



FROM THEN TO NOW

1847 - 2007

An Historical Overview of Weston Presbyterian Church



160 Years of History of Weston Presbyterian Church

When we look at the history of this church, we find there was Presbyterian worship in Weston even before 1847. Services were held in the homes of residents in the early days of this community. Weston was still a hamlet by the Humber and Toronto was a long way off.

Robert MacDougall, a Justice of the Peace, and John Pirritte, the local teacher, were devout Presbyterians who had recently come out from Scotland. They often walked to Toronto on Sunday mornings to hear the Rev. Joseph Harris of First Presbyterian Church. Mr. Harris was formerly from Belfast and he was the first Presbyterian Minister in Toronto. Occasionally, Mr. Harris would walk back with these two staunch Presbyterians and conduct an afternoon service in one of their homes in Weston. Interestingly, we find our Irish and Scottish heritage joined together in these very first Presbyterian worship services in this community. It was on June 16th, 1847, that the Toronto Presbytery appointed the Rev. Harris to preach at Weston and this Church became an official preaching station in that year.

1858 to 1900

On January 6th, 1858, almost eleven years after the appointment of Rev. Harris, Weston was officially organized as a congregation. On September 22nd of the same year the Rev. D.B. Pearce was inducted at a salary of one hundred pounds per year. Thus were the origins of the Presbyterian Church in Weston. The congregation, known as Weston Free Church, met in the afternoons or evenings at the Methodist Episcopal Church, known until quite recently as the Oddfellows Hall, located around the corner on Church Street. Within a year, Rev. Pearce left under a cloud of church discipline, and the charge stood vacant for over 13 years. With this turn of events, Dr. Willis, the principal of Knox College, became the interim moderator and sometimes preached there. More often, though, he sent his students to “try the wings of their eloquence” in their first sermons. It was said that almost every Knox student of that era preached his first sermon at Weston.

The first church building was built in 1865 on the present site, at a cost of \$600, a gift of Mr. D. Sloan, so the church opened free of debt. It is still in use as it houses the choir loft, organ chamber, choir room, and entrance to Creelman Hall. It is one of the oldest Presbyterian Church buildings still in use in the Greater Toronto Area. On January 8th, 1873, Rev. Robert Pettigrew (10 years) was inducted and that year a choir was formed and a Sunday school was operating. In April of 1875, a union with Woodbridge was made by Presbytery and evening services were started at Weston. Rev. Walter Reid (16 years) followed Rev. Pettigrew and under their ministries the Church flourished.

The congregation soon outgrew this building and in 1880, the present sanctuary was built at a cost of \$3000. The old building became the Sunday school hall. The sanctuary was dedicated in 1881, the same year Weston was granted village status by incorporation. William Tyrrell, who became the first Reeve of the Village of Weston that same year, was the architect and contractor of our new Church. The Church continued to flourish and its debts were soon retired. The pulpit, which is still in use, is a copy of one that was used in the old St. James Square Presbyterian Church in Toronto (the present site of Ryerson University) and was carved by Johnny Brown, a member of the congregation.

1901 to 1911

The congregation continued to grow and in 1901 Weston was made a separate charge. In May of that year, the Rev. R.M. Hamilton was inducted as Weston's fourth minister and led the Church with great vigour for eight years. He must have been a man of great faith, energy and persuasion, for in one year the Church's debt of \$550 was completely removed. In August, 1902 he asked the congregation to renovate the church, install new furnaces, enlarge the Sunday school and install a pipe organ. The congregation approved the plans on the condition that he would be responsible for raising the funds to cover the total cost. That cost was over \$3000 in 1902. The entire amount was over-subscribed in two months. Services were held in the Town Hall during renovations and the re-opening service was held on December 8th, 1902.

1911 to 1924

The congregation continued to grow and a site was purchased at the corner of Main Street (now Weston Road) and Mill Street (now Bellevue Crescent, south of Lawrence Avenue) for a new Sunday school building.

The facility was dedicated in March 1912 and known as Westminster Sunday school building. Unfortunately, the division in facilities, with the Sanctuary here on Cross Street and the Sunday school there on Main Street, resulted in a rift in the congregation. Some members wanted to move the services to Main Street and others wished to stay at Cross Street. At a congregational meeting in March 1913, bad weather kept attendance to 38 out of 245 members. A majority of the 38 voted to hold all future services at the new facility and to sell the Cross Street site. Westminster Presbyterian Church was then fully established on the new site and the Cross Street site was sold.



The church on Cross Street was then re-purchased by some of the old members and services resumed on January 18th, 1914. Presbytery refused to recognize this congregation though, so it operated as an independent Presbyterian Church known as The Old Kirk. The group continued to worship steadfastly and endured three failed petitions to Toronto Presbytery asking to be recognized as a second Presbyterian congregation in Weston (one petition was signed by 259 members). They appealed to the General Assembly, held in Montreal in June 1917, and the appeal was sustained. The church was then named The Old Presbyterian Church. From June 1917 to 1925 there were two official Presbyterian Churches in Weston.

In 1925 Westminster Presbyterian voted for church union and The Old Presbyterian Church opted to remain Presbyterian. It was then named Weston Presbyterian Church and Westminster became Westminster United Church. The Rev. W. MacKay was the minister during this period of upheaval from 1915 to 1924. Coincidentally, in 1915, the Village of Weston was accorded town status.

1924 to 1938

Between 1924 and 1938 the congregation was led by a number of ministers; Rev. J.G. Cheyne, Rev. Walter Moffat, Rev. R.B. Ledingham, and Rev. F.C. Harper.

1938 to 1955



In 1938, Rev. Currie Creelman began a long and successful ministry (until 1955). During World War II, Rev. Creelman served as Chaplain in the Canadian Army, one of 107 men and women from the church serving in the Armed Forces. During his absence the pulpit was supplied by two retired ministers, Rev. J.P. MacLeod and Dr. Thornton Meek. Rev. Creelman returned to renew the congregation and following World War II the Church grew dramatically.

The post war years were boom times in the life of the congregation as new families moved into the area. The Pax Sunday school Class was started in 1946 with a membership of 25. The Sunday school, from Cradle roll to young people, and the congregation grew in numbers that over-taxed the facilities.

In 1951 the new Creelman Hall was erected to provide Sunday school rooms, meeting space, recreational area and kitchen facilities for the growing congregation. In 1953 the sanctuary was enlarged by moving the organ, choir loft and choir room back into the original building. A special service of re-dedication was then held.



1955 to 1976

In 1955 Rev. Robin Boggs began a ministry which extended over more than two decades. The church facilities were used to capacity and it was not unusual for chairs to be placed in the aisles for special services.



The young people's Pax Bible Class grew to more than 150. Other groups such as the Men's Club, W.M.S. Evening Auxiliary, Owaissa, Women's Association, Choir, CGIT and Explorers were very active.

The congregation showed foresight in acquiring a number of properties adjacent to the Church which provided ample parking. Eleven Cross Street was designated as the "Church House" with offices for the minister and secretary, a meeting room, lounge and kitchen, with Scout facilities in the basement. An entrance was made from the parking lot to Creelman Hall with a new corridor to the sanctuary. The choir room was enlarged and a new entrance was placed at the front of the church. The renovations were dedicated as a Canadian Centennial project in 1967. This was also the year that Weston became part of the Borough of York of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto. During the 1960s and 1970s, the Women's Association organized the installation of the beautiful stained glass memorial windows in the sanctuary.

After many years of full activity, the Church experienced what many other congregations experienced. Young people grew up, married and in many cases moved away from our community, resulting in a steady decline in the church membership, Sunday school and Pax Bible Class.

1976 to 1983

In 1976, Rev. Murray Garvin began his ministry in Weston after 16 years as a missionary in Taiwan. He proved to be a very innovative minister with special interest in Christian Education and empathy for young people. In 1977 the Sunday school was re-organized with programs geared to all ages from infants to adults. The Sunday school teachers formed a special committee and worked on the Jerusalem Experience, which was presented on Palm Sunday 1979. Each group in the church helped to recreate the setting of Jerusalem in Jesus' time.

Rev. Garvin was also responsible for our participation in the Knox College student placement program. Because of his obvious empathy with them, Weston became a favourite posting for students. During this time, thirteen students from Knox and/or Ewart College contributed considerably to the life and spiritual growth of our congregation. Also the Toronto Formosan Presbyterian Church shared our facilities, and by 1990 that congregation had grown to the point that they had to leave us to seek larger quarters.

It was a great moment in the life of our congregation when Christine O'Reilly was ordained in our Church on May 18th, 1983. It was very special because Christine grew up in the church. Previously Craig Cribar, from our congregation, had been ordained in 1962.

Other important innovations during Reverend Garvin's ministry were:

- 1977 A public address system installed and services taped for shut-ins.
- 1978 The Memorial Fund was formed.
- 1979 Talks began regarding the use of property for a Seniors' facility.
- 1979 Participation in ecumenical services and in the formation of W.A.E.S.
- 1980 Participation in Cursillo movement.

1983 to 1987

On September 9th, 1983, Rev. Dr. Ronald F.G. Campbell began his ministry in our congregation. His Doctorate was in communications and he taught that subject at Cornell and Seneca. After 11 years as Dean of Seneca College, he felt the call to return to the pastoral ministry.

Prior to accepting our call, Dr. Campbell assisted as part-time minister at North Park Church where Ferne Reeve was a part-time Deaconess. Together, Dr. Campbell and Ferne Reeve conceived the idea of combining the churches as a two-point charge, using a team ministry for the two congregations consisting of Minister, Deaconess and Knox student. After approval by both congregations and the Presbytery of West Toronto, the new system was started in September 1984. The system proved beneficial to both congregations. In April 1987 North Park received permission from Presbytery to once again become a self-supporting charge.

Dr. Campbell placed a high emphasis in his ministry on reaching out to young families in the community and this resulted in new members who became very active in the congregation and brought their children with them to the Sunday school.

Dr. Campbell's particular experience was of great benefit to the Property Development Committee in their efforts to develop a seniors' project. Many years of discussions, planning and submitting applications were involved, however, local and political opposition caused the Ontario Municipal Board to refuse approval for this project. A second attempt was made but failed.

On September 1, 1987, Dr. Campbell resigned to become Dean of Students and Student Placement Officer at Ewart College.

1988 to 1997

In February 1988 Rev. Joyce Elder became the minister at Weston Presbyterian Church (1988-1997). In 1996, the Ghana Calvary Methodist United Church began sharing our facilities, and this relationship continues today.

On May 4th, 1997, we celebrated our 150th Anniversary with a special Worship Service followed by a luncheon. We were delighted to have the Moderator of the 122nd General Assembly, Mrs. Tamiko Corbett, visit with us and share in the festivities.

In the latter years of Rev. Elder's ministry, a serious rift developed in the congregation, leading to a decline in membership and the resignation of Rev. Elder on October 30th, 1997.

1997 to Present

The Presbytery of West Toronto appointed a special commission to look into our difficulties. The Rev. Harry Klassen was appointed Interim Minister by Presbytery and ministered to us from January 15th, 1998 to February 27th, 2000.

A Search Committee was set up in June 1999 to find a new minister. After reviewing dozens of applications, the committee recommended Dr. Lance Odland to the Session and congregation for the position. He preached for the call on October 15th, 2000, and was inducted on Sunday, November 26th, 2000, after being ordained at Knox Presbyterian Church, Sudbury, the previous week.

Rev. Dr. Lance Odland, B.A. (Hon.), M.A., Ph.D., M. Div., our current minister, was born and raised in Alberta. While in the west he worked with young offenders, the Canadian Mental Health Association and the John Howard Society prior to coming to Ontario in 1985 to study at York University, where he completed his Doctorate in Philosophy in 1992. Dr. Odland then went to Sudbury to teach at Laurentian University and while there attended Knox Presbyterian Church. In September 1997 he entered Knox College (the theological college of the Presbyterian Church in Canada) and graduated in May 2000. In his last year at Knox, he interned as University Chaplain. He also spent just over two years, from June 1998 to September 2000, at Alderwood Presbyterian Church as stated supply.

During Dr. Odland's ministry, we have experienced many new projects that have nurtured our spiritual growth, such as: revival of the Church choir; introduction of new hymn books and psalters; restoration of Church library; large wooden cross made by Mr. Warren Sloan installed in the Sanctuary and dedicated on September 9, 2001; children given the opportunity to go to Glen Mhor summer camp; Tuesday afternoon Bible Study; Wednesday evening Bible Study on specific books of the Bible; formation of Youth group; participation in the Lenten Series held yearly with five other churches; photographs of adults and children at congregational events displayed on the walls of lower Creelman Hall; Memorial Wall set up (155th Anniversary); Nativity displays set up each year; participation in the Christian Community Connection events with other denominations in Weston.



As well, there have been several planning/visioning workshops on Saturdays at Weston, as well as one at *L'Arche* in Richmond Hill, an evening workshop with Keith Boyer (Synod consultant), congregational study of *Together in Ministry*, plus a Session retreat.

Dr. Odland is strong on pastoral care and is friendly to all. He supports all the groups in the church, i.e. W.M.S., Choir, Owaissa, Church School, Women's Fellowship, etc. with his presence and encouragement. He has also been involved in the yearly Vacation Bible Camp including conducting worship every morning for the children. Currently Dr. Odland is encouraging technological advances such as equipment which can be used with a laptop to show DVD's, etc. in upper and lower Creelman Hall and the sanctuary. A web-site for the church will soon be in operation.

New church members have been welcomed, including a number from the Alderwood Presbyterian Church which was dissolved in September 2000. Two more congregations, the Eben-Ezer Santa Sion Pentecostal Church and a branch of the Toronto Harvest Missionary Church are now using our facilities.

Funds from the recent sale of properties have provided for the much needed upkeep of our properties. Creelman Hall has been painted and the windows have been replaced. Water seepage problems have been addressed. The sanctuary carpet has been replaced. Extensive steeple and chimney repairs have been completed. We are now in the process of becoming more technologically aware in the area of communications, hoping to use these devices as outreach tools.

Looking to the Future

In each generation there have been people in our congregation who have worked and planned for the future. We too should look to the future so that our efforts may strengthen our Church's ministry, and ensure its continued life and service to future generations.

At Weston we reach out to the community as individual volunteers and with financial support to local ministries while we continue with our strong financial support for the work of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Weston Presbyterian Church has been challenged in the past and has always been blessed by God. We continue to feel blessed and look forward to meeting the challenges of the future.



List of Ministers

	Year of Induction
Rev. D. B. Pearce	Sept. 22, 1858
Rev. Robt. Pettigrew, B.A.	Jan. 8, 1873
Rev. Walter Reid, B.D.	1884
Rev. R. M. Hamilton, B.A.	May 31, 1901
Rev. A. H. MacGillivray, M.A.	Dec., 1909
Rev. J. W. H. Milne, B.A.	1912
Rev. Dr. J. Ashdown	Jan. 18, 1914
Rev. William MacKay, B.A.	1915
Rev. J. G. Cheyne	Supply 1924
Rev. Walter Moffat	Feb. 10, 1928
Rev. R. B. Ledingham, B.A.	Sept. 4, 1931
Rev. Frank C. Harper, B.A., B.D.	Mar. 26, 1936
Rev. R.C. Creelman, B.A., B.D., M.B.E.	Oct. 18, 1938
Rev. J. P. MacLeod	Supply World War II
Dr. P. Thornton Meek	Supply World War II
Rev. R. J. Boggs, B.A.	Jan. 12, 1955
Rev. Murray L. Garvin, B.A., M. Div.	Apr. 29, 1976
Rev. Dr. Ronald F. G. Campbell, B.A., B.D., M.A., Ph. D.	Sept. 8, 1983
Rev. Joyce E. Elder, B.A., M. Ed.	Feb. 14, 1988
Rev. Harry Klassen, B.A., B.D., M. Th. (Interim Minister)	Jan. 15, 1998
Rev. Dr. Lance Odland, B.A. (Hon.), M.A., Ph.D., M. Div.	Nov. 26, 2000

