

AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH (1963 – 2024)

Preface

This document is intended to provide a brief historical background of Trinity Baptist Church as part of a package to be sent to prospective candidates interested in becoming our Pastor. While seeking to draft an accurate account, the present Transition Team committee admits this work omits many details and names that might otherwise be included if used for other purposes. It is our aim that the reader discovers the significant events in our local church – whether good or bad – and leaves with a better understanding of the journey endured by some and recently joined by others within our congregation.

THE EARLY YEARS (1963-1976)

Mrs. Allen Tuck and Rev. William Heath compiled “The Beginning of the Willow Park Baptist Church, Calgary, Alberta”, a record of our church’s earliest beginnings. In 1963, members of Cambrian Heights Baptist Church (located in northwest Calgary) decided to start a mission church in the growing southeast area of the city where no other evangelical church was present. Their pastor, Rev. Cunningham, along with others, began meeting in the southeast home of one church family on a weekly basis for a month. After the fourth week, the family could no longer host the meeting since their employer was relocating them to Saskatoon. Nevertheless, the seed was planted.

In 1964, with a loan from the Baptist Foundation of Texas, Cambrian Heights purchased an acre of land at 9920 Fairmount Drive SE. That summer, they hosted a Vacation Bible School in a large rented tent erected on the property. They saw an overwhelming response; 190 children were enrolled. By October, another family had moved into the Willow Park area and a Sunday School program was started in their basement with 33 attending. This eventually led to the rental of the nearby Acadia Community Hall for regular Sunday services, with Rev. Cunningham preaching. After each sermon, Rev. Cunningham would leave to drive back to the north end of the city in time to preach at Cambrian Heights. By December, 56 were enrolled in a Sunday School with seven classes ranging from nursery to adults.

In January 1966, they relocated to the larger facilities at David Thompson School. A Women’s Missionary Society was started in February, augmenting the existing Girls Auxiliary and Royal Ambassador groups. Later that spring, the first baptisms were held: a mother and her two daughters who had been attending from the beginning.

In January 1967, Rev. Gene Hodge (from Spokane, WA) became the pastor, relieving Rev. Cunningham to focus on Cambrian Heights. Pastor Hodge started Sunday evening services in the home of one local church family. Two large tents were acquired and a small building erected at the purchased property to house the piano and other equipment used for VBS that summer. Rev. Hodge left in September of that year to return to seminary studies in Texas.

Mr. Allen Tuck, in whose home the work began in 1964 and where evening services were being held, started leading the worship services. Sunday evenings took the form of a Training Union. By December, the church had 26 members with 72 enrolled in Sunday School.

In March 1968, Rev. B. L. "Billy" Heath (from Williams Lake, BC) became the pastor. The work continued to grow steadily. By April 1969, there were 150 enrolled in Sunday School.

In the summer of 1970, the 77-voice Youth Choir from Calvary Baptist Church in Tyler, TX came to sing and assist in Vacation Bible School. With the team's additional 94 workers, they held three VBS programs in one week: two at nearby schools in Calgary each morning and the third in Gleichen each afternoon.

	VBS Enrolment
1964	190
1965	258
1967	295
1968	251
1969	182
1970	447

In January 1971, city hall approved re-zoning of the purchased property. Half an acre was sold to Gulf Oil and the remainder was to be the site of a new church building.

On May 13, 1971, the church became formally organized at an evening event meeting in Central Memorial High School. It was intended to immediately follow the Canadian Southern Baptist Conference, held that year at Cambrian Heights, allowing for seven pastors from sister churches to attend and participate. Rev. Henry Blackaby from Saskatoon was the featured speaker, giving the charge to the new church.

In September 1971, construction began on the new church. Children, teenagers, adult members and ex-convicts all donated more than 2500 volunteer hours to the effort. The recently released prisoners belonged to the Con-cern Society, a group dedicated to reintegrating these men into communities by providing labour for enterprises which otherwise might not get done for lack of funds; their wages were paid through a winter works grant from the federal government.

In an undated article outlining the history and benefits of Sunday School published in a local newspaper, Rev. Heath described a special Stampede Sunday:

"The church I work through has an annual Stampede Sunday. This takes place tomorrow at 9:45am. The children and adults are encouraged to wear Western dress and the theme will be carried out in rodeo events based on Biblical questions. Real horses will be brought to church to carry out the theme. To many of us the Sunday school is a glorious stampede that goes on every Sunday all year round."

Rev. Heath continued to serve Willow Park Baptist Church until October 1976.

THE MIDDLE YEARS (1976 - 1995)

Without the aid of newspaper articles and source documents, the years from 1976 to 1995 are described using notes from and conversations with Mrs. Diane Kilbride.

During this period of time, portables located on the church property were used to house a Christian School, staffed by John and Diane Oliver.

Dr. Robert “Bob” Tucker from Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary in Cochrane started a Hispanic congregation using the sanctuary of Willow Park Baptist Church on Sunday afternoons. Dr. Tucker spoke in English while the congregants listened, some with hearing devices plugged into pews and listening to the Spanish equivalent as spoken by the translator sitting in the sound booth above the auditorium entrance. An interim pastor, Dr. Wayne Cook, also from the Seminary, led the congregation for a brief time.

Dr. Duane Garrett, from the Seminary, led the congregation through recovery from a time of significant turmoil. He shared pulpit supply duties with Dr. Cook. During this time, it was recommended that the name of the church be changed to Trinity Baptist Fellowship, later altered to Trinity Baptist Church.

In 1991, Shafer Parker came as pastor and led the church until 1993. Under Pastor Parker’s ministry, Trinity began to grow again numerically. Shafer Parker later pastored Hawkwood Baptist (a North American Baptist church) in northwest Calgary and served with Faith Beyond Belief as staff apologist; he is now retired. Dr. Garrett again served as interim pastor until 1995. Dr. Garrett now resides in Louisville, KY and teaches at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

THE RECENT YEARS (1995-2024)

In June 1995, Dr. Robert “Rob” Blackaby came as pastor and led the church until 2008. Rob’s brother, Peter, joined the staff as an associate pastor in 1996 in a part-time capacity while attending the Seminary in Cochrane; he would later serve full-time until 2009. Over the intervening years, other ministry staff members would include Nigel Wheeler, Patou Zeleke, Tim Williams, Ruth Blackaby (Rob’s sister), and Michael “Moose” Mitchum (Ruth’s husband).

The Blackaby years were characterized by biblical teaching and numerical growth. Eventually, the congregation grew to a size that precipitated them to relocate worship services to a nearby school for two years. They would later return to the 9920 Fairmount Drive SE property.

In 2002, Trinity modified its polity to incorporate an Elders Team, sharing the burden of church governance with the pastoral staff.

In 2006, the portables on the property were replaced by a double-size unit, thereafter used as Christian education classrooms, children’s ministry, youth activities, and for other events.

Mission church plants were launched in different communities throughout southern Alberta, all using Trinity as an anchor for financial purposes. Some thrived and some collapsed. They included works in Coaldale, Lethbridge, Pincher Creek, Nanton, Okotoks, and Calgary (Vietnamese).

A new church planting strategy was developed under which Trinity would serve as the anchor church to fund and support a SouthTrails Network of sister churches in south Calgary. As part of this plan, Trinity began a two-service format on Sunday mornings, not only to accommodate the increased attendance but to prepare for the launch of a church plant. Rob Blackaby would preach first at Trinity then at the new work.

Several mission teams from Southern Baptist churches in the United States of America came to assist summer ministry efforts at Trinity (VBS, Basketball Camp, Stampede BBQ) and in communities targeted for church plants (neighbourhood block parties, Soccer Camp).

Southwinds Church was launched under this strategy in 2007, with Trinity returning to a single service format. Several of Trinity's members volunteered to leave and form the core of Southwinds. Trinity continued to host office space and administrative services for Southwinds.

Dr. Rob Blackaby left Trinity to become the president of the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary, assuming the role left vacant by his cousin, Dr. Richard Blackaby. Rob continued to preach at Southwinds but also filled the pulpit at Trinity for part of the next year. Trinity continued its cooperative relationship with Southwinds, now an independent congregation.

Dr. Wilson Nelson came from the Greenville area of South Carolina as an intentional transition pastor in January 2009 and left in June 2011. Wilson's ministry emphasized relationships and re-building foundations. Dr. Nelson later worked on staff at North Greenville University and area churches as interim pastor. In the years since leaving Trinity, Wilson and his wife returned multiple times to visit Trinity, often alongside mission teams from South Carolina churches. He has since retired in Florida. Miss Jamie Daughtry joined the ministry staff as Director of Student Ministries in early 2009 and left in late 2011.

The church building required renovations along with its congregation. During this period, a multi-year plan of refurbishment was launched, starting with interior re-painting throughout and replacement of the foyer flooring with ceramic tiles; in later years, the entire lower-level flooring was also replaced with ceramic tiles. Our facilities were made available on a weekly basis to two ethnic congregations: one of eastern European heritage and another of messianic Jews.

Rev. Bobby "Bo" Stevens came from Jonesboro, GA to be the pastor in July 2011. Bo's ministry was characterized by an emphasis on discipleship. Bo left Trinity in September 2013 to pursue leadership of his family businesses in Texas. Robbie Booth joined the ministry staff as Youth Intern in early 2012 on a part-time basis as he continued studies at the Seminary in Cochrane, leaving late 2013. Miss Leticia Frenette joined the ministry staff as Director of Children's Ministries from May through December 2013.

In September 2014, Trinity had the pulpit filled by Gordon Grieve for around six weeks. He was brought on full-time in April 2015 and stayed until the end of December 2020. During his tenure, additional staffing needs were filled by Christy Nova (as the head of children's ministries), Nicholas Frenette (as a summer student intern), and Blaise Kemna (as the head of youth ministries). Teams from South Carolina continued to come to help run a basketball camp at local community facilities with a high number of children registered. Steady congregational growth occurred, including younger couples.

Much changed in 2020 as a pandemic gripped the world. Government public health orders imposed restrictions on gatherings, whether for secular or sacred purposes. Trinity moved into “on-line only” mode from April through June 2020, using social media platforms to broadcast Sunday services. In-person attendance returned in July but that was somewhat short-lived into the fall as the spread of virus increased. We permanently returned to in-person services in early 2021, complying with attendance limits, eventually moving to two Sunday morning services when public health guidance reduced the limits even further.

From the crucible of a pandemic, Trinity started to regularly broadcast Sunday services, use on-line platforms for committee meetings and enjoy a variety of in-person and videotaped speakers from near and distant locations to fill the pulpit during the period without a full-time pastor. Not unlike most churches at the time, Trinity suffered the loss of some attenders. Nevertheless, taking turns to attend in-person services, a core of the congregation survived, emerging from the pandemic. In the fall of 2021, we resumed several in-person ministries, including Sunday School. Church-wide fellowship luncheons resumed shortly thereafter, bringing back a vibrancy missed during the many months of isolation.

In July 2022, we welcomed Chris Woodcock as our pastor. He and his family moved from Ontario. Consistent pulpit ministry helped to stabilize and grow attendance. Our children and youth resumed meeting on selected Friday nights for fun and a devotional time, later expanding their ministry to include leading congregational singing for Sunday services once monthly and presenting a drama around Easter and Christmas. Mid-week prayer transitioned to two gatherings: one in-person at the church on Tuesday evenings and another continued on-line Wednesday nights. As an academic student pursuing graduate studies, Pastor Woodcock enjoyed teaching on various doctrinal subjects; these classes became known as Theology Café, scheduled immediately following our monthly Soup & Bun lunches. The Woodcocks left Trinity in January 2024.

WHAT IS TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH LIKE TODAY?

Trinity is a relatively small church with 50-70 attenders on Sunday mornings. We remain affiliated with the Canadian National Baptist Convention. In recent years, Trinity has consistently enjoyed a diverse congregation with a healthy mix of ethnicities and generations. Between Sunday School and the morning service, we have a time of fellowship known as *Interlude*; attenders enjoy refreshments and visit with one another in the foyer. We continue to host a monthly luncheon after a Sunday morning service, open to everyone.

The congregation seeks to be a family of believers committed to Jesus Christ and following Him. We appreciate messages based on the exposition of Scripture. We enjoy times of fellowship, bible study, and prayer. Sunday morning services include a variety of music styles for congregational singing.

We have a rental agreement with a Korean congregation, also affiliated with the Canadian National Baptist Convention: Woori Church. They are of similar size to Trinity but have a younger overall demographic. Woori occupies our facility on Sunday afternoons and meets mid-week for prayer. Trinity enjoys cooperatively participating in ministry, inviting Woori to fellowship events and joining together for special services (e.g. Good Friday) and productions (Easter drama).

Trinity has no mortgage and is debt-free. The main building's roof was insulated and re-shingled in the fall of 2023; the portable building roof was re-shingled in the spring of 2024. A commercial chair lift was installed in January 2024 for mobility-challenged individuals to go between the upstairs auditorium, the ground-level foyer & offices, and the downstairs fellowship hall, classrooms, and washroom facilities.

The property is located at 9920 Fairmont Drive SE. Across the street is an Italian Market, a Tim Hortons, and a plaza with small commercial and retail tenants. Adjacent to the north side of the property is a Petro-Canada gas station with service bays; on the south side is a multi-tenant apartment complex known as Willow Green Estates.

Below are three links to resources published by the City of Calgary describing the communities of Willow Park (in which Trinity is located), Maple Ridge, and Acadia. They provide statistical information on their population, ethnicity, income, and other demographic characteristics.

https://www.calgary.ca/content/dam/www/csps/cns/documents/community_social_statistics/community-profiles/willow-park.pdf

https://www.calgary.ca/content/dam/www/csps/cns/documents/community_social_statistics/community-profiles/maple-ridge.pdf

https://www.calgary.ca/content/dam/www/csps/cns/documents/community_social_statistics/community-profiles/acadia.pdf

While in its early years, Trinity attenders largely came from these communities above, today's congregation largely commutes from areas throughout and surrounding Calgary.