

Three Churches Close, Trinity United Opens with New Hope



A Dedication Service was held at the new Trinity United Church on Jan. 3rd. with members from each of the former Churches taking part in the opening program. From left to right: Harriet McWhirter (Wesly/Belmont) -carrying the Cross; Grace Fiddes carrying the Communion Set (Lower Onslow); Evelyn MacLean (Wesley/Belmont) carrying the Offering Plates, Tom Buchanan (Onslow) carrying the Canadian Flag; Fran Fiddes (Lr. Onslow) carrying the Hymn Books; Piper- Thomas Harrington; Rose Selwynsmith (Wesley/Belmont) carrying the Bible; Eric Lynds (Onslow) carying the Christ Candle. Three Magi were the Chairpersons of each congregation: Frank Hoyt (Onslow), Carl Crowe (hidden from view) (Wesley/Belmont) and also Chairperson of Admin Group representing the Pastoral Charge, and Doug Anthony (Lower Onslow). The other Church Flag was carried by Ross Higgins (Onslow).

By Linda Harrington

The end of 2009 came with mixed emotions for the congregations of Wesley United (Belmont), Lower Onslow United and Onslow United. All three Churches were formally closed with



Jamie Stewart performed a saxophone solo, as the offering was collected, during the Dedication Service at Trinity United Church, Central Onslow. (Harrinton Photo)

worship services of decommissioning held on three successive evenings, in each of the Churches, beginning on Dec. 27th. There was an opportunity to remember the history of each congregation and bring some closure. Rev. Gerry Kerr preached about good news of the future while acknowledging the pain and loss that closing a Church would bring.

The decision to close three Churches and open a new one was an involved process. A Visionary Committee was formed three years ago, with their focus on looking to the future and how the Church could survive. It had become increasing clear that not only were finances a growing challenge but finding individuals to serve on so many small committees was harder to do as well. Three people were needed for each position across the charge and this number of volunteers was just not available.

Once the decision was

made to only have one Church on the charge, the Churches were looked at individually as to their size, access and need for repairs. Two Churches needed very expensive repairs in the short term. Onslow United was in the best shape and was large enough to accommodate a larger congregation. Motions were made, and votes taken, to affirm the agreement to make the Onslow site the future location for the new Church.

The three congregations made suggestions for the Church's new name and a vote was taken by secret ballot, which were counted by Fay Smith and Rev. Ian Harrison of Truro Presbytery at a congregational meeting. The result was not well received by many people. "Everyone hoped for a name that would signal a new beginning and representative of all three Church communities," says Rev. Kerr. "So presbytery asked us to revisit the choice and consider whether

we could live over the long term with the first choice."

The congregations met again and found a name that would identify the former three Churches as inclusive of everyone. The choice became Trinity United, which had been the second most popular in the voting. "I know there are those who would be unhappy with the result but in the long run I am hopeful that Trinity United will serve our new congregation for generations to come," says Rev. Kerr.

The move from three Churches into one brings changes in the running of the Church. Trinity United has merged the three Sessions into one, as well as the Board of Stewards and Trustees. The committees which have been charge wide will remain unchanged. Other changes will happen more gradually over the next year with the hopes of taking the work load off those who now have more than one role.

The Trustees of each congregation still have the responsibility of maintaining the Church buildings. The Board of Trustees of Trinity United, along with Truro Presbytery, will attend to final disposition of the two surplus buildings. The decommissioning services declared them to no longer be places of worship but the buildings are available for other uses in the community. A community group in Lower Onslow is hoping to take over ownership of the Church building, while the Trustees in Belmont are still looking at options.

The Dedication Service for the new Trinity United was held in Central Onslow on Jan. 3rd, 2010. The service was a celebration of the future and a joining of the three congregations. Principal items from each Church had been removed at the Decommission Services, in a symbolic way, and they were brought back into the Dedication Service of Trinity United. These items included

an altar cross, Holy Bible, Christ Candle, hymn books, Church flags, communion set and a memory scrapbook. Larger items brought from Lr. Onslow and Wesley United included an organ and keyboard, pew cushions, baptismal font and wall hangings.

Rev. Kerr referred to the Trinity United Congregation as a new "blended family". "We have been together now for three Sundays and there is a good feeling expressed that folks feel at home in our new space", says Rev. Kerr. "We have tried hard to put the onus on everyone to reach out and extend hospitality to one another." He says he is encouraged at how supportive people have been, even the good wishes and congratulations from sister Churches in the community. We will never be a mega-church but as a rural church we can be a welcoming place of sanctuary for those who want community and an opportunity to be appreciated and loved."

There is a feeling of excitement and enthusiasm radiating from Rev. Gerry Kerr as he talks about the future for Trinity United and its people. He says, "It would be sad to slip back into a mindset of survival and maintenance when we can be about much more that involves faithful witnessing and thriving ministry that celebrates the essential goodness of people. This is the season of Epiphany and so we imagine seeing God through the face of Jesus and each other. I think our opportunities are as endless as our imagination is of what God is calling us to do in this time and place."

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Rev. Gerry Kerr poses with Faye Smith, Representing Truro Presbytery, in front of the newly installed Trinty United Church sign. (Harrington Photo)



Three former organists included Reta Nelson (Onslow United), Ann Fiddes (Lr. Onslow United) and Dawn Stevens (Weslyan United). They are joining Rev. Gerry Kerr. (Harrington Photo)



Rev. Gerry Kerr poses with Jean King and Sophia Lynds. Jean is one of the eldest members of Trinty United Church and Sophia one of the youngest members of the newly formed Church. Jean says she has been attending Church at Onslow for 72 years. (Harrington Photo)

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