Regular every-Sunday singing, preaching, brought us into togetherness. There were mission trips to Honduras. GEMS. Cadets. Coffee Break. Alpha. Small Groups. Leading Worship. Eating the icing and leaving the cake. A health crisis through which people prayed and loved us. A house fire after which the congregation surrounded the victims with love and compassion. Sea to Sea, arriving at Covenant with crowds lining the streets and cheering, was overwhelming. Without biological family in Manitoba, Covenant became the "real" family for so many people. We're praying that God will continue to HELP US as we enjoy the healing journey that the Transition Process is meant to be for us.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **COMPILATION OF THE DISCUSSION OF THE SEVEN FOCUS GROUPS AT OUR ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS, CONGREGATIONAL MEETING, May 14, 2009.**

Seven groups sat around tables in the Fellowship Hall, discussing the four questions listed below in bold. These are the questions and the comments.

### **1. Now that I (Pastor PH) have been here for a month, what are your first impressions of the Transition Process so far:**

Good, hopeful. It's good to have a plan. It is hard for me as I am still digesting what happened in the last year. You need to deal with the messy emotions.

Attendance has increased, which means more enthusiasm for transition process and new pastor. Sense of hope. Positive, good to have deadline so know change will occur.

Wonderful, new spirit, heads up again. Beneficial to help people communicate in positive way. Like change of season.

Good to have someone come from outside to see our strengths and weaknesses.

Good things; allows participation of the congregation.

Waiting to see how it plays out. Seems positive so far. Curious, Good feeling generally.

Very happy with the transition process so far. Positive energy in the church/

### **2. What questions come to mind?**

How do you deal with the past?

Process seems clear. Lots to do, how is it all to be done?

How do we get people to engage? Contact people through elders and congregational care associates.

How do we get a good fit? Transition team will help with that.

If there is no meeting of the minds, unity after 9 months, do we continue on?

Can we really all get on the same page? The goal setting seems to be on a very aggressive timeline. To accomplish the goal setting objective, we must get everyone on the same page very quickly. Will the transition process deal with the hurts? How?

Questions about some of the past hurts; should our story telling involve the good and bad? Is it good to bring up past pains? It is best to forgive but not forget our past so that we can learn from it. Discussed the possibility of having someone to meet with those who have hurts, one-on-one or in small groups.

### **3. What are your expectations and hopes**

That we learn to love each other, unity, acceptance on a wide spectrum, liberty, the essentials, spiritual renewal, testing the spirit, focus on the things that divide us.

Unity of vision. Passionate, everyone behind it. Remember that we are following the Lord's leading, not about us, yet it concerns us. This is a hope but also a concern.

Good communication. To learn & be respectful of others point of view. Humble, could my way not be God's way for the time? Could I be wrong? It's not about us; it's about God. How does that work?

Unified direction led by GOD!

To be positive.

To see CCRC with a common but not overly diluted goal (Mission, Vision, Values) that everyone believes in and acts towards.

Hopes: unity, community, tolerance. Acceptance of different opinions and respect for one another. Have our differences and a unified goal.

### **4. What are the major challenges this church faces.**

Evangelism has been put on the back burner though internalizing. We have so many good things to offer and no one to share it with. We have lots to offer, learning to pray, verifying our ministries. Lost faith in our ministries.

Biggest stumbling blocks is us; our own ideas, pride, selfishness, unwillingness to accept truth, truer loving, respecting others. Some challenges because of different views relating to change with youth and old.

Fear that people won't really invest in it. Need to learn to listen, not criticize. Different visions of church; need to come to a better balance, appreciating our common ground.

We need to educate in many areas; giving, volunteering, involve youth. Tumultuous history; move from College Ave., but also some in Kildonan, especially when Providence started. Need to heal, forgive before we can reach out to others.

Unity; varying views on the basic goals of CCRC. We must consider what is “precious” at CCRC, look to our strengths. Heal the hurts, love each other, deal with the undercurrents that hold us back.

Challenges: hard to let go and forget hurts. We need to forget in such a way that we forgive but learn from our past. We need good participation, the younger generation needs to get actively involved too.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **AN ANALYSIS OF OUR HISTORY**

### **by Peter Hogeterp**

Covenant CRC has had several extremely significant chapters in its history that go some distance in explaining some of our present challenges.

- 1) Its earliest history is that of a tiny, poor struggling group of Dutch immigrants, who had arrived in the 1890’s and in the early 1900’s, striving to maintain a CRC, with much help from the denomination.
- 2) A dramatic change came with the arrival of hundreds upon hundreds of post-WWII immigrants who began to arrive in the late 1940’s and continued arriving throughout the 1950’s. The small struggling group was bombarded by newcomers which added numbers, but these newcomers also brought with them their religious conflicts from the Netherlands as well as their own expectations of “church.”
- 3) Two very vocal and divisive pastors (in terms of going in a direction different from that of the denomination) served the College Ave. CRC during the social upheaval of the 1960’s and 1970’s, a time in which the CRC as a denomination also made some extremely crucial decisions at Synod that marked its future direction (esp. Synod of 1973). We are carrying some effects of this division into the present.
- 4) In 1961, during the ministry of Rev. J. Rubingh at College Ave., a group of members from College Ave. organized into the Kildonan CRC. That church grew quickly during those yearly years, especially after Rev. Harry VanDyken became pastor at College Ave. (1962-67). The pastors of both churches put their stamps firmly on those two churches, resulting in both churches having fairly distinctive

- personalities. When the two churches merged, those two personalities may not have “merged” as effectively as we had thought or wished.
- 5) Denominational issues such as the debate on creation vs. science, and the 25-year long denominational debate over the place of women in the ordained Offices created a major split in the denomination in the 1980’s, which was felt also in the Winnipeg CRCs, leading to the formation of Providence Reformed Church (affiliated with the URC) in 1990.
  - 6) With the loss of significant numbers of members to the URC predominately from College Ave., and building needs in Kildonan, the “merger” word began to be spoken between members of College Ave. and Kildonan CRCs. Mergers are typically very difficult, but there is a sense that this one went well. Building the new church building together was a great unifier. But as noted in 4) above, the post-merger ministry may not have resolved some of the issues around personality differences.
  - 7) The ministry of Pastor Bill Tuininga ended poorly, both for him and the congregation. The church was beginning to decline in numbers during his ministry, for a number of reasons (e.g., failure to deal with issues from our past [see above], declining denominational loyalty, growth of mega-churches, conflict within the local CRC, continuing conflict over denominational issues, poor ways of handling conflict, disunity around vision and goals, etc.). The pastor tried to help the church find a new direction (e.g., Willow Creek model), but his leadership style alienated as many people as it brought on board. The church continued to decline in membership. He left somewhat abruptly in October, 2008 to begin a new ministry in Edmonton.
  - 8) Council decided in February, 2009 upon the urging of Pastor Tuininga and the congregation, to enter a Transition Process, citing the polarization around the issue of whether the church’s focus should be on reaching the lost for Christ OR on nurturing believers in their Reformed world-and-life view as a major division in the congregation. The Transition Process began on April 1 and is scheduled to end on December 31, 2009. The goals of the Transition Process are to sort out issues of the past, help the church identify its strengths and growth areas, and discover God’s vision for its future.