

## **A History of St Philip the Evangelist Church**

The first step toward the establishment of a new parish in the district of Elboya Heights was taken in 1952. At that time, the district was sparsely populated with only a few houses built and no roads or sidewalks – Elbow Drive was itself just a gravel road! The area of Elboya Heights was administered by the parish of Christ Church (until 1957). In the summer of 1952, several people, including Bishop Ragg, Canon Crump, Archdeacon Axon, and others, stood on the highest piece of land in the district and decided it should be the site for a new Church building. Three lots at the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> Street and 49<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW were purchased by the Diocese of Calgary – total price: \$1500!

The congregation of Christ Church, Elbow Park, was instrumental in the establishment of the parish of St. Philip the Evangelist. St. Philip's was originally conceived as a "mission" project of Christ Church. In 1954, 30 people from the district met and decided to proceed with plans for a church building. It was agreed that a hall was the immediate need as it would allow regular church services, youth groups and Sunday school to be held. Plans for the Church Hall were presented at Christ Church's annual meeting in January 1955. As a result, the parishioners donated \$15,000 to the new project and authorized the vestry to borrow \$10,000 as a first step towards the construction of the new Church Hall. The balance of the funds needed was to be raised by the people of the Elboya district. The cost for the building was estimated to be \$40,500, according to the tender submitted by the Walden Construction Company.

The Church Hall was ready for occupation in early 1956, and was dedicated by the Bishop of Calgary, the Rt. Rev. G.R. Calvert on February 5, 1956. Over 200 people attended the Dedication service. After this time, Reverend R.B. Crowder, assistant curate at Christ Church, was placed in charge of services at St. Philip the Evangelist. He would later describe the early years of the parish as a "pioneering experience".

During 1957, Christ Church continued their venture of parish extension by assuming full financial responsibility for the new parish until December 31, 1957. This gracious act gave the fledgling parish time to organize, appoint wardens and vestry, and to carry out a financial campaign. Fund-raising efforts were a resounding success – 125 families out of a possible 150 pledged \$12,500. In fact, on one Sunday, over \$12,000 was pledged within a 2.5 hour period! In a final act of generosity, the parish of Christ Church assumed responsibility for the remaining \$10,000 that was owed to the Diocese for the new hall. By the time that St. Philip's hall was built and furnished, the congregation of Christ Church had contributed more than \$32,000.

Parishioners would continue to worship in the hall for 5 years. Between 1959 and 1960, plans were drawn up for the main Church building. Again, the Walden Construction Company was contracted for the job. The Sod Turning ceremony was held on July 12, 1960, almost five years to the day since the sod-turning for the hall. The cost for the Church was \$95,000. By this

time, over 200 families attended St. Philip the Evangelist, coming mainly from the surrounding districts of Upper and Lower Elboya, Britannia, Stanley Park, Windsor Park, Meadowlark Park, and Mayfair. St. Philip's had made the transition from a "mission" of Christ Church to a self-supporting parish.

The design of the new church featured a high peaked roof, giving the illusion of steeple and roof combined. The nave windows were glazed with cathedral glass. The church was able to seat 250 people in the main area, with the provision of 50 additional seats in the balcony. As well, the choir stalls were able to accommodate 30 choristers.

The service of Dedication for St. Philip the Evangelist was held on Passion Sunday, March 19, 1961. The Bishop of Calgary, the Right Reverend G.R. Calvert opened the service by ceremonially standing outside the entrance and knocking three times on the closed door. The door was then opened from within, and upon entering the Church and saying a brief prayer, the Bishop was presented with the keys of the Church. He then proceeded to bless and dedicate the building. Over 300 people attended the service. It is interesting that the pamphlet of the dedication service includes an insert requesting funds for pews. Apparently, the Church only had enough money to purchase 13 pews (out of 30), and asked for anyone interested in donating towards the pews to contact Reverend Crowder.

The year 1983 was a banner year for St. Philip the Evangelist. The balance of the mortgage on the Church building was paid to the Diocese and the mortgage papers were "burned" during a Morning Prayer service in October. A week later, on October 30, St. Philip's held a Consecration service conducted by Bishop Barry Curtis. During the service, the Bishop used his staff to trace the sign of the Cross upon the floor, together with the Alpha and Omega, and said, "I claim this place for Christ crucified, who is the first and the last, and the Lord of all". Parishioners celebrated the consecration of the Church with a buffet lunch following the service.

## **Amalgamation of St Philip's and St Mark's Churches (2006)**

St. Philip's continued to evolve as a parish over time. However, as Reverend Graham Goode noted at the Annual General Meeting in 2006, the maturity of the Church was accompanied by declining attendance and finances. In 2004, the parish undertook a Discernment process to determine its future. It also pursued a "cluster" arrangement with four other churches in 2005. A Task Force from St. Philip's was created and by early 2006, was in active discussions with their counterparts at St. Mark's Anglican Church, Marda Loop. St. Mark's, which had also experienced decreases in membership, church attendance, and financial revenues, was receptive to negotiation. The dialogue between the representatives of both churches was "lively and frank" and the committees found a lot of common ground. A draft proposal for a potential partnership was given to all parishioners in February 2006. The committee recommended that the Church building and property of St. Philip the Evangelist be sold, and that a new partnership ministry be established on the St. Mark's site. St. Mark's, with its larger facility and high-visibility locale, was the logical choice for a combined parish home. The Church property of St. Philip the Evangelist was subsequently sold in November 2006 to Living Spirit United Church.

The congregations of St. Mark's and St. Philip's met separately for information sessions during the month of March 2006. There was a joint worship and information meeting for both parishes on Sunday, April 30, at St. Philip's. The congregations voted affirmatively to form a new partnership ministry, located at St. Mark's, on May 7, 2006. Rev. Bob Bettson, rector of St. Mark's, said, "In the past, some church mergers have been arranged from above and they haven't always been successful. But this was very much coming from the grassroots". Each congregation voted to "disestablish" their parish at their respective Annual General Meetings, and voted to "establish" the new Anglican parish.

The final service at St. Philip's was held on May 28, 2006. It was a time of mixed emotions. 2006 marked the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Church, so the order of service included the Old Testament reading from the Dedication service of 1961 and the Epistle and Gospel lessons that were read at the service of Consecration in 1983. Rick Merryfield, long-time parishioner and leader of St. Philip's Praise team said of the service, "The atmosphere was amazing. There were tears, of course, but there was also a feeling of a new start, that it was time to move ahead".

The two congregations began worshipping together at the St. Mark's site on June 4, the Feast of Pentecost. To celebrate the occasion, pink flamingos decorated the lawn of the church. As a temporary measure, it was decided that the new parish would retain both names – thus, be called the Anglican Parish of St. Mark & St. Philip. This name was confirmed early in 2007 by Bishop Derek Hoskin.

Rectors at St. Philip the Evangelist:

Rev. R.B. Crowder: 1956-1965

Rev. C.A. McMullen: 1965-1969

Rev. J.R. Flagler: 1969-1986

Rev. Tom Carman: 1986-1993

Rev. G. Goode: 1993-2006

Sources:

**St Philip the Evangelist: A Short History of the Parish from 1952 – 1961**

**Calgary Herald, World of Religion page, March 18, 1961**

**The Sower, March 1977**

**The Sower, November 1983**

**The Sower, June 2006**

**Calgary Herald, Religion Page, December 23, 2006**

**Thanks especially to Audree Wilson for her collection of historical documents pertaining to St. Philip's**