

History of Grace Fellowship Baptist Church

Grace Fellowship Baptist Church had its beginnings in a Missionary effort sponsored by the West Coast Children's Mission, which was an outreach program of the Mennonite Brethren Churches of British Columbia. In the mid 1940's, two young ladies, one of them being the aunt of present member, Susan DeLong, held Sunday School classes and Vacation Bible Schools in either the old Memorial Hall (which was located where the present municipal hall stands,) or by renting rooms in a local motel.

In the spring of 1946 Peter and Susie Teichroeb came to Hope to continue this work with children. There being no kindergarten or pre-school classes of any kind in Hope at that time, their busy, exciting programs were warmly received by parents and children alike; they soon became known as "Uncle Pete" and "Aunt Susie," and are still remembered in these terms by the parents and children of that time. It is noted in a book on the history of Hope that 'all doors in Hope were open to the pastor.'

Home for the Teichroeb's in these early years was in the back rooms of the little church that was built on the east end of Wallace Street, when Wallace Street was a dead-end street! (This building eventually became Henderson's Funeral Home. It is now a private residence.) J.H. Block, the father of 'Block Brothers,' supervised the construction of this building.

As the Word of God was faithfully preached, the work expanded into a thriving little congregation, which was formally recognized in 1950 as the Wallace Street Baptist Church.

Founding members were Henry and Leonard Adrian, Norma (Bailie) Olson, Ervin and Olga Bunkowski, Betty (Corbett) Saunders, Harold and Eileen Carlaw, and Peter and Susie Teichroeb.

Pastor Teichroeb's personal testimony and practical Christian teaching deeply affected the young congregation and soon, bursting at the seams, the little church undertook a rigorous building program with volunteer help. This led them to the present site on Third Avenue where, in 1957, Grace Baptist Church was dedicated to the Glory of God.

In those years Pastor Teichroeb's health was failing so in 1963 the church bid farewell to the little family, now including Paul, Rosalie and Judy, as they moved to Haney for a much needed change.

That same year an elderly country gentleman, name Ormond McKee came from Duncan with his wife Ethel, to shepherd the church. In those years many families were leaving Hope for economic reasons. The church lost Sunday School teachers and Superintendent, choir members and leader, youth workers, etc. But Mr. McKee just took this in his stride. His inspiring sermons and his personal testimony strengthened people, and, before long, the church was full again. In 1966 Pastor McKee retired but continued to minister in many churches till his death.

Graham and Dorothy Brotherton came in 1966. The village of Hope had become the Town of Hope and as it grew so did the church. The year 1967 was Canada's Centennial and Pastor Brotherton and the church were much involved in a large, interdenominational service held in the Memorial Park. Graham was a gifted Bible teacher and was much appreciated for his talent on the organ. Dorothy, an accomplished writer, was famous for her column in the Hope Standard, "Musings of a Minister's Wife". They left hope in 1969 with their two little sons, both born in Hope.

That year Team Missionaries Art and Margaret Harms served us for six months with their son. They had been supported by this church since the 50's and were loved for their encouraging ministry through the years.

In 1970, Tom and Joy Fairgrieve arrived in Hope and for ten years this couple led the church. Tom's ministry of prayer was outstanding. Prayer meetings were well attended by all ages and it was not unusual to see the men in particular down on their knees. Tom and Joy were both musically talented and they led the church with a joyful sound.

In 1981 Matt and Sandi Dressler were welcomed in Hope. This strong, young, gifted couple continued to encourage the many talented members to produce wonderful music and exciting programs. It was during Matt's ministry here that plans were made to build a new addition to the church. The new facility was designed and built with much volunteer labour. Matt and Sandi helped dedicate the new wing to the Glory of God in 1987, almost 30 years to the day that the first service was held in the existing building. They left Hope in 1988 with sons, who were both born in Hope.

In 1989 Pastor Bill Plant and Roswitha arrived from Fernie with their daughters. They ushered in the '90's and were well loved by the town. They demonstrated the love of Christ with their big hearts, willing hands, and their open door, not to mention Bill's bagpipes! Many were added to the church during their ministry.

It was during the '90's also that Bob and Sandi Evans came to assist. For two years Bob served as associate pastor. His love for teens and his vision for the lost were a great boost to the church.

After saying good-bye to the Plants in '98 the church welcomed Rob and Judy Griffioen who served in the interim with their four teenagers. The work with teens in those months was outstanding. The church was filled with teens and they were blessed.

In 1999 Pastor Jeff and Angela Kuhn with three little girls (soon to be four,) arrived on time to welcome the New Millenium! With the help of associate pastor Andy Frew and his wife, Niki there was much activity. Angela and Niki are both Hope-grown girls so it was like a homecoming. Andy felt called to take a position with a large church in the city in 2002. Later that year, we welcomed Doug Kirsch as our Associate Pastor. Doug, his wife Kam and baby daughter settled into life in Hope and service in the church. Kam was also born in Hope, carrying on the 'tradition' that our pastors marry local girls. Doug, now with two daughters, left Grace in 2005. In 2007, the church called Ed Thomas, who had attended the church for some ten years, to be its Associate Pastor.

It's easy to see that this church is made up of happy, serving people, not so different from that first little congregation on Wallace Street.

Pastor Teichroeb's vision for work among children remains. Many love the Lord and serve Him joyfully, depending on God through prayer to do His will among the community of Hope. The faithful preaching of His Word is still vital.

During these years the Church has continually grown under the ministry of these many pastors. Many people have come to know the Lord as Saviour and several have obeyed the call to full-time service for Him. As we look back over the years, we must celebrate God's goodness to His people and say with the hymn writer, "To God Be the Glory, Great Things He Has Done."