

A Brief History of Lake Windermere Alliance Church

With thanks to the many previous compilers of the history of this church

Part 1

The seeds of Lake Windermere Alliance Church were sown in the 1940's when Miss Craig from the Canadian Sunday School Mission held Sunday school in her home in Windermere. A group of five women also met regularly to pray and share what they had read in the Bible that week.

In 1954 Robert Kuglin, pastor at the Alliance Church in Golden began a weekly Bible study in Windermere with several local people. They held an evangelistic crusade in November and saw many saved. This led to a visit from the District Superintendent who officially organized the church and installed Mr. Kuglin as pastor of Lake Windermere Alliance Church. He noted that there was severe persecution and yet church growth, with people saved almost weekly.

Pastor John Ritchie followed Kuglins. He lived with his wife in a chicken coop and they held services at the Windermere Hall. Several lay pastors including Henry Block, Red Walker and Harry Walmsly followed pastor Ritchie, holding Sunday School on Sunday mornings and church services in the evening. In 1956, the first missionary speaker, Lila Inglis from Guadeloupe shared with the congregation.

Services were held in rented space like Pynelogs. In 1957 the church lot was purchased for \$300 and construction began, utilizing a loan of \$6000 from the Alliance office in Nyack, New York.

Pastor Robert Gould arrived in the spring of 1960, discovering that several families had left and started a church in Canal Flats while the church had been without a pastor. The church at that time was meeting in the basement of the building that was still under construction, but on pause due to finances. Pastor Gould remained until 1962 and was followed by Ernest Neufeld.

Pastor Neufeld helped finish the church building and also built a house which later became the manse. Drivers picked up children around the valley on Sundays to bring them to Sunday school. Vacation Bible School also began in these years and carried on for decades. Evangelistic campaigns were held most years and Sunday evening services were considered evangelistic.

Pastor Neufeld was replaced by Winston Beers in 1965, who remained until 1966. Pastor Mel Dick along with his wife and four children arrived in 1966. They enlarged the manse, digging out

and then pouring a basement underneath the house. They were well known and liked in the community, and stayed until 1968. Despite the positive ministry, church attendance waned. On one particularly low Sunday the pastor had to ask two visitors to take the offering.

John Barach, noted as an excellent preacher/teacher followed the Dicks. But when he left in 1970, the church considered closing due to low numbers.

John and Eloise Bergen and their two sons arrived in 1970. Their youth, musical ability and outgoing nature gave the church a boost. Strong Christmas events and a good Sunday school brought many new attendees.

When the Bergens left in 1974, Jim and Linda Penner arrived and served until 1976. The church then went for nearly a year with no pastor. Then in 1976 James Pederson and family arrived. James was a hard worker and a good visitation pastor. Solid Bible studies, prayer times and more consistent ministries developed. But attendance was low and there were financial challenges.

Pastor Pederson left in 1980 and was followed by Craig Burns, who was doing his pre-missions home service, from September of 1980 until August of 1982 when he headed to Hong Kong. Ray Cobb served as an intern in 1982.

Part 2

Michael and Kathy Philips arrived in September 1982 and was the first pastor to serve more than four years. He held to a more openly charismatic theology than earlier pastors. In addition to a longer term pastorate, this season was marked by some significant developments and events:

- A large number of professions of faith- fifty or more some years- and many baptisms
- The first staff pastors, Ian Trigg (1984-86) and Ann Wilson (1986-87)
- Manse sold and new sanctuary built (Dedicated May 26, 1985)
- Sunshine Ranch Ministry, 1983-87, ministering to the long weekend party crowd south of town with prayer, first aid, witness
- Several short term missions trips and significant financial and relational support for C&MA missionaries
- In addition to the VBS and Sunday school, the church added a playschool using the church facilities. Most of the children were from non-church homes.
- Several words of prophecy related to the spiritual battle for Invermere (1987)
- Pioneer Clubs and Children's Church started
- The Alliance Women's ministry which engaged in outreach and encouragement of local women and support of Alliance missions got established
- Several reports of physical healings following anointing and prayer by the elders

Some interesting side notes:

- A 1987 report stated "Unlike past years, very few fell away from the Lord."

- The pastor's 1988 Annual Report (written in early 1989) noted many false rumours in the community about the church, an unusual number of people healed through the laying on of hands by the elders, and concluded with the phrase "A PEOPLE AT WAR".
- Despite the large reported numbers of conversions and baptisms, there were minimal increases in church attendance

Pastor Philips left later that year and was followed by Doug Chisholm. Significant growth in membership, a large numbers of professions of faith (26), a basement reno, the start of a community food bank (27 hampers first year), some strong missions conferences and an intern (Quentin Steen) moved the momentum of the previous decade into 1990. However Pastor Chisholm's ministry came to an end in 1991 due to an inappropriate relationship. Pastor Dallas and Donna Sylvester arrived in October of that year.

Dallas was joined by youth pastor and gifted musician Rick Richards who served until July 1992. The next several years are marked by steady, consistent ministry, including:

- More than 100 hampers provided each year by the Foodbank
- Steve Kirby serving as youth pastor from 1993-1996
- Solid attendance and growth in almost every ministry
- Many special events, both outreach and growth oriented
- Celebration of the church's 40th, the start of small groups and renovation of the fellowship room

In 1997 Pastor Sylvester went on a health leave and then resigned, finishing in mid-November.

Pastor Dieter Magnus arrived in early 1998. Jared Enns, assistant/youth pastor, and his wife Rebecca came in February 1999. Some ministry to First Nations was started and a 15 passenger van purchased. Lisa Rohrick was sent out as a missionary from the church.

The church experienced its highest average attendance of 177 in 2000. Several large purchases were made including a video projector (\$5k in '98), updated sound system (\$11k in '99), piano (\$8k in 2000) and photocopier (\$7k in '01). With a General Fund budget ranging from \$98-144,000, these were significant investments!

Despite a slow decline in Sunday attendance from its peak, the church grew in breadth of ministry like never before. Ministries as diverse as Sunday school, youth, men's, women's, missions, VBS, Pioneer Clubs, 50+ club, young adults, and the preschool all thrived in the early 2000's. Pastor Magnus describes the time as a "sweet spot" for the church. There were two long term, full time pastors who were involved in the community, a large number of committed members and volunteers from a wide age spectrum, lots of energy and mostly strong giving.

Some key events:

- Very large youth groups with many non-churched kids
- Very large (100+) ladies events and consistent men's Promise Keepers group
- A strong young adults ministry for several years
- Food bank becomes Columbia Valley Food Bank and moves out of the church
- Deaconess ministry started
- A reconciliation Sunday in 2002 to address residual issues surrounding pastor Chisholm's departure, as well as a related apology to the community through an ad in the paper
- Partnership with Snowboarders for Christ
- Purchase of the property north of the church in June 2004, with rezoning, renovation of the building for daycare and eventual licensing in 2007
- The 50th Anniversary Celebration in the fall of 2004

One of the patterns of LWAC is the large number of visitors. Pastor Magnus recalls one May long weekend where there was an attendance of 275- with only 100 of them being regular local attendees! Many locals also flowed through the church. At one point, leadership counted more than 400 people who used to be in the church and still lived in town.

Challenges in this season included tensions over music styles, foggiess regarding the vision and direction of the church, a wave of injuries, illness and moves, and a decreasing number of volunteers. The 2005 board chair's report stated "I have been a leader for a long time and I have never seen the leaders, pastors and many of the rest of the congregation more tired." In January 2007 Pastor Magnus resigned, with his last Sunday being March 4th.

At the February 2007 AGM, and in the days following, a simmering dissatisfaction with the leadership was expressed openly and in some cases harshly. Input was sought from the Alliance District office. A consultant was engaged to perform a Congregational Health & Conflict Assessment. One of the results was that the board of elders was disbanded and replaced with a Transitional Leadership Team. This was a season of significant conflict and confusion. There was widespread agreement that the initial process only seemed to compound the issues. Jared Enns was moved to the role of Interim Lead Pastor. A transitional pastor/coach, Gerry Teichrob was retained for the summer to begin the transition process while Jared was on vacation.

At the February 2008 Annual meeting, the Transitional Leadership Team was replaced with an elected elders board. The pastoral search committee had its first meeting April 21. Pastor Enns began a 3-month sabbatical on July 1. Trevor Hagan candidated in August and was called to be pastor starting in September. During the search process, and for some time following, there were many questions and concerns expressed about why Pastor Enns wasn't moved into the role of Lead Pastor and how his ministry conclusion at LWAC had been handled and communicated.

Pastor Hagan's first year saw things like a revamped membership covenant, a mission statement- "We want to shine for Jesus Christ by loving God, loving people, and making disciples in our community and the world"- the beginnings of a quest for vision and the drafting of some values.

There was strong giving to the Global Advance Fund, though at times the local budget was stretched. Despite a recognition of need for more youth ministry, there was not enough funding to hire more staff and volunteers were short. A young adults group began, serving up to fifteen. In 2011, there were two joint worship services at Kinsmen Beach and three Christmas Eve services, two of which were at Panorama.

2012 saw the retirement of the church debt, and the church ended the year in the black for the first time in five years. The broad ministry of a decade earlier mostly continued, though often with a shortage of workers. The decline in attendance that had started in 2001 continued, with the 2013 average attendance being 102, down 42% from its peak in 2000.

Sonshine continued to develop and the SCCOT team was formed to assist the manager. An elder-led care ministry began with a plan for elders to visit everyone in the church.

2014 brought two interns to LWAC, with Nathan Hildebrand coming for the summer, and Jordan Tjart, with his wife Alexis, coming for the fall. Each had a focus on youth, a group of 20-25 kids, mostly from non-church homes developed, and the desire to hire a youth pastor grew. A motion to proceed in that direction was made at the 2015 AGM, with an expectation that this would lead to church growth. In July of that year, Matt and Keara Moore came to the church, with Matt in the Associate/Youth Pastor role. Finances were tight, but in 2016 average attendance was back up to 124. A discussion of women elders which had started several years before led to a vote in December of 2016 with the motion to have women elders being carried 21-20. Pastor Hagan was given a 3-month sabbatical and the financial year end showed a small surplus.

Momentum carried into 2018. The "Love God > Love People > Make Disciples" mission process was articulated, the first female elder elected, several capital projects completed and there were strong finances. Sonshine had a strong year and began to hit its organizational stride.

In July of 2018, a District official met with the pastors to seek to resolve some building tension. Pastor Matt went on medical leave in July until September. In September, just prior to Matt's return, the board of elders asked Pastor Hagan to resign, which he did the following Sunday.

In consultation with the District, the board made a decision to enter a season of intentional transition rather than moving immediately to search for a new lead pastor. In January, 2019 Daren Wride began as an onsite part time transitional pastor.
