

# A History of St. Barnabas' Church

## Chapter I: The Roxboro Protestant Community Church by Rosemary Bauchman, July, 1972

*Grateful acknowledgments to Mrs. C. Howes, Mr. T. Amberley, Mrs. O. Skare who supplied much of the detail used in this section.*



“How does a church begin?”

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Those of us who grew up in established communities, where the church was often the oldest building in the locality, have probably given little thought to this question, perhaps assuming that some vague ‘they’ – the Diocese, the Archbishop, or heavenly direction – see to it that a church is automatically provided when the need arises.

Not necessarily so.

A church begins in the hearts of people.

The only church building in the neighbourhood was a small wooden chapel for those of the Roman Catholic faith. It stood on what is now a shopping centre

In the early nineteen-fifties the Montreal Island area known as Roxboro, which consisted of summer homes and a few scattered farms, was caught up in the post-war real estate development boom. Lots offered for sale in the vicinity of Gouin Boulevard were purchased by would-be home owners, mostly young couples, who were prepared to work on the building of their own homes and dig wells for drinking water. A new community began to take shape.

parking lot opposite the present R.C. Mary Queen of Peace Church [ft–now in Roxboro-Pierrefonds Train Station parking lot]. Protestants of all faiths were obliged to

journey into the city (along Gouin Boulevard, there was no Trans-Canada Highway then) to attend services there. Most Anglicans went to the Church of the Good Shepherd in Cartierville. This posed difficulties for families with young children who needed a nearby church for baptism, Sunday School, a full opportunity to participate in the many facets of the life of an active parish unhampered by transportation complications.

During the 1953 Christmas season, Mrs. J. Curwood and Mrs. A. White, with about eight children, went carol-singing. They collected five dollars. This five dollars was the first money earmarked for a church in Roxboro. This was the beginning.....

The dream of a church in the new community continued to engage the thoughts of these women. Next summer, attending a garden tea, they fell to discussing it with Mrs. C. Howes and Mrs. O. Skare who were also very interested in such a project. Interested enough to take action; they formed a committee and set about taking a census. Canvassing the new streets, they went from door to door, asking—

“Are you Protestants?”  
“Are you interested in having a church?”

Sixty-eight families made a positive response, and the next step was to call a meeting. An Armistice Service was held in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Clifford Howes, 76–8th Avenue. It was conducted by Mr. While the actual building had not even reached the blueprint stage, an active congregation sprang into being. For several months the services were held in private homes, but as numbers swelled, it became

A.G. James of the Salvation Army. Between forty and sixty people crowded the house for this service and the meeting following. Three Ladies' Guild groups were formed with the common objective of raising money with which to build a church. In response to an appeal broadcast by two local radio stations, an organ was donated by Mrs. Wells of Beaufort, other gifts in those days included stationery and chair. All the women had 'penny bags' to save all the coppers that came their way.

A wonderful ecumenical spirit blossomed; Anglicans, Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Salvation Army and United Church members met on November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1954, to formulate plans for a common place of worship in the only building large enough to hold them all – the Roman Catholic Church.

That night, a Board of Trustees was appointed with Mr. Clifford Howes as President. The first task of the board was to draw up a religious charter and submit it to the Provincial Government for approval. (This was granted in 1955.) Meantime, a vigorous campaign to raise money for the building of the Roxboro Protestant Community Church was launched, an objective that took a leap forward in January 1955 with the gift of a plot of land on the corner of 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Gouin Boulevard by Mr. Roland Bigras, the Mayor of Roxboro.

necessary to find a larger meeting place. The Roman Catholic School Board offered the use of the assembly room in their new Lalande School, free of charge, the only cost being janitor fees. Dr. Douglas Wilson

conducted the first service there in March, 1955. School-aged children met for Sunday School classes at the home of Mr. and Mrs. James. In February, 1956, classes were started for those of kindergarten and nursery age, enabling a lot of young parents to attend the morning services. A choir was organized by Mr. K. Vander Baaren and directed by organist Mrs. C. (Betty) Howes.

1956 was an active and important year as the Building Fund Campaign, with \$30,000 as its objective, gathered momentum. When \$24,000 in cash and pledges had been received, the actual building started. The firm of De Belle and White, Architects, drew up the plans and in the spring the ground was broken. On Labour Day the cornerstone of the new church was laid and dedicated. Throughout that summer and fall, the men of the congregation laboured, digging the foundation, building forms, mixing and pouring concrete. A massive steel girder was manhandled into place by twenty-five volunteers—they could not afford a crane. Many of those working on the church took time out from the building or finishing of their own homes to do so.

Meantime, the women were constantly engrossed in money-making projects, bake sales, garden parties, raffles and teas. It was in connection with fund-raising that a difference of opinion arose among the Trustees. Some objected to card-parties, raffles and dances as a means of financing a church, and one member of the Board resigned over this.

However, that summer the women borrowed a huge army tent to house a big bazaar and enlisted their husbands to erect it. When this was done there was general

consternation—the marquee was inside out!

Amid loud sighs and groans it was taken down, wrestled right side out and put up correctly. The women went on from that small set-back to hold a spectacular bazaar which received the support of the entire community. All those of Protestant faith, Catholics, Jews, came and gave generously. Linguistic and racial barriers were of no account and the tally at the end of the day offered heart-warming evidence of what can be done when people forget their differences and work together for the common good.

On Christmas Eve, 1956, these efforts were all rewarded and crowned when the first service was held in the basement of the new church. Cliff Howes and Tom Amberley mounted ladders to support the uncertain door-frame as the people arrived, carrying their own chairs along slushy roads in freezing rain. The joyful Christmas hymns were sung with a special zest by the congregation in the basement while the organist accompanying them in the shell of the new building above was protected from drips coming through the roof by two men holding umbrellas over her head.

The Reverend Roland Bodger officiated at the Holy Communion service in the Community Church that Christmas Eve. He was assisted by a young student minister, the Reverend Reginald Hollis. [ft—student minister?]

The original sixty-eight families had increased to one hundred and fifty by the end of 1956; this growing trend was to continue steadily for a number of years as the area was further developed.

1957 saw a continuation of the work of finishing and furnishing the inside of the church. Pews, chairs and other furniture and equipment were purchased or donated. The pulpit and lectern were made by hand by a member of the congregation, Mr. Eric Benstead. All installations and labour were done by the men of the community who brought their individual talents and specialized knowledge to this work of love.

Four different denominations used the Community Church, week by week about, with visiting ministers officiating. They were Anglicans, Presbyterians, Salvation Army and United Church. On one occasion, at least, the opportunity arose to reciprocate the kindness of the Roman Catholics when they wished to use the Community Church for a special Christmas Eve service.

Naturally, the new church had its quota of minor emergencies and problems. It was built beside the railway crossing, and every Sunday morning, just as the preacher was well launched into his sermon, a deafening blare as the 11:42 train passed through prompted an involuntary checking of watches by the congregation, and compelled him to halt his discourse until the noise receded.

The organ pump had been powered by a vacuum cleaner motor and during one service this motor caught fire. As the smoke issued forth, the choir continued singing and the organist hastily transferred. About this time, a newly formed Girl Guide Company and a Brownie Pack were given permission to use the Hall free of charge. Requests began to pour in from other groups including a recreation club, the Canadian Legion, the Salvation Army (who

to the nearby piano while the wardens and sidesmen extinguished the conflagration!

The first summer a plague of flies broke out in the Community Church. (It was later established that flies wintering in the insulation had left behind vast quantities of eggs which hatched with the warm weather.) Spraying seemed to be the obvious way of dealing with this, but on the first occasion this was done, the delayed action effect was as disturbing as the original nuisance. Dead and dying flies fell like rain, scrunching beneath the feet of the congregation and making it necessary for the celebrant to cover the Chalice with his hand between communicants. Each succeeding summer brought new waves of flies to annoy and distract the church-goers, so a general air of relief was evident every fall when the cooler days brought a respite.

The Board of Trustees held regular monthly meetings at which the progress of the construction and the raising of funds to pay for each new stage were topics of prime importance. In February, 1957, a vote favoured paying the guest minister ten dollars for his services. The trustees took it in turn to provide transportation for him. On one occasion, choir and congregation were in their places waiting for the service to begin, but no minister appeared. Suddenly, an embarrassed trustee realised—“Good Heavens! It was my turn to pick up the minister!”

were building their own meeting place) and a ballet class who were all eager to obtain the use of the Hall for their meetings, it being such a central location. No charge was made to anyone at this time, but organizations were told that a donation to

the Building Fund would be appreciated. It was not until December of 1958 that a regular rental charge of five dollars was levied to help defray the overhead costs. In February, 1959, this was raised to ten dollars, or fifteen per cent of the proceeds from any profit-making event. (Guide and Brownie packs were exempt from these charges.)

Meantime, the installation of plumbing and water and sewer connections continued throughout 1957. The first annual Sunday School picnic was held this year at Cap St. Jacques.

By January 1958, the large number of children attending Sunday School was posing a space problem which was temporarily handled by dividing the classes, having half the children report at ten a.m. and the balance at eleven o'clock. In March, the Board authorized an expenditure of up to twenty-five dollars per month for Sunday School supplies and operating costs.

The local Boy Scouts held a Church Parade in February, 1958 another first event for the Community Church.

Later that spring, Saturday afternoon movie shows were put on in the Hall Card parties and Teen Dances were also held there occasionally.

Financing continued to be an ever-present headache, especially after the United Church members, who had grown in numbers with the expanding of the area, left to form their own church, although any financial interest they held in the Community Church was left to the

remaining members with their blessing. Their support was missed.

A new fund-raising campaign was conducted in 1958 as much urgent work was still uncompleted. A contractor had been engaged to do the stone work and a debt of \$3,715 was incurred for this.

Magnificent support was always provided by the untiring Ladies' Guild who had donated two thousand dollars by the end of 1958. However, it became necessary to take out a bank loan for three thousand dollars which was offset against the amount owed to the contractor. Together with the mortgage of seven thousand dollars the church now had a total indebtedness of ten thousand dollars.

By this time, the building was being shared by Presbyterians and Anglicans, with a preponderance of the latter. Weekly contributions began to decline, especially in the summer when sometimes the collection was not sufficient to pay the visiting minister. It became apparent that the operation of the church under the prevailing system was no longer practical. Accordingly, in the fall of 1959, the Board of Trustees circulated a letter and questionnaire to all the church members in an attempt to ascertain the reaction towards affiliation with one or other denomination. It seemed obvious that the Community Church could no longer function as such. The resulting vote was twenty-six to five in favour of joining the Anglican Communion, so in November, 1959, the Roxboro Protestant Community Church passed into history.

It passed into history, but the efforts of a succession of dedicated man and women live on. From this modest beginning sprang many churches now flourishing in the surrounding area; the Westminster Presbyterian Church, Roxboro United, the Salvation Army Hall, the First Reformed Church...all owe their origin to the inspired work of a small band of people willing to forget their differences in their desire to build a place of worship dedicated to the glory of God.

A church begins in the hearts of people.”