**105th Anniversary Edition – Through The Decades 1911-2017**

* By 1911, Vancouver was already 25 years old – a bustling, developing port city on the West Coast. On the religious front, it was a time of exciting change, of ecumenical discussions and of church building and growth. Many of the older churches in Vancouver were built around this time. In her history of this congregation, Jessie How outlines what the time and area were like in these early years:

“*It all started (for this congregation) in 1911. Vancouver, with a population of 137,000 had its western boundary at Alma Road. Beyond that lay the northwest section of the Municipality of Point Grey, formed in 1908. In this area, West Point Grey, roads were being laid out; a one-track car line was in operation; Southeast Marine Dr. was being extended to become the scenic Northwest Marine Dr, and by 1911, the site of the University of British Columbia had been selected on the Point. People in the growing city saw good reason to move to this new district.*

*West Point Grey was not the urban community it has become. From Alma Road to what is now Discovery Street, from 16th Ave. to the waterfront, was tall timber; the water system from the city had not been completed; streetcar service stopped early in the evening; there was a small grocery store on Sasamat St. at 6th Ave and very soon more shops appeared on 10th. Here were all the characteristics of a village, with not too difficult access to the city.*

*With the vision of a university next door, West Point Grey saw a promising future. As more families moved here, a two-room school was built on Trimble near 4th Ave., and later, the eight-room Queen Mary School was opened.*

*One side of community life was missing. The nearest Presbyterian and Methodist churches were in Kitsilano. Adults were able to reach the Sunday services by street car (the motor car was not common then) – but it was hard for children to travel so far from home to Sunday School. So arrangements were made to hold Sunday School in Queen Mary School.*

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*Something was still lacking. The community needed a centre for worship and service. In the early Fall of 1911, a committee of Methodists were appointed to ask the Home Mission Board to establish a pastoral charge in West Point Grey. There were 38 members ready for a new congregation. A student minister from Columbia College in New Westminster was sent to them and he started services in the school on Sunday afternoons. Both Methodists and Presbyterians attended. A site was chosen on Tolmie St. at 8th Ave. and .... the church was built in the summer of 1912 ...”*

Of course, during these early years of the 20th Century, two events that were to have a profound impact on all aspects of church and society were the great Influenza Epidemic of 1918 and the First World War. In 1914, when Canadian soldiers enlisted in the first great war of the 20th Century, many anticipated that they would be home by Christmas to celebrate their victory. But the young men were not home by Christmas. The war dragged on for 4 years. The work of the churches in West Point Grey suffered considerably. Many of men were serving in the armed forces, times were hard and church finances were low.

* 1920’s ….. After the war, with the assurance of peace and the return of the men from overseas, and renewed hope that the University would soon be started, interest in church revived and membership increased. On the church front, talks of church union between the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches were at their most intense – often stimulating great debate – and sometimes bitter division – between family and church members. On June 10th, 1925, the United Church of Canada was born – joining together the Methodist and Congregational churches in Canada, as well as 2/3 of the Presbyterian churches. Tolmie St. Methodist Church became Tolmie St. United and West Point Grey Presbyterian changed its name to WPG United. Some of the Presbyterians who chose not to enter United Church union formed the nucleus of the present WPG Presbyterian church. It soon became apparent that 2 churches of the same denomination so close together was not practical. And on March 31st , 1927, a group of members from the 4th Ave Church marched up the hill to the former Tolmie St. Methodist Church – now to be known as West Point Grey United Church. The remainder of the Presbyterian members made plans to build a new Presbyterian church at 12th and Trimble, and in 1928, it was dedicated as West Point Grey Presbyterian Church.

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\* 1930’s …. Following the stock market crash in 1929, the decade of the 1930’s began on a bleak note as the Depression years were felt in all areas of Canada and the United States. Churches during this time also felt the affects as unemployment and scarcity took their toll. In the early years of the Depression, churches were crowded with people desperate for answers. West Point Grey United at this time, had an average Sunday School attendance of 315 children and youth and there was talk of the need for a building to hold the expanded numbers of people. In 1935 a Building Fund was established.

* 1940’s …… Then 1939 and another war on the horizon as the decade of the 1940’s rolled around. There was a question about whether this was the right time to take on the building of a new sanctuary. Under the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Telfer, it was decided that “By faith we can do it!” and the old building was moved to be used as a Christian Education centre. And on October 12, 1941 the new church (this current building) was dedicated. Another interesting thing of note was that the Thrift Sale was started in 1941 by the women of the congregation – and has continued in some form until this year.
* 1950’s …. The 1950’s were a period of post-war boom in both church and society. Optimism was on the rise, along with hope for a better world. Under the leadership of the Rev. Elliot Birdsall and assistant minister, Rev. Charles Finnemore, in 1953, the church roll listed 787 members and Church School attendance stood at 516. Once again, there was an obvious need for more room. And in 1957, the construction of a new Christian Education Building was undertaken.

* 1960’s ….. In 1962 The United Church Women was formed – joining the former Women’s Auxiliary and Women’s Missionary Society movements. Church School continued to flourish as did youth groups such as Canadian Girls In Training, Hi-C, and Young People’s Union. Ecumenism was on the rise, and joint services, pulpit exchanges and other events brought the churches of West Point Grey together. In 1963, the manse on 6th Ave was sold and a new one bought on Bellevue Drive. The church reorganized its governing structure to reflect more of an emphasis on the importance of lay ministry

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* 1970’s …. By the 70’s the was an obvious shift. Church School attendance was declining steadily, new styles of worship were being introduced. In the United Church, more and more women began training for the ordained ministry. An emphasis on inclusive language was being put forward. And a new ecumenical lectionary of scripture readings, based on a 3 year cycle was introduced in the late 1970’s.
* 1980’s …. During the 80’s, church attendance continued on a downward trend – influenced also by the introduction of Sunday shopping in many areas, and sporting events on Sundays. And in 1988, the United Church made a bold decision by proclaiming that sexual orientation itself was not a deterrent to ordination – causing consider consternation and debate across the country.
* 1990’s – the present 2017 ….. The last twenty - five years have seen the increasing emphasis on interculturalism both in society and in the churches – especially in areas like Vancouver, where there has been a rapid increase in immigration – particularly from Asian countries. Here at West Point Grey, the ESL program has reached out to newcomers to Canada since 2004 – offering not only the opportunity to learn English, but also to find community as they adapt to a new culture and place. Over the last 5 years, this has also developed into a move on behalf of the church to finding ways to building bridges with our neighbours, and Linda Liang was hired as the Intercultural Coordinator to help us become an intentional intercultural community of faith. TLC – the Lunch Club, under the wonderful leadership of Janis Terrien, has provided a place of welcome, and nourishment for both body and soul for seniors in the West Point Grey area since 1998. And for over 10 years, the Out of the Cold Program provided hot meals to the disadvantaged and lonely. New technologies (like powerpoint in worship) and new creative forms of worship have also had an influence on church life. One challenge has been that church attendance has continued on a downward spiral, as has Sunday School attendance as the surrounding community becomes more secular and diverse. There is an increased awareness that change is afoot – and while that involves letting go of some things from the past – there is also an opening to new possibilities as we follow the leading of the Spirit ‘birthing something new’ in our midst.