

**“Memory and Hope” Rideau Park United Church, Ottawa ON
Anniversary Sunday October 30, 2022 Rev Steve Clifton**



My father-in-law grew up in the city of Ottawa. He shared with me once the memory of driving up to what is now Alta Vista with his cousin after they had returned from the Second World War. His cousin lived up this way in the country outside the city limits. This area in the mid 1940s was rural. Forest and pasture. And the roads you drove to get here were narrow dirt roads. Where we are now was beyond the darkness on the edge of town.



**Spring time
in the new suburb
1957**

When the first houses were built in this new suburb of Ottawa, it was still outside the city proper. Audrey Henry, who was an early resident of this area and an early member of this church, spoke of the view from her kitchen window in the early years of this neighborhood. Washing dishes, she looked out at cows grazing.

In the 40s this area was thoroughly rural. Then houses were built. Then a church was dreamed of... On March 15, 1951, a group of 5 met at the home of Warren Jeffrey to consider establishing a church in this brand-new growing suburb.



A larger meeting was held 6 weeks later at Alta Vista school and a delegation was formed to appeal to the United Church through the Ottawa Presbytery for permission to form a congregation.

In September of 1951, the new faith community began to meet for worship in the Alta Vista School. As 1951 ended church members numbered 110, the Sunday School had 200 children with 17 teachers, the Women's Association had 7 circles meeting. There was a men's group of 46.

RIDEAU PARK ACTIVITIES CARRY ON



FAITH

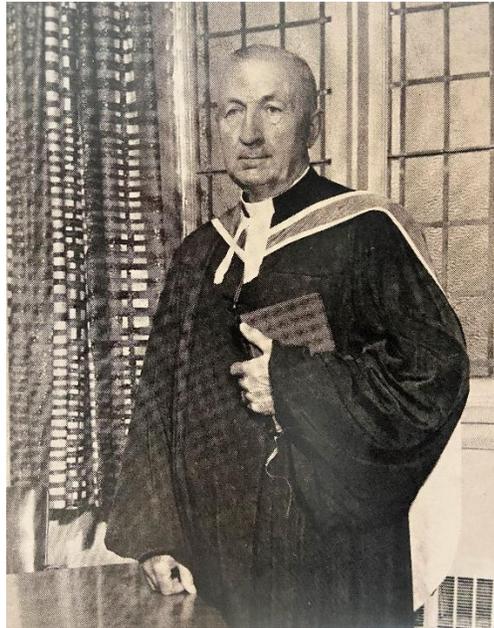
PRAYER

SACRIFICE

On January 21, 1952, the first congregational meeting was held, with 100 people attending. The committees and structures of the nascent congregation were organized, and our congregation's name was chosen- we would be Rideau Park United Church.

Initially a group of worship leaders rotated week by week to make services at Alta Vista School possible on Sunday mornings. On May 18, 1952, Rideau Park called its first minister, Rev Dr WA Beecroft.

As 1952 came to a close, the new Rideau Park had 203 members. The church had expenses in 1952 of \$4792. It raised \$8739 for a healthy surplus of almost \$4000.



In April of 1953, Dr Beecroft- (yes, our Church Hall is named after him)- he arrived and began to serve the fledgling church. Also in April of 1953, the Sunday School collected 15 tons of wastepaper towards fundraising for a new church.

In the 1953 Annual report Rev Beecroft wrote of the need for a building, expressed gratitude for the hospitality shown by the Alta Vista School and wrote these words: “Now we have set our hands to the task of building a place of worship...Does anyone doubt that our investment will come back to us in rich spiritual gain.... Our hope is in God.”

A building drive was started with a door- to - door, in home visitation program; 110,000 dollars were pledged over 3 years by 317 members.

Some wanted a Christian Education wing to be built first but as most wanted the sanctuary was prioritized with a teaching area being built that would be expanded in a few years, when finances permitted. A Hall was also dreamed of at some future date,

Other churches were visited to get ideas for the new worship space, architects were consulted, builders approached. At the congregational meeting of 1954 church membership stood at 308. With the post war baby boom underway, there were 426 children enrolled in Sunday school with 41 teachers and a choir of 29.



On Sunday July 11, 1954, the sod was turned, and construction began. On Oct 31, 1954, 68 years tomorrow, the corner stone for the new church was officially laid.



Which brings us to September 11, 1955, when this sanctuary that we meet in today was used for worship for the first time. The day before, on September 10, 1955, the Ottawa Citizen reported that “the big and growing congregation moves from Alta Vista Public School where its worship has been conducted while the church was built... Almost 500 families (with 700 children) in the fast-growing Rideau Park area are now supporting the church...”

On Sunday September 11, 1955, a congregation gathered for worship here for the first time. The hymns for the big day were number 21 in the old Blue Hymn Book *O Worship the King*, #46 *All Hail the Power of Jesus Name*, and #199 *We love the Place O God*. Luke 4:14-22, 2 Chronicles 6:7-21 were the Scripture readings shared, the same ones that Karen read this morning.

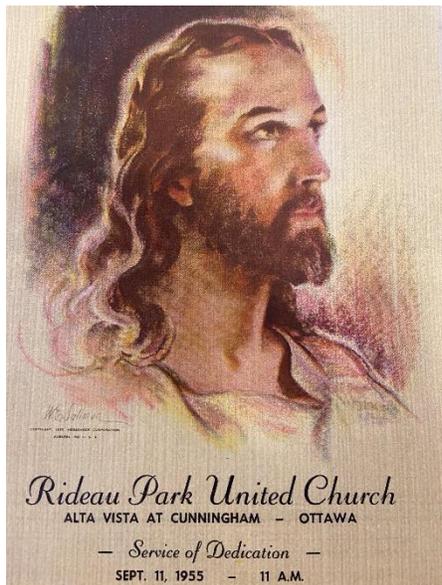
The Prayer of Dedication for this place of worship where we gather, I was as follows, we can pray anew today...

Gracious God we pray for thy favour as for the first time we enter this place of worship. In Thy honor we have built this sanctuary.

May every part of it be and remain holy to the Lord...the spacious nave, the quiet chapel, the pulpit and the sacred book, the instrument of music and the place of the singers, the table of remembrance, the font of baptism and the rooms for the children.

Make this thy dwelling place. Adorn and sanctify this house with Thy presence. Out of our deep concern for the sanctities of our religion we have planned and worked together, we have brought our offerings, so this Rideau Park United Church has come into being and today our hearts are glad and grateful.

Our dream has been realized. Our faith has been vindicated. Now let Thy blessing fall. Let thy blessing fall upon this house. Let thy blessing fall upon this people. May the benediction of thy peace abide forever in this holy place. Amen



Bulletin announcements for a few weeks later – October 23, 1955, show a congregation at home in this new space; the announcements sounded very contemporary and familiar. They included an appeal for teachers for the teen girls' class and a notice for the first Bazaar to be

held in the new church, on Oct 29, 1955, with tearoom tickets available from Women`s Association members.

The new sanctuary drew people to this place. By the end of 1955, the church roll had expanded to 623 members.

Make this thy dwelling place, prayed the first congregation gathered here in this sanctuary. They prayed that this space would be a place of blessing.



This space where we gather today was to be a place of holy encounter. This is a place of holy moments as baptisms and weddings have been celebrated... This is a place where we have gathered to say goodbye to people we have loved. Here we may have experienced welcome from a kind person or experienced the friendships of Christian community.

Maybe entering this place, we remember people who used to share these pews with us on Sunday.

In prayer, in song, in our seniors, in our young people, in newcomers, in familiar faces, in times of joy or in times of loss maybe here we have encountered God, been brushed by the sacred, caught a glimpse of the Holy, here in this hallowed space.... *Let thy blessing fall upon this house., they prayed.*

On September 11, 1955, the first worship service was held in this place, this sanctuary that we share. That is a little more than 67 years ago... almost 3500 Sunday mornings...more than 5000 Sunday services. We have encountered generations of special people here.

We have sung maybe 15,000 hymns here. We have listened to about 80000 minutes / 1300 hours of sermons. (maybe it seems longer.)

We couldn't be in this space for a long time due to Covid. For some the first time back in the sanctuary is quite impactful. This is a sacred space.

So here is an invitation. Take a moment in the next few days to sit quietly and to remember. Whether you have been here in this space for 60 years or for 30 minutes, take a few minutes to prayerfully remember your time in this sanctuary. What holy moment or moments come to mind? What memories or feelings bubble up for you? What people do you remember? What event stays with you? When in this space did you feel something, see something, experience something... different, special, sacred, holy ...

With those who have gone before us we pray as they did: Let thy blessing fall upon this house. Let thy blessing fall upon this people. May the benediction of thy peace abide forever in this holy place.

Amen