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A Legacy of Faithfulness: Celebrating 120 years of the Free Methodist Church in Sault Ste. Marie

On Sunday, October 11th, 2026, our church celebrated its 120th year of "official" ministry. And while this day marked 120 years of being official, the work of the Free Methodist Church in Sault Ste. Marie actually dates back to 1902.

In 1902, people who had been members of other Free Methodist churches in Eastern Ontario settled in the Soo and began to meet together in their homes for Bible Study and prayer. Eventually they welcomed their first pastor, the Reverend E.A. DeMille, a recent Spring Arbour College graduate. Reverend DeMille arrived at midnight on a wintry January evening, disembarking from the ferry from the American Sault (which he finally caught after his train had been delayed by hours due to the weather). Upon his arrival, Reverend DeMille was met by all 6 members of his congregation.

This small group continued to hold services in homes and eventually started to grow. They finally became an official church on October 8th, 1906 (although they were called a mission, not a church), when they held their first board meeting. The Reverend DeMille was appointed as their first pastor.

In 1907, the small congregation moved their meetings out of homes and into a property on Brock Street. One year later, they moved again, using the Presbyterian Mission on Bruce Street to hold their services. In September 1910, the congregation (under the leadership of evangelists Miss Matilda Sipprell and Miss Alice Walls) purchased an old store on Gore Street to serve as their church.

In 1912, the Gore Street Mission property was sold and a new property was purchased on Grosvenor Avenue. Construction on a new church was completed in 1913, and services began with Reverend P.K. Smith serving as pastor. During this time, the status of the Free Methodist work was changed from mission to church. Two years later, more property was purchased on Grosvenor for a parsonage. Grosvenor Avenue served as home for our church for 56 years.

But eventually the congregation began to outgrow their facilities. In 1965, under the leadership of Reverend Allan Hyndman, the congregation purchased property on McNabb Street, the church's present location. They began to build in 1967, but because of limited finances, only the basement was completed. So, in September of 1969, the congregation began to meet in the basement – and continued to do so for almost 10 years, until the exterior and upper floor of the building were finally completed in 1997. The expanded facility was dedicated on November 19th, 1978. Reverend Merlyn Rensberry provided pastoral leadership during this period.

2004 saw further remodelling and expansion of the facility, while 2022 saw a change in name to Hillside Free Methodist Church, as it is known today.

And so, here we are, 120 years or so later. At least 5 different locations. At least 33 different pastors. Numbers of people come and gone. Those are the facts and figures. But the real story in all of this is one of faithfulness. The faithfulness of people to give and serve and take courageous steps to help their church be all it can be – and the faithfulness of God to provide everything that has been needed for 120 plus years. That faithfulness has produced more than the facts and figures of history. It has produced countless stories and memories. It has also influenced and changed countless lives. And that's what is being celebrated this October – 120 years of faithfulness.

- updated by Tim from a 100th anniversary essay by Pastor Marc McAlister

The following is a list of pastors who have served the Sault Ste. Marie Free Methodist Church:

1906 – Edwin A. DeMille
1907 – 1908 – Byron E. Stevenson
1909 – 1911 – Matilda Sipprel & Alice Walls
1911 – 1912 – Anna Botting & Alice Walls
1912 – 1915 – P.K. Smith
1915 – 1918 – T. Robb
1918 – 1921 – E.E. Loveless
1921 – 1924 – W.R. McCready
1924 – 1925 – A.G. Hartle
1925 – 1927 – J. Roberts
1927 – 1929 – C.E. Walls
1929 – 1931 – J.W. Cowherd
1931 – 1933 – D. McGugan
1933 – 1936 – W.E. McQuiggan
1936 – 1938 – H.H. Hyndman
1938 –1939 – H. Loveless
1939 – 1940 – B.E. Shaver
1940 – 1945 – R.C. McCallum
1945 – 1950 – W.C. Peach
1950 – 1954 – J. Winslow
1954 – 1959 – N.A. McQuarrie
1960 – R. Sterling Hicks
1960 – 1965 – J.W. Fletcher
1965 – 1973 – Allan Hyndman
1973 – 1978 – Merlyn Rensberry
1978 – 1984 – Harold Scott
1984 – 1987 – Michael Gillian
1987 – 1994 – Douglas J. Dawson
1994 – 2001 – Steven Lougheed
2002 – Dean Anderson (interim pastor)
2002 – 2013 – Marc McAlister
2014 – 2017 – Wesley Wood
2017 – 2022 – Christopher Walls
2023 – present – Kevin Bishop

- compiled by Helen McWilliam & Tim Howard

Come, Christians, join to sing, Alleluia, Amen!
Loud praise to Christ our King, Alleluia, Amen!
Let all with heart and voice before his throne rejoice;
Praise is his gracious choice; Alleluia, Amen!

- Christian H. Bateman (1843) Public Domain

The church is not an organization that you join;
it is a family where you belong. - Anonymous

Our 100th anniversary issues also included this letter from Pastor Doug Dawson. His thoughts and recollections give a pretty representative picture of our church over the years. We're happy to say some things never change.

The Soo church holds a special place in my heart as it was my first pastoral appointment.

I remember those first weeks and the many who came out to help us settle in and feel a part of the community. We remember Roy Whitney's gift of his "homemade" maple syrup and Bryan and Grace Turner taking us all the way up to the Trading Post for ice cream and to show us the sights of the north.

We fondly remember the beauty of the mist on the river in the fall, the many waterfalls, the fall show of colour in the forests and the crisp sound of walking in the snow on a cold January morning.

But above all we remember the people. I have boasted many times of the gifts, talents and abilities that God has graced the people of the Soo church with:

- People like Ron McQuarrie and his awesome ability to greet a newcomer and make them feel warmly welcome or his infinite patience with young baseball players on the church team.
- The many wonderful musical gifts scattered throughout the congregation – pianists, guitarists, and singers.
- The young people who grew up in the church and have carried their ministries to other cities and places.
- Faithful prayer warriors, generous givers and faithful workers, both those who are in the forefront and those whose ministries may only be know by a few.

We also fondly remember the many who shared a meal with our family.

I also remember some special spiritual moments that were a wonderful blessing:

- The week of teaching on prayer with Rev. E.A. Cooper, the "marriage and family" meetings with Bishop Donald Bastian and the powerful presence of the Spirit during those times.
- Many of the Tuesday morning prayer meetings when the presence of God was greatly felt and tears flowed freely.
- The city-wide prayer meetings and the numerous times we joined with other churches in town to praise God together – also some special communion services and Easter Sunrise services that touched hearts very deeply.

We ask God's blessing upon you as you celebrate this special year.

With fond memories and warm feelings:
Doug, Valerie, Melissa, Stephen and David Dawson

To My Church *– a Devotional by Tim Howard*

One of my earliest memories is of my sisters, Cheryl and Arlene, carrying me across the street from our house and up a little way to the little red church on Grosvenor Avenue. These little journeys began in the spring of 1958 when I was about two-and-a-half years old. Little did I know then what this church and its people would come to mean to me.

Just how special you are will be hard to put into words, but I'll try.

You taught me about God. You planted a seed way back then, and over the years you nurtured it with you wisdom, encouragement and love – and you did it in such a gentle and natural way that it seems that my faith has always been a part of me. You taught me by example. I'll never forget how Fred and Ann Eddy used to sit holding hands in church. Without saying a word, they spoke volumes to me about love, commitment and faith. I just knew that if Mr. and Mrs. Eddy believed in God, then He must be real.

You'll never know how many lives you've touched. I know many people, family and friends alike, who've attended social gatherings at our church, and shared happy times and sad with us – from weddings to funerals. Without fail, they speak of the kindness, warmth and compassion of our pastors, past and present, and our people. No matter how they may feel about organized religion, they look upon our church with appreciation and goodwill.

I know that my dad always appreciated the love and kindness shown to our family by this church. He was touched when the summer came that I was too old to attend CYC camp as a camper and Allan Hyndman made me his assistant counsellor. He appreciated the many visits by our pastors over the years. I still recall Dad and Pastor Rensberry sitting at our dining room table discussing the wonders of the universe together. He appreciated your prayers on his behalf during times of illness, and so did we, his family. I know this church made a real difference in his life – and I believe it made an eternal one.

I have a feeling that if you were to gather together all of the folks whose lives have been touched by this church, past and present, Sault Ste. Marie would not be able to contain them all. And I have a feeling that will still be true 120 years from now as the legacy and ministry of this church continues, as long as it is filled with people like you who make the church what it was meant to be.

Happy 120th anniversary, everyone – and thanks for just being you.

Yours faithfully,
Tim

We hope you've enjoyed this special edition of the *T.E.A.M. Report*. Your comments, suggestions and submissions are always welcome and can be sent us at ***slowpoketim@shaw.ca***. Until next time, everyone, take care – and May God Bless!