

The Story of Holyrood Mennonite Church – Part 1: Early History, 1956 to 1996

We are blessed to benefit from our elders who are generous with advice and lessons from life and history. The saying “In Africa, when an old person dies, a library burns down” is relevant to us as well. From the files of Millie Glick, and the recollections of Ike, we have recreated a timeline of the history of the Holyrood Mennonite Church, from its early beginnings as a house church to the inter-cultural congregation it is today.

1. First Mennonite families (1940s and early 1950s)

- Two families and a single young woman were the first to leave the security of their close-knit rural Mennonite communities for the unknown of big city life. They were joined by two other families in 1949.
- In September of 1950, the four families held their first bible study and prayer meeting
- By the mid-1950s it became more acceptable for young Mennonites to attend university, and the group started to look for a more permanent home to take the place of the rotational meetings held in each others' homes.
- Regular church services started in 1956 after the King family offered their new home's large basement. From there, the group started searching for a church building.



2. Building of the church (1955 to 1957)

- In November of 1955, a building committee was struck. It had three members: One from the mission board, one from the Northwest Conference board, and one member from the Edmonton Mennonite Fellowship group.

- By October 1956 the Holyrood site had been found and an invitation was sent to the Mennonite communities for a sod-breaking ceremony. A construction shed was built, the foundation was poured, and the front steps were formed. The site was located in a new Edmonton district and had no trees. Volunteer help for the church building project came from throughout the surrounding Mennonite communities.
3. Dedication of the church
- On June 23, 1957, the building was sufficiently advanced that the new Church could be dedicated. The first meeting was held even though the interior was not quite finished. The inspiring sermon topic was "Looking Backward, Forward and Upward". Three testimonials were giving with the theme "My Church and I": *"Benefits I have received from my church"*. *"What I owe my church"*, *"What I expect of my church"*. It took courage and faith to carry the cost of the \$30,000 project for the new Mennonite Fellowship Centre.



- At the first morning service in the new sanctuary, lunch was served for 175 people to celebrate the dedication, and the small Mennonite Fellowship congregation settled down to the business of building the church.
- The Mission Board provided a strong root for the church. A Call to Action by Ike Glick in 1961 noted the daily baiting through newspapers, radio, magazines, television to spend time and money for things we do not need; the new prosperity of city life was out of proportion to most of the world.
- The Alberta Mennonite University Students (AMUS) formed an association for social events.

- The first pastor couple was Howard and Marie Snider, who served two years living in small quarters behind the pulpit, from '57-'59 (today's Nursery).



- The second pastor couple were Ike and Millie Glick who agreed reluctantly (after a third request by Conference) for a maximum of two years or less if a replacement could be found. They were deeply involved with helping several northern Indigenous communities getting their own schools, leading to the development of The Northland School Division.
- In 1964, the parsonage was completed as home for the third pastor's family.



4. 10-year celebration

- In 1968, the Holyrood fellowship became officially incorporated. Notable charter members were Pearl and Ben Lauber, and Carol Martin.
- This was followed by Holyrood becoming a full member of the Northwest Conference.
- In 1972, the congregation was led by the team ministry of 5 members: Ike Glick and David Lefever among them. Volunteer pastors and support teams served without financial compensation.
- By 1975, the old place was just too small! Committees were struck, dinner meetings were held for the congregation, and consensus was reached to add onto the original building. Once again, the sound of construction echoed on the corner of 79 and 95 Avenue.
- Once again, a foundation was poured: *If your help comes from on high, how can your foundation fail?*
- Ed Good became the project manager. Talking and planning must be done and, if the job is to be completed, all must be supportive of each others' efforts and do their part to provide unity. Every church needs a few strong supportive members – usually they do their job with little fanfare, often out-of-sight. Without this type of member, church programs would be difficult to maintain.
- In the 1970s, the church community was in transit. Raising children in Edmonton presented new challenges. Homes were scattered throughout the region as new neighborhoods were established. Children attended different schools and had church social interactions only on the weekend. Family and church life was first nurtured here in Holyrood, and the youth of the 70's – now adults – while scattered throughout North America, were contributing their share to the well-being of society.
- In 1979, Holyrood started sharing the building with the Chilean Spanish Church Iglesia Hispana, and the office wing with the Northwest Conference.
- Pastor Jorge Vallejo was serving the Spanish Church, and Roger Hochstetler became the first salaried pastor, changing the structure of the volunteer team ministries.
- By 1978, at the 20-year anniversary celebration, we had built a building for the second time, but this is not the end of the story: *Our task is to continue building the church – Praise the Lord.* (Don Kauffman, 1978)
- The InterMennonite Ministerium that was formed for mutual support led to shared Passion Week Services, Festivals of Faith, and numerous shared Ministries. Separate Conference distinctions faded away as we became involved together in our common calling. Examples of joint projects were Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Ten Thousand Village Crafts, YOU, The Welcome Home Community, and Recycling, later adopted by the City of Edmonton.
- Holyrood's symbol, the Dove and Flame was carved by Ike Glick in 1977, on the plaque base provided by Paul White.

5. Baby boom years in the 1980s

- The 1980s were the baby boom years for the congregation. Nine babies were born in 1989: Seth and Melissa Wideman, Debra Earl, Allison Taniguchi, Trevor Steckly, Evan Ropp, Heidi Clemmer, Kristen White, Andrea Lint.
- Holyrood's famous Sunday puppets got started when "Earnest Sam" became the first puppet to teach the children's story.



- The Holyrood Hornets ball team in 1990.
- Ed Good at the mortgage-burning celebration in 1996.



6. Church membership in the first four decades (taken from directories)
- In 1978, the church listed 61 member families and singles.
 - In 1990, the congregation had dropped to 40 member families, reflecting a dire economic situation in Alberta.



- Pastors, from 1956-1996: Paul Voegtlin, Ike Glick, George Varghese, Merlin Staffer, Roger Hochstetler, Ray Landis, Jean-Jacques Goulet.
- In 1998, an active youth group and intergenerational congregation of 150 to 175 attendees included families transferring from Faith Mennonite Church (1980-1996).
- The 1999 directory lists 108 member families and singles.

NEXT: PART 2

The Story of the Holyrood Mennonite Church – Part 2: The next 25 years, 1996 to 2022

Do you have stories, memories, insights and photographs from your participation at HMC?

Please contribute to the church's archives.

