

Roots & Reflections

BOW VALLEY CHRISTIAN CHURCH



It all
started
with one
woman,
and a
small
group of
girls...

Back in 1928, times were already tough and the



Depression had yet to hit. Agnes Nelson took a look around her Tuxedo Park neighbourhood — a rough area with street gangs — and figured she needed to do something to reach out to the young people there. So she started a Sunday school in her house — not very big at first, just ten girls in all. Mostly their parents weren't church-goers, but they let their daughters go to Mrs. Nelson's on Sundays. The girls didn't get a lot of attention at home, but Mrs. Nelson gave them plenty of it — and a chance to learn about Jesus and grow friendships with one another. Within a few years, the school had outgrown the Nelson home and moved to an empty United Church building at Centre Street North and 30th Avenue.

Around the same time, civic leaders asked Dr. Richard Westaway, a veteran church-planter, to begin a church in Tuxedo Park, hoping that it would help clean up the neighbourhood. Dr. Westaway began holding services in the same building as Mrs. Nelson's Sunday school, and Tuxedo Park Church of Christ was born.

Reaching Out with Open Doors...

Created to make a difference in the community, Tuxedo Park Church of Christ did just that. With open arms and open doors, the church welcomed people from every denomination and walk of life. Without much money, church members relied on each other — and they generously offered their support, friendship and hospitality. In the process, they found that even though they didn't have much, they still had a lot.

Sunday afternoons were times of great warmth and fellowship, with most everyone being invited back home for something as simple as cinnamon toast. "We didn't have much," offered one long-time member, "but we shared what we had and made a good time of it." Poor families who couldn't contribute financially to the church did janitorial work.

The church was a big attraction to children, many of whom still needed to get off the streets. Soon the Sunday school was welcoming up to 100 young people a week. Already crammed for space, the children had to sit up on the platform and anyone who needed to use the bathroom had to impose on the friendly neighbour next door. But the children came for the teaching and fun and the opportunity to grow. Said one young girl at the time: "At church, I felt like I mattered."

Not satisfied to wait for people to come to them, the church reached out to the community, knocking on doors and having tea with neighbours. They offered friendship and care to people in the community, many of whom became life-long members. For most, the church became home and family, born out of the close ties brought on by hardship: "I didn't have children or grandchildren of my own," explained one member, "but I am called Grandma and Auntie in this church. We became family not by relation, but by relationship."



Connected to Alberta Bible College and the World...

Alberta Bible College moved to Calgary from Lethbridge in 1937, finding a building a few blocks away from Tuxedo Park Church of Christ. Not long after, the church and college worked together to build an addition to the College building and the church moved there in 1940, beginning a close relationship that remains to this day.

Besides facilities, the church and college shared staff and students. The presence of the college students made Tuxedo Park a pretty unique church for the time. Alive with young adults, Tuxedo Park became one of the places for students to get their "field experience" and the church was able to offer a high level of Christian education to its members.

ABC was also home to a small number of foreign students who also attended Tuxedo Park. The church maintained ties with these students as they went back to their homelands to minister, offering prayer and financial support. These foreign ties created a spider web of connectedness that broadened the reach and focus of the church into the rest of the world, and began a commitment to international missions that remains strong to this day.



**Tuxedo Park Church of Christ and
Alberta Bible College, 1939**



**Jamaican students,
Clifford and Cordeta Edwards, 1947**

*"We didn't have much but we shared what
we had and made a good time of it."*

**Tuxedo Park Church of Christ
congregation, 1930**



Exceptional Teaching...

The Church of Christ is a Bible-based church, which means that the governing principle of the church is to know and apply scripture. Believing that the Bible is the only authoritative, inspired, written Word of God, the church does not follow any doctrine or teaching other than what is found in the Bible.

The connection with Alberta Bible College supplied the church with an able group of pastors and leaders, all well equipped to provide first-rate Bible teaching. The church's mission to make more and better disciples has been made possible through exceptional teaching by devoted people who have served this church throughout its history.

Ministers over the years have included R.J. Westaway, J. Merlin Hill, M.I. Breakenridge, R.L. Howell, Frank Rempel, Robert Bryan, Robert E. Gonyea, Ed Benoit, Preston Wilkins, Meredith Bergman, R. Allan Dunbar, and Rick Scruggs, who has served this congregation since 1975. Interim Ministers have included E.G. Hansell, Edward MacKay, Boyd L. Lammiman and Ron Fraser.



J. Merlin Hill



M.I. Breakenridge



R.L. Howell



Frank Rempel



Robert Bryan



Robert E. Gonyea



Ed Benoit



Preston Wilkins



Meredith Bergman



R. Allan Dunbar



Rick Scruggs



E.G. Hansell



Edward MacKay



Boyd L. Lammiman



Ron Fraser

What Kind of Church?

The Christian Churches and Churches of Christ denomination is actually not a denomination at all. It began as a movement in the 19th century. The "Restoration Movement" was about developing a "restored" understanding of what it meant to be a church, the goal being to return to the basic principles of the early (first century) church.

During the late 1700's, the church in Europe had lost its way, with a focus on creeds that produced divisions in the church and a clergy system that actually

Campfires and Games...

Showing great foresight, early church leaders saw the potential for spiritual growth and community-building through an unusual activity for the time — camping! The first camps were held in tents at Jumping Pound, Midnapore then Buffalo Lake. Church camps were started in and around Pine Lake as early as the mid-1940's. At that time, \$4.00 was enough for ten days of camping, which meant scores of young people were able to escape the city and enjoy lake life.

Perhaps more than anything else, camping has helped build community in our church. The bonds that were formed in hardship were strengthened through fun. Extended stays at camp gave new people a chance to integrate into the church and gave the leadership another way to connect with the congregation on a personal level. For many, camp was the place where friendships were formed that eventually led them to Christ and a church home, and for some, to pursue ministry and missions as careers. The connection with Pine Lake Christian Camp remains an important part of the life of our church.

In the late 1920's, alongside the camping program, was the beginning of what is now Prairie Young People's Association (PYPA), a unique youth organization run by and for youth. Throughout the years, the church's young people have been active as leaders in this organization.



TOP TO BOTTOM: Midnapore Camp , Pine Lake Christian Camp, 1943, Pine Lake Christian Camp, 1990's

sought to restore the church to its true calling — to seek and save the lost — by spreading the Word of God to those who didn't know it, and to work cooperatively with other churches to carry out the great commission.

In keeping with our Restoration tradition, Bow Valley Christian Church has chosen "no creed but Christ" and to be non-denominational and independent, while maintaining strong ties of friendship and cooperation with all other denominations.

Bow Valley is led by staff and a board of elders which is approved by the congregation.

"The 'Restoration Movement' was about developing a



From Tuxedo Park to Cambrian Heights...

For more than 30 years, Tuxedo Park Church of Christ sought to “seek and save the lost” in that little church on Centre Street. After the war, the men returned home and the church again began a time of growth. A stronger economy fuelled a post-war boom in Calgary. New construction and expanding suburbs were as familiar to folks in the 40’s as they are to us today. And the most important change: instead of riding to church on bicycles, people could now afford to drive cars, which transformed the little congregation of Tuxedo Park from a tiny community church to a larger “commuter” church with members who lived in different parts of town.

To respond to the city’s growth, Tuxedo Park gave up some of its members and money to plant two sister churches in other parts of the city during the late 40’s and early 50’s. This focus on growing God’s Kingdom beyond our own church and responding to a changing world remains part of the vision of the present-day church.

By 1962, Tuxedo Park had grown beyond itself and needed a bigger building. The church moved into the new community of Cambrian Heights and became Cambrian Heights Church of Christ, once again establishing a Sunday school first, and then having the larger



Cambrian Heights Church of Christ group

church follow. Although the church continued to grow slowly through the 60’s, they didn’t seem to have as much impact on the community at that time as did the earlier church. As 1970 approached, Cambrian Heights struggled through a period of transition and decline.

Things changed in a big way in 1973 when Cambrian Heights got a new dose of energy. Led by Allan and Judy Dunbar, the church began another round of innovation, developing new ministries for reaching believers and unbelievers. A “Pairs and Spares” program helped to connect families and foster caring, personal relationships. A very successful “Moms and Tots” (observation nursery) program was set up for young mothers in the community and staffed with volunteers from every generation who helped minister to both moms and preschoolers. It was probably as successful as any program in those days for reaching non-Christians and helping them come to Christ.



Cambrian Heights Church of Christ, 1962

Another innovation: a bus program which ran from the early 70's to the early 80's. Just like in the Tuxedo Park days, the church realized that parents who weren't church goers still wanted their kids to go to church on a Sunday. So Cambrian Heights Church of Christ found a way to get them there. Three to four school buses would run a route through the northern communities, picking up kids who didn't have another way of getting to and from church. One current member who rode the bus for eight years remembers the fun on board, especially the singing before and after church. "The bus program introduced a lot of young people to church and eventually some of the parents started coming, too." During the week, bus captains would visit the homes of the kids they picked up. Once again, the focus on personal connection was powerful, and the Sunday school grew again.

Also in the early 70's a few members from Cambrian Heights saw the need for outreach to street kids downtown. In those days, there were no soup kitchens or homeless shelters, so The Upper Room was established. With rented space on 8th Avenue S.W., church volunteers (from a variety of churches) fed and cared for needy young adults who also needed to know the Gospel. Street ministries, continued on by others, through ministries like the Mustard Seed and Inn from the Cold, make a difference in our city.

Passionate about large-scale outreach, and wanting "a church without walls," Cambrian Heights launched "To You...With Love," a ministry televised by national satellite on Sunday mornings. With fewer than 100 members, this small congregation took a big leap of faith and committed to the financial costs associated with producing a weekly television program seen on CFCN locally, and in portions of Canada and the northern U.S. The program often featured interviews with Christian leaders as well as other prominent figures



TOP: Allan Dunbar, Host of "To You...With Love"
BOTTOM: Bow Valley Christian Church Choir taping for "To You...With Love".

who might have been visiting town. The program gave the church a new, higher profile in the city, and enabled the leadership to play a unifying role with other evangelical churches and develop stronger relationships with community leaders. Aimed at unbelievers, the show allowed viewers to watch Christian programming in their homes (some watched from prison cells). Viewers could call into phone lines, staffed by Cambrian volunteers, for more information or for personal prayers. Personal visits and

correspondence courses for new believers were also parts of the ministry. Church volunteers were able to help countless people with health and personal problems through prayer and counselling. One volunteer who answered phones for fifteen years described the personal impact of the ministry: "When the show finally ended I felt like I was out of work. I still miss my job!" The program ran for twenty years, from 1973 to 1993, and helped the church impact not just Calgary, but the continent.

During this time, Cambrian Heights began to grow like never before, expanding from less than 100 people to 500 in a short time. A highlight of the time was the willingness of the congregation to work

together to support the church's energetic outreach project, showing a strong faith in God and in each other. Because of the close personal ties that still ran strong, church members and leaders enjoyed a high level of trust. As a result, they were able to work together, play together, and often travel together. Although the post-war economy stayed strong, members still needed support through tough times — such as the death of family members — which drew the church together as people ministered to one another. As they had for some sixty years, people would describe their church as more than just a place to go on Sunday. For many at Cambrian Heights, "the church became family."

"As they had for some sixty years, people would describe their church as more than just a place to go on Sunday. For many at Cambrian Heights, 'the church became family.'"

Cambrian Heights Church
of Christ congregation, 1991



From Cambrian Heights to Bow Valley...

In 1992, Cambrian Heights Church of Christ became Bow Valley Christian Church. Parking and access issues, along with the need for more classrooms at Cambrian, caused the church to start looking for a new building, eventually settling in a vacant church building at 53rd Avenue N.W. The early

1990's marked a challenging, but successful, period of evolution as the church moved toward more modern forms of worship, attempting to respond to the needs of a younger generation while respecting the needs of the older. Another change: the end of Sunday school classes for adults and the beginning of a small

group program designed to help individuals grow spiritually in community.

Continuing to focus on building the Kingdom through outreach, Bow Valley has been intent on planting new communities of believers that don't look like carbon copies of each other and are therefore



better able to meet the needs of different people. So far, Bow Valley has launched two unconventional churches: Xalt, which seeks to serve the unique needs of people from Generation X, and Connections Christian Church, which is a cluster of house churches, more suited to people who prefer the informality and even greater intimacy of a smaller church. Bow Valley is also partnering with other churches in Calgary to plant Journey Christian Church in the southeast, one of the city's largest growing areas.

Still seeking to effectively meet the needs of our changing community, Bow Valley has concentrated on reaching Calgary's large immigrant population, most of whom speak English as a second language. Bow Valley has focused on providing programs to help them learn English and become integrated into the church community. Simultaneous translation services and Conversation Club (designed to help immigrants learn English) are a few examples. One immigrant family from South America describes their experience at Bow Valley: "We found friendship to be an important part of the church. People made a lot of effort to help us learn English. They gave us household items and sponsored our kids to go to

camp. We feel very blessed. When you come from a different country, it feels very special when people care about how you are doing. This is the way to encourage people to become Christians."

In 2003, with the goal of reaching the large Chinese community in the city's

northwest, Bow Valley merged with a small congregation of Cantonese, Mandarin and English-speaking Chinese. In addition to ministering to immigrants, outreach programs include Neighbour Link, Inn from the Cold, and the Pregnancy Care Centre.

However, the majority of

world outreach efforts involve supporting missions overseas through the training, evangelism, and translation efforts of many international missionaries.

Just like the early days, Bow Valley is fortunate to have an energetic young adult group, and a strong intergenerational mix, largely due to our continued connection with Alberta Bible College and other Christian colleges such as Alliance/Nazarene University College, and Rocky Mountain College. We continue to have a large, innovative children's ministry intent on reaching young people before their teens.



If you want to know where we're going,
look at where we've been...



In keeping with our Restoration roots, we seek to be an inclusive church with an open door for everyone who wants to be part of our community. And although we continue to grow, we still consider our church to be our family — not by relation, but by relationship with God and one another.

Like the church that Jesus established, we believe that as a community of believers we are all saints and we all play a part in building the Kingdom. Like Agnes Nelson, who did one small thing that touched generations, we encourage each member to use his or her gifts to minister to one another. Who knows what God may do?

As we continue on our mission to make more and better disciples, we pray for God's guidance as we look to the future with respect for the legacy we have been given: a focus on personal caring and relationship; a willingness to share the ever-relevant good news with our changing and diverse cultures; a multi-generational and multi-ethnic congregation focused on building the Kingdom of God.



BOW VALLEY
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

5300 – 53 Ave. NW Calgary, AB T3A 2G8

Tel: (403) 286-5300 E-mail: info@bowvalleychristianchurch.org

www.bowvalleychristianchurch.org