

The History of Scarborough Baptist Church

Introduction

Although we typically consider history as a chronological study of man's imprint on his surrounding landscape, in the context of a Christian perspective, we are inclined to appreciate the hand of our Lord as an instrument in fashioning that progression. As a consequence, the history of Scarborough Baptist Church is more correctly viewed as a divine evidence of Our Creator's desire to make His presence known within the southwest Scarborough community and beyond. In that regard, men and women serve as His earthly instruments.



6247 Kingston Road, west from Birchmount. (Way). Sep-10/28.
City of Toronto Archives, Series 10, 1007-10022

In 1928, the Kingston Road streetcar line was extended to its most eastern point, a loop at the southeast corner of Kingston Rd. and Birchmount Rd. With this connection, the area expanded rapidly.

Scarborough was a predominantly rural area until well into the 20th Century. Birchcliff was the first area of the sprawling township to experience urban growth, a direct result of the area's proximity to the city of Toronto. By 1908, a radial line connected the area with Toronto and the township government was established in the neighbourhood. The municipal offices were situated just a block from the present church building, from 1922 to 1947. As evidence of its growth, it was in the Birchcliff neighbourhood that Scarborough's first Dominion supermarket and Canadian Tire stores were established. In

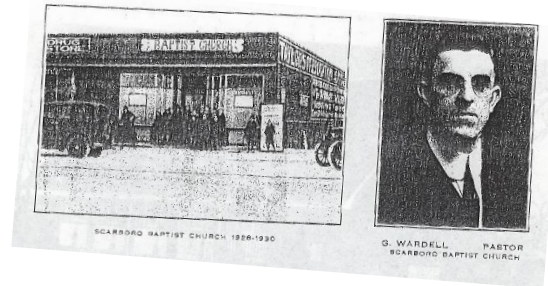


5366 Birchcliff Avenue, south approach (G) over Radial Line
Kingston Rd. (Way) Sep-16-27.
City of Toronto Archives, Series 10, 1007-10022

The Formation of SBC (1928)

In this climate of growth was seen the beginnings of Scarborough Baptist Church. Although the history of Baptist Churches in the Toronto area was already well established, there was a disaffection amongst some members over the direction of the Baptist Conference, resulting in 62 members of the Birchcliff Baptist Church to meet in late 1927 to establish a new meeting place. Through the resolve of those people, the financial assistance of Forward, Pape Avenue and High Park Baptist Churches and the providence of the Lord, by January 1928, Scarborough Baptist Church had been organized and was meeting in the storefront one block east of our present location. On January 5, 1928, the Rev. Glen Wardell (with his wife Maude) was installed as Scarborough Baptist Church's first pastor.

Many disciples, including Pastor Wardell, had already been instrumental in the establishment of two missions in the township; in the summer of 1927, a small meeting house was established in the Kitchener Park area (which eventually became Commonwealth Avenue Baptist Church and now is known as Christ Almighty Baptist Church) and in the fall of the same year, another mission was established at the Turney home in West Hill. Eastbourne Park witnessed the installation of a third mission in the township in June, 1929. In the 1931 census, the largest religious affiliation, by far, was with the Anglican Church at nearly 45% while Baptists were fifth at 1,073 adherents or 5.2% of the township population.



Early Growth and Ministry (1928-1959)

Initial ministry at SBC involved distributing tracts at 8am on Sunday mornings followed by a prayer time at 10:30 and the worship service at 11. In mid afternoon, a Bible Study/School was provided and the day ended with an evening service at 7pm. Such did the Lords word proliferate that it was almost immediately necessary to start planning for a larger facility in which to meet. On October 1, 1928, the lot at the corner of Kingston Road and Lakeside Avenue was procured for \$3,500. With a further investment of \$5,500, the first church building was erected and dedicated on January 4, 1931. Rev. Percy H. Kadey from Flint Michigan Gospel Assembly (in Flint, Michigan) was invited to preside over the week's consecration festivities, with three inaugural services on that Sunday and further services each night of the following week. Mr. Kadey was a renowned cartoonist and was well known for singing hymns as he drew. The original church building was a two-storey structure with the front facing Kingston Road and was laid on a north/south orientation. The first motto was Scarboro for Christ.



At this time, the Great Depression had a firm grip on the Scarborough area, resulting in the township becoming insolvent and requiring the province to take over the affairs of the local government. Nevertheless, the Lord was demonstrating his abundance in times of great need. In the first three years of Scarborough Baptist Church, the faithful grew to 109 strong and were witness to 34 baptisms. Each Friday evening, over 150 children gathered for a Gospel Meeting.

The Reverend Glen Wardell remained as pastor of the newly established church until 1934 when the Reverend Tom Summers (with his wife Mary) assumed the role of shepherd at Scarborough Baptist Church. While almost

25% of the township population was on government relief during the deepest depths of the Depression, the Lord showed His hand was on the church as it continued to thrive. In 1941, Pastor Summers was followed by Reverend Don Dinnick. It was during this time, and most likely as a result of the military turmoil in Europe, that the Birchcliff community received a large influx of Portuguese families. The Lord therefore guided Pastor Dinnick and the congregation to establish a dedicated ministry to the needs of the newly established Portuguese community. It was during Pastor Dinnick's time at SBC that he met and married local resident Gladys May in 1943. In 1949, Pastor Dinnick was called to a charge in Fergus Ontario and Reverend Don Veitch (along with newlywed wife June) assumed the pastor role for three years. Reverend Veitch moved to Maranatha Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan where he remained as Head Pastor for forty-one years. During this time, the Birchcliff Community became fully settled and rapid population growth in Scarborough was focused elsewhere as the township topped 100,000 people in 1954. In that same year, Reverend Dinnick returned for a second calling as Pastor of SBC, to leave for a final time for a Radio and Camp Ministry in Lloydminster, Saskatchewan in 1959.

New Buildings and Continued Outreach (1960-1990)

In 1960, the torch was passed to Reverend Paul Holliday (with his spouse Nelda alongside him) and the church began to contemplate expanding their 30-year-old facility or erecting a new building to accommodate the expanding core of believers. After three years, Pastor Holliday moved on to Willowdale Baptist Church, eventually entering the academic field in two universities before briefly holding the president's role at the Toronto Baptist Seminary in the late 1970's. An adjacent lot on the west side of the church building was purchased and a sod turning for a new sanctuary and building facility was undertaken in 1965 under Pastor J. Balfour Pittaway. The pastor along with his wife Florence, served from 1965 to 1971 during an exciting time in the church history while the present building was erected. Having acquired, in his past, a considerable building expertise, Pastor Pittaway was heavily involved in the erection of the new structure. The new sanctuary was built to orient east to west, with greatly expanded facilities. On October 30, 1966, the Glory of God was demonstrated with the official dedication of what we continue to call our church building, more than 50 years later.



When the Lord made plans for the Pittaways in Stratford, SBC welcomed the Reverend Don Kearns as the new Pastor in 1972. Among the unique outreach endeavours that blossomed under Pastor Kearns was a bus ministry that started in 1975 and had expanded to a fleet of three vehicles that were used to bring the Lord's faithful to SBC until government regulations were imposed resulting in this ministry being curtailed. Along with his wife Miriam, Pastor Kearns also oversaw the establishment of a daycare as a community outreach endeavour that ran for 8 years. During this time, the residential property directly behind the church became available and was purchased for \$75,000 in 1980 and was subsequently used as a manse. After departing SBC in 1982, Pastor Kearns continues to be active in the service of the Lord (as of 2018) as an associate pastor at a Scarborough AGC church. Doctor Doug Webster (along with wife Ruth) was the pastor for the next four years. From late in 1987 until 1990, Scarborough Baptist Church was without a lead pastor, at which time, through the providence of our Lord and to the gratefulness of the congregation, the Reverend Gordon Bickle served on an interim basis.

SBC and the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists (FBE) (1990-present)

After maintaining an independent or unaffiliated Baptist presence for over 60 years, it was during this period that the leadership of Scarborough Baptist Church first sought to join the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists (FEB). In December 1989, Dr. Timothy Starr (FEB Central Home Mission Commission Secretary) was sent to speak with the church on their potential relationship with the Fellowship and by April of 1990, representatives from SBC were attending their first FEB Central Convention.

The history of FEB goes back to September 26, 1933 when 27 churches established The Fellowship of Independent Baptist Churches of Canada at Eglinton Baptist Church in Toronto. From 1933 to 1950, the Fellowship grew from those original twenty-seven to one hundred twenty-four churches. In 1953, the Independent Baptists and the Union of Regular Baptist Churches in Ontario and Quebec joined to form FEB. By the time that Scarborough Baptist Church joined the denomination, it had grown to a family of four hundred and fifty churches with much of that growth attributable to the efforts of Dr. Starr.

Continued Growth and Provision (1997-present)

After several years without a full-time pastor, the Reverend Hans Hamer returned from ministry work in Holland to lead the SBC flock in a full-time capacity. A former sergeant with the Halton Regional Police force, Pastor Hamer (and wife Simona) inherited a congregation of around 60 but was able to report that this figure had increased to between 80 and 90 within a few months. In 1997, Reverend Hamer departed to become police and fire chaplain back in Halton Region and the Lord brought Reverend Stephen Hamburger and his wife Linda to Scarborough Baptist Church from Greenwood Baptist in North Bay, Ontario.

In 2003, the sanctuary received its first air conditioning unit as a result of a generous donation. Two years later however, the cupola-style roof steeple was blown over in a November storm. In 2008, the church undertook an aggressive new mission and vision direction that attempted to define the church's role in the modern community. In this endeavour, those involved determined that through the glory of our Lord, that Scarborough Baptist Church would adopt a new team leadership model to energetically proclaim the gospel into the community. As part of that initiative, SBC first entered the high-tech era with its first website. In 2010, Reverend Hamburger became the longest tenured pastor in the history of the church when he completed his thirteenth year and in 2017, after twenty years faithfully guiding the SBC flock, Stephen retired from active ministry and was replaced by Reverend Francis Williams along with his wife Marjorie, who arrived after ministry work in the Stouffville area. Furthermore, in that same year, the manse was sold.



Pastor Francis Williams

As Scarborough Baptist Church passes its 90th year in the Birchcliff community of Scarborough, the congregation continues to honour the Lord Jesus Christ with a presence that attempts to "Seek God, Serve People, Save Lives." In this way, the gospel of good news will continue to emanate from SBC as a testament to the love and goodness from our Saviour.