

Willowgrove: a Concise History

Built in 1968, Willowgrove United grew out of the realignment of two former Pastoral Charges – Sault Suburban and Emmanuel-Hill, in which Tarentorus United became aligned with Bruce Hill and Grace United Churches. During the years 1963-66 the charge was consolidated under the name of Willowgrove and plans for a new church building were laid. Meantime, services were held in King George School on Gladstone Avenue.

Rev. J.R. (Rea) Grant, Willowgrove's first minister, resigned at the end of 1966 because of ill health and after a period of leadership by lay pulpit supple, **Rev. Robert Chapman** was secured as the second minister and presided at sod turning ceremonies on April 8, 1967, being inducted into his pastorate on July 1.

The first service of worship at Willowgrove United Church was held on December 3, 1967, with the service of dedication held on February 18, 1968, attended by Moderator of the United Church, Rt. Rev. W.C. Lockhard, Rev. E.S. Stephens, chairman of Algoma Presbytery, Rev. Rea Grant, former minister, and Rev. Robert Chapman.

Rev. R. Chapman accepted a call to the Bradford area as of the end of 1970 and once more lay ministers supplied, the congregation being under the direction of the Chairman of Algoma Presbytery, Rev. I. Johnston.

On April 1, 1971 the **Rev. Donald M. White** was inducted as the third minister of Willowgrove Pastoral Charge.

During his tenure, Willowgrove thrived, requiring the building of a new church hall. As the Sunday School and Youth program grew, an addition to the church proper was built in 1978, to be known as Fellowship Hall, which would include the Ross Charles Elliott Resource Library.

The 50th Anniversary of The United Church of Canada in 1975 saw Willowgrove celebrate by erecting a MOSAIC depicting the Algoma District.

During the 1980s a new 'Classic' electronic organ was acquired and installed, which still graces our sanctuary today.

Jane Capstick, now an ordained minister in North Bay, assisted Rev White as Staff Associate between 1992 and 1996, providing ministry to youth and seniors.

Rev White would preside over Willowgrove for twenty-six years, until his retirement due to health issues in 1997.

In the late 1990s we again had a brief period of leadership from the laity as we searched for a new minister to replace the venerable Rev White. We were very lucky to have the **Rev Bruce McLeish** accept a call to serve Willowgrove in 1997.

Two years later **Helen Smith** was brought on as Staff Associate to assist Rev McLeish with the

ever-busy ministry at Willowgrove. She would recognize a further call to ministry, and after discernment embarked upon a course of study to be recognized as a Designated Lay Minister.

During this time Willowgrove undertook two consecutive capital projects: a Chancel renovation in 2003, and an accessible entrance reconstruction in 2007. Both projects were generously supported by the congregation, and have greatly enhanced our ability to minister to the community.

In 2009 Helen accepted a call to serve as sole minister at the East Koran Maxwell pastoral charge.

In 2011 Rev McLeish announced his intention to retire, effective the end of April. He and his family were feted at a special dinner at the Croatian Hall.

At this point, Willowgrove again looked to the laity for leadership, with worship being led by the many talented lay worship leaders within our congregation and throughout Presbytery. Meanwhile, a Joint Needs Assessment (JNAC) was conducted, and a Joint Search Committee (JSC) was struck to search for a new Minister.

We are pleased to be welcoming **(Rev) Dr David Zub** to Willowgrove as our fifth Minister.

Willowgrove continues to be a busy place, with both congregational groups and committees and outside groups holding regular meetings and special events within our facility. We look forward to continuing this active and vibrant ministry for many year -- decades, even -- to come.