

A Short History of Gabriola United Church

When, in 1912, Mr. Stenhouse came to Gabriola Island to visit his daughter, Mrs. Robert Law, he was concerned that “there was nae proper Kirk for her tae gang tae”. He donated funds to rectify this situation and with land donated by James Gray, and community help, the early church was built and dedicated the following year.

The church hall was built in the 60’s, and washrooms and a small kitchen added in the 70’s. An on-site well was dug in the 80’s and in 1988, our 75th anniversary year, the kitchen size was doubled, and a storeroom added.

The Windows

The first window to be created and installed with the 75th Anniversary window (right side closest to the front when facing the front) August 28th, 1988 which depicts our native arbutus.

The second was the Gray Family Memorial (left side to the front) December 18th, 1988 with a Christmas connection and a Gray family connection showing the sheep and the dogwood tree.

The third installation with the ‘Let There Be Peace’ Easter window (right centre) from the Sweet family in 1989 with a modern crucifixion scene.

The fourth is the Outreach window (left centre) dedicated on October 8th, 1989 for which the congregation raised an equal amount of money for the Crosby Fund as the window had cost. It depicts a fruit tree with fruit gathered to share.

The fifth (right rear) installed November, 1992 is in memory of Jack Steele, who always sat below that window and was a strength to the congregation. It shows an angel wand the ‘burning bush’ of Moses’ story.

In the sixth (left rear) Darlene Mace-Harvey, who had designed and built all the windows with great skill, was given free rein to say something close to her heart. So, we have ‘The Stewardship of the Forest’ which depicts our Douglas Firs and the elements of air, water, earth and fire. This completed the sanctuary windows at that time.

In 1996 the need for more parking was critical and the east side lot was enlarged and gravelled and a Building Fund started. In 1997 a new concrete foundation replaced the sagging blocks and an old maple stump that held the church up, and the no longer used brick chimney from 1912 was torn down. Later these bricks were used to build a planter on the street side of the building. The bricks were produced by the Gabriola Shale Products plant which operated continuously from 1911-1950 and was located on the hillside at the bottom of Brickyard Hill.

A growing congregation by 1998 made it necessary to enlarge the sanctuary so with generous donations from the congregation and friends on the Island, and a loan from the United Church Conference, the extension was completed and dedicated in December 1999. That loan has now been paid off and future plans are to enlarge the hall and facilities to accommodate the growing population of Gabriola.

Gabriola United Church: 2011 – 2016

Sometime before 2011 (while I was Board Chair) Rose Jones and Vic Weibe had a meeting with me inquiring about renting space, but nothing seemed to come of it for a while until Angela and I got talking at Island Singers one night and shortly after a formal proposal was worked out for St. Martin's to rent. We put in a bookcase for their needs and set a space in the kitchen storage. We sometimes met in passing but had separate services.

By 2012 each congregation was in need of a new half-time minister/priest, so we entered a shared agreement signed on September 1st and a shared Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), with a two-year mandate, was set up. By October Joan Scandrett was hired after due diligence of a joint shared search committee. We were doing 'Friday Lunches' at PHC, shared the cost of paving the driveway hill, did 'Christmas Alive' together and the 'Caregivers' group was started.

In 2013 we had a joint Covenanting Service for Joan, and lots of discussions and 'talking circles' in the United Church, especially on the use of wine in the Communion and at socials. The decision was that we would add wine as a choice at Communion, but not at socials.

We celebrated our 100-year Anniversary of the church being built and services being held here most of that time. We had an increasing number of shared services, both congregations donated to each others' projects: Teas, Bazaar, Bell Ringers and the Bake Sale at the school. We started to look at Governance as our Board / Session model did not seem to be working well.

2014 A Hard Year. We began with continued exploration of more shared activities, adding the Prayer Shawl Ministry and 'Caregivers' now met at the Commons. The Rev. Joan had problems, took medical leave May to July, came back for a short while but left completely in November. This was quite a set back to all of us as we seemed to have very little information about what was going on. So, Harold Jenner and Rohana Laing came out of retirement for our services and the Bishop appointed Rev. Rob Hutchison to do the two joint services and serve St. Martins. Our attendance numbers dropped sharply, and we were quite dispirited. But Ted Brydges started a Christian book workshop to which some U.C. people went and JAC kept on trying to get some results, but the U.C. Board was deadlocked.

In March 2015 with help from Presbytery, we had a workshop on Governance led by Ivy Thomas and decided to change our model to a Council, making possible another thing we could do together. The Trial Joint Council met in September and after a slow start ironing out the details, has met monthly. Now was the time to think about Intentional Interim Ministry to see where God would lead us next.

The Transition Team was formed with some former JAC members making up equal representation from both congregations and Presbytery and Diocese reps. They started in August and after interviewing seven candidates chose Rev. Peggy Jensen. She started in November just in time for Advent. She helped us understand what is meant by 'Shared Ministry'. That is, never to lose our roots where we have come from, but to be on the cutting edge of new horizons in the larger church.

History of St. Martins Gabriola

And in the beginning there was St. Martin in the Fields. Well really a little later.

In the early 1900's to 2005 the Anglican Church on Gabriola was a mission church of St. Pauls Nanaimo, with a number of Anglican priests providing any services they could for the next forty years. In the late 30's and 40's, the Anglicans, led by Reverend J. Cooper, held services at both north and south schools, as Reverend G.W. Taylor had in 1896.

In 1950 six to eight Anglican families asked Canon Knowles from St. Pauls to hold services. The first service was held at the Surf Lodge and the second in the Community Hall. Then because the United Church was inactive, F.M. Boulton arranged for the use of the United Church for worship on a monthly basis. The chimney was rebuilt by the Anglicans at that time.

Subsequently in 1956 Eric Boulton and Mrs. Stokes negotiated a lease of the old schoolhouse on the site next to where the Community Hall now stands. Renovations were made, pews and an altar built, and linens provided. The old school was transformed into a Church with a church bell and was called St. Martin in the Fields. With an Island population of about 300 and no development that was a true description.

Until about 1969 Lay people took most of the services once a month using Morning Prayer and only having a Eucharist if a priest happened to be available. Up to this time transportation to the church services was by bus. The school bus was contracted out as it was not run by the School District.

In 1971, when the Reverend Peter Horsfield came to live on Gabriola, he was invited to take charge. He decided to make the services more ecumenical, closing the church and beginning his ministry at the Women's Institute Hall. The church building eventually burned down. With the help of Al Bowden, a Pentecostal Minister, Rev. Horsfield developed an ecumenical liturgy. A Sunday school was run in the Agi Hall by Anne Horsfield with parents help. Worshippers were Anglicans, Baptists, Roman Catholics, and Lutherans. This was the foundation for a strong Ecumenical tradition that still exists on Gabriola in both St. Martin and the GES. During this time Christmas Midnight Mass was held in the Anglican tradition, but rather earlier in the evening at the Agi Hall, in my memory, is of a full house.

In 1975 it was decided to auction the food provided at the Thanksgiving Service and Darcy Bouton suggested to Mrs. Horsfield at Sunday school that his father could be the auctioneer, and this was the start of Eric's career as an auctioneer. For several years the proceeds of the auction were given to ACTS which developed water systems for villages in Uganda. The auction then continued by the Ecumenical Community of Our Lady of Victory and St. Martin, morphed into a dinner, and is now run by the Ecumenical Society.

With the death of Al Bowden, and when in 1984 Peter and Anne Horsfield moved to Nanaimo, the church continued to function under the direction of Peter Hodge with lay parishioners providing the homilies but no Eucharist. This continued for about a year or so but eventually services ceased in 1986.

In 1988 a meeting was called, primarily because there were a small amount of funds and a charitable tax return needed to be filed. That meeting was attended by seven people of whom at least five still

attend this church at least on feast days. A second meeting in 1988 with Archdeacon McKay from St. Pauls decided to ask the United Church if we could hold services here on Wednesday evenings and services were held weekly, alternating between Catholic and Anglican liturgy. This arrangement lasted for about a year. In the meantime, Ted Reeve had made some renovations, including the addition of a gas heater, to the virtually unused Catholic Church for his daughters wedding. St. Martins asked for and received permission to use Our Lady of Victory and in 1989 we started with alternating services on Wednesdays as this was the only time Anglican and Catholic clergy were available. A constitution was written which provided for equal numbers of Catholics and Anglicans on Council, all lay people, no voting clergy, no wardens, and the Chair to rotate every two years from Catholic to Anglican, the maximum time on Council was two two-year terms. The church name was changed to The Ecumenical Community of Our Lady of Victory and St. Martin.

The next stage was with the arrival of the Rev. Donald Gordon, Heather Gray's father, who was a retired Anglican Priest. Services were now moved to Sunday at 9:00am with the Catholic services being given by two Catholic Sisters who brought the pre-consecrated host from St. Peters in Nanaimo. Both communities worshipped as one and took the Eucharist at each other's services. Furthermore, we suddenly had four retired Anglican Priests in the community and the community included Lutherans all worshipping together.

With the retirement of Bishop Remi deRoo this arrangement, which was against the Roman Catholic rules, came to the attention of the new bishop and was not allowed to continue. In November of 2003 the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Victoria recommended that the Ecumenical Community comply with the request of the Diocese that a new separate service schedule be established, and separate financial responsibilities for Catholics and Anglicans be implemented.

In the spring of 2005, the St. Martin Wardens and Clergy met with the Diocese of British Columbia Council (Anglican) and St Martin of Tours became independent of St Pauls Nanaimo and was no longer a mission church. At about this time the Rev. Donald moved to the Lower Mainland and the Rev. Linda St. Clair then took over as Priest in charge. So eventually after over 15 happy years of Ecumenical gatherings, St Martin felt that they could no longer comfortably continue at Our Lady of Victory and left to wander in the wilderness of Gabriola for about seven years. We worshipped first at the Commons until it was pointed out by a parishioner that the upstairs room at the Commons was not built to hold that many people so we moved to the Theatre Centre and looked seriously at purchasing that property. Later we looked hard at building a church on a property that Robert and Heather Gray were prepared to donate but the cost of building to the standards for a public building were so high that eventually that dream was abandoned.

So finally when it was clear that we could not build our own church and the lease at the Theatre Centre was not going to be renewed we came to the decision to ask to come back to the Gabriola United Church nearly two decades after our previous sojourn here.

At the time that we left the Log Church it was considered to ask the Gabriola United Church if we could worship here. However, the desire to have our own place combined with the fear and trauma of having to again leave a place that we might grow to love was too great to contemplate. So, the idea of sharing a church was rejected at that time.

A quote from the first draft of this history:

“A new roof was put on the church and a concrete foundation placed under half the church.”

If you have been counting, St. Martin in the Fields and of Tours has been worshipping in 10 different places over the last 66 years. I trust that in 60 years time someone looking at the history will see that it is still 10 places in the last 126 years and that we did not need any new foundations here and the roof was well maintained. Also, that the Ecumenical Spirit that was, and is, an essential part of St. Martin of Tours will survive and grow in any beyond this church community.

George von Westarp

April 10th, 2016

References:

Rev. B Huston A History of the Anglican Church on Gabriola. (A Monograph)

Eric Boulton Oral discussion of memories about St. Martins on Gabriola

Adlib postscript:

Sitting at breakfast this morning I wondered about a couple of things. If the Anglicans had not started using the United Church in the 1950's would Dr. Henn have started United services at that time?

If Peter Horsfield had not developed St. Martins as an ecumenical church and included Roman Catholics would the present use by the Catholics of the Log Church begun on a weekly basis? Or would Catholics have continued to go to St. Peters in Nanaimo for services as they did prior to St. Martins moving to the Log Church and fixing the foundation?

St. Martins 2011 – 2016

In 2011 we were renting the facilities of the United Church for worship and were considering our future. One question we asked ourselves at that time was where did we think St. Martins church family would be in five years, that is 2016. A closer relationship with our United Church friends had developed, with many shared outreach activities like the Friday lunch programme, Caregivers Support group, and Christmas Alive which by the way is shared between all five churches on the island. We did a lot of soul searching at the time and realised that, although we had been well and faithfully served by our talented and retired priests, we would eventually need to hire a full time resident priest if we were going to grow. However as always, financial considerations restricted our ambitions and, in discussion with the United Church who were also considering this problem, we realised that a shared ministry could be feasible.

Much of our energy from that point went into working on a Shared Ministry agreement. This was signed in June 2012. We agreed on a cost sharing arrangement. Our governing bodies, for example our parish council, stayed the same as always with the addition of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) made up of representatives of both churches. The mandate of this group was to vision for our future, consider any day to day difficulties or misunderstandings and bring recommendations to each church committee. At this point we did lose some of our long-time members. This period was not easy. A parish profile was issued in May 2012 and a joint selection committee selected Joan Scandrett to be our full-time resident priest in late 2012.

Events leading up to Joan's resignation and Jacquie Jessup's leaving led to difficulties and confusion. At this point the Bishop had asked that St. Martin's council keep all information confidential. This lack of communication led to an atmosphere of distrust with misinformation and rumour taking the place of fact. I think our United Church friends were particularly hurt by this and it caused serious damage to the fledgling shared ministry. Rev. Rob Hutchison was sent to replace Joan. He had difficulty relating to the United church ethos and although St Martins appreciated his ministry, I realise that he was less than ideal for the United church. This also contributed to the waning interest in shared ministry. We were still working together on shared activities, but it seemed as though the enthusiasm and good will were lacking. However, with God's help we persevered and in order to continue on the shared ministry path we were advised to look to and Interim Minister who would guide us. We created the Trial Joint Council made up of members of our original separate councils and, for this period of transition, which was 18 months, we selected a transition team made up of 2 Anglicans and 2 United selected from the larger council. Jean, Marie, Corinne and me. We were advised by the representative from presbytery Jeri Bjarnson from our diocese Rev. Jim Holland. We were tasked with the hiring of an Interim Minister and hired Peggy Jensen, a United Church minister who is very open and understanding of the Anglican ethos. We meet regularly with Peggy, Jim and Jeri and reported to the Trial Joint Council... God has guided us to this point thus far and we seem to have reached calmer water.

So where are we now? Well, we are still speaking to each other and working together! We are learning about each other's form of worship what matters, what we are willing to let go. I don't think we have to lose our identity. Some of us are ready to storm ahead, some are more cautious. I feel we need good communication always, respect for each other and to let God guide us. So, I ask you, can you see a clear way? Where are you now?

