

**CELEBRATING  
NEW LIFE FELLOWSHIP  
BAPTIST CHURCH**

**HOW GOD BUILT HIS CHURCH IN INNISFIL**



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## **Celebrating New Life Fellowship Baptist Church How God Built His Church in Innisfil**

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations... (Matt. 24:14, NIV).

Ever since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has been moving in the hearts of ordinary people to grow and establish Christ's kingdom on earth, the church. This is God's story of building his church in Innisfil.

### **Don Clark**



The Clark Family

(From left to right: Sarah, Judy, Stephen, David, and Don)

Feb Central wanted to double the number of churches in its region in 1988. (Feb Central is the Fellowship's English wing in Ontario and Quebec.) Since ten families from Bradford Baptist had moved to Innisfil the previous year, the pastor, Dr. Doug Tiffin, considered starting a daughter church there. By June 1989 Bradford's deacons were serious about this church plant. Therefore they invited Dr. Timothy Starr as Interim Church-Planting Coordinator for Feb Central to speak to the congregation. At the next business meeting on September 10, 1989, the church voted to accept that project. Then they set up a search committee to find a pastor for this new church.

By November 18 the search committee asked Rev. Don Clark in a letter prayerfully to consider this opportunity. In January 1990 Don Clark presented his vision for the new church in a morning service. Afterward Bradford Baptist held a business meeting on February 1, 1990. Because of the enthusiasm of the Innisfil families, the congregation officially voted to begin this church plant on May 1, 1990, a few months sooner than intended.

Don Clark and twelve committed families met four times during March and April to

make plans. On April 15 the group voted on the name, New Life Fellowship Baptist Church. Meanwhile Pastor Don began five months of deputation work among the York-Simcoe churches—at times accompanied by others from New Life.

The Lord graciously opened the hearts of people in other churches to support this church plant. Some churches took up one-time offerings. For example, the Sunday school at Grace Baptist Church in Alliston raised \$600 for hymnals. By February 1991 Pastor Don had raised full support from personal friends and churches. That first year Bradford Baptist assumed a monthly support of 25%. New Life became responsible for 32.5%. Emmanuel in Barrie, Bethel in Orillia, Willow Creek in Midhurst, Springvale in Stouffville, Forward and Melrose in Toronto, and Fairview in Lindsay contributed the remaining funds.

Although the New Life families continued to worship at Bradford Baptist Church on Sunday mornings during April and May 1990, they began to meet every Sunday in the late afternoon. On Tuesdays they met for prayer in Carol Rackham's home. Then on Saturday May 26, forty adults canvassed Innisfil beginning in Alcona. They distributed 750 invitations over two weeks and mailed another 6000. Their goal was to cover every home in Innisfil east of Highway 400.

The families of New Life began Sunday morning services at Goodfellow Public School in Alcona on July 1, 1990. They averaged fifty-six in attendance every Sunday morning during the first five months. The church continued meeting at Goodfellow for three years. Every week volunteers arrived before the 10 am service to set up chairs, prepare the nursery and toddler rooms, and the refreshments. Afterward they had to clean up. Meanwhile in September and October attendance averaged twenty-six in the evening small groups.

On August 5, 1990, Pastor Don conducted his first baptismal service at Innisfil Beach Park. He baptized Elizabeth Bainard, wife of the deacon David Bainard, and Ed Eisbrenner, husband of Kim Eisbrenner. Don Harrison had the privilege of baptizing his daughter, Crystal Harrison.

Before New Life could become a church recognized by the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists and by the Government of Canada, it needed a constitution. The new church also completed several other steps:

Sunday August 26—Dr. Doug Tiffin led a commissioning service at Bradford Baptist.

Sunday September 2—Pastor Don oversaw an organizational meeting. Members signed a charter, accepted a pastoral call, and elected officers.

Sunday September 9—After several months of good discussions and three drafts, New Life adopted its own constitution.

Sunday September 30, 1990 at 3 pm—New Life Fellowship Baptist Church held a recognition service at Goodfellow Public School. Almost 250 well-wishers came from sister



weekly attendance of sixty. Rob and Kathryn Fleming also worshipped with them in a one-year church planting internship to prepare for missions work in Japan.

### Acquiring the Church Property



For over a year the New Life family had been praying for God to show them where their church building should ultimately be situated. Then on July 26, 1991, Keith and Ruth Sinclair noticed property for sale on the east side of Highway 11 just north of the 6<sup>th</sup> Line in Innisfil, 9.6 acres listed at \$169,000. Five men—Keith Sinclair, Don Clark, Ken Brown, Graham Rayner and Gord Kent—checked out the site and prayed for God to make it clear if this was his choice for the location of the church. They did not have to wait long. The realtor Noel Andrade indicated he would waive his realtor's fee so that the property would cost \$155,000.

On Sunday August 4, 1991, Ken Brown read the following motion:

The land acquisition committee moves that New Life Fellowship Baptist Church proceed to purchase the Frank Nagy Property at a maximum cost of \$155,000 plus costs, with the following conditions:

1. That the land be rezoned from agricultural to institutional use;
2. That highway access be granted from the Ministry of Transportation;
3. That full funding of \$155,000 be raised by November 30, 1991;
4. That the church approval be granted by a membership vote on August 11.

Members unanimously passed the motion with a show of hands. How could such a small body of believers raise that much money in such a short time? By God's grace, the church met all the conditions.

There was a problem with the visibility requirement north and south at the entrance on Highway 11. Nevertheless the Ministry of Transportation approved the application after the Innisfil town council rezoned the property "institutional." In addition, Bob Elliot, owner of the farm south of the property, granted an easement so that the church would have access to

the 6<sup>th</sup> Line. Gary Keuhl of Willow Creek Baptist, an official with the Simcoe District Health Unit, evaluated the site and decided it looked suitable for water and drainage for sewage. As a result New Life received an official letter approving the site for a building of 250 people and for fifty daycare children.

Dr. George Bell offered to raise funds at the September rally of the York Fellowship Region. Dr. Roy Lawson promised a \$30,000 interest-free loan from the Fellowship. Furthermore New Life received approval from the denomination, the local association, and the parent church, Bradford Baptist, by September 14. This meant that the deal closed on November 25, 1991. Thus God planted New Life some 20 km from her parent church in Bradford with the mandate to serve Innisfil and the south end of Barrie. After attending the first anniversary celebration, Dr. Doug Tiffin wrote Pastor Don:

To see where New Life is today – unbelievable! To think that you’ll be purchasing property – NUTS! The size of growth and committed people, especially among the new arrivals – fantastic!

After one year you’re actually going to get land has got to be of the Lord. Otherwise you are NUTS! But I want say GO FOR IT! Let God continue to grow your vision for New Life.

In his Christmas letter Pastor Don wrote, “As we head into 1992 the challenge remains to reach those unchurched folks all about us in the Town of Innisfil, to disciple those within our increasing ranks and with God’s help to achieve the balance between the demands of family and church according to biblical priorities. With the office in the house this is sometimes very difficult.”



Celebrating Easter on own Property

On Easter Sunday April 19, 1992, 111 people gathered on the property to celebrate Jesus’

resurrection. Afterward Pastor Don wrote, “The sun was up, but clouds obscured its brightness over the land. Everyone stood in a sheltered spot beside a good fire started by a friend and neighbour in the congregation. Although the sunrise was disappointing, the people gathered for a Son-rise to celebrate the glorious resurrection of God’s Son, the Saviour of the world.” What a special day—to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection for the first time on their own land! Then they gathered for the regular Easter service at Goodfellow Public School.

### The Highway Sign



The fledgling congregation wanted to use the property to reach out to the residents of Innisfil and to build community awareness of the existence of New Life. Pastor Don believed a sign on the church property was an excellent outreach tool. Therefore in May 1992 they decided to erect a sign. After Keith Sinclair and David Bainard constructed the sign in the Sinclair’s barn, they loaded it onto a flatbed truck and took it to the church property. Then they poured concrete into prepared holes and carefully lowered the sign into place. In his 1992 Christmas letter Pastor Don asked prayer for the weekly witness of the sign that passing commuters read daily.

Shortly after Gord Kent had retired in 1993, Pastor Don phoned him. He said, “I’m going over to change the church sign. Would you care to come along and help me?” Afterward Gord drove home with the box of letters in his car. Pastor Don counselled Gord to “always remember who your congregation is, driving up and down along the highway.” Although principally meant to attract the attention of non-believers, the sign has also been a blessing to believers.





In 2007 Justin and Angela Bartlett developed a website for the church, and they have been responsible for its up keep ever since. Shortly afterward, the sign was changed to announce the existence of the website.

Until 2014 Gord Kent faithfully changed the message on the sign biweekly. He usually put the message on the south face of the sign and the accompanying Scripture verse on the north side. His reasoning was this: As people travel north on Yonge Street, the sign is on their right, close to the side of the road. Gord wanted everyone to read the message first and then desire to know more. He has now passed this job on to Kevin Richardson.

### **The Big White Cross**



The following year Rev. Fred Vaughan told Pastor Don about a 45-foot high cross, which had been in front of the Pentecostal Church on Davis Drive in Newmarket. When the church moved to Gorham Drive, they threw it out. The cross was sitting in a storage yard in Keswick and belonged to Vic Priestly. Soon he intended to cut it up for scrap metal. But Pastor Don

and Fred Vaughan made a trip to Keswick and negotiated a great deal: \$500 cash plus a \$2000 receipt and free delivery to the Church site.

Malcolm McDiarmid and Christie Kent, along with Pastor Don, placed the cross on blocks to sand it. Afterward they painted it white, with a special primer coat first. Ed Kopeechuk and Ken Brown dug the holes for the sono tubes. Then Noel Andrade's friend in Alcona helped put the cross in place after Ken Brown had an engineer do the cement work. With thankful hearts they finished the work the week before Easter in April 1993. Once again New Life held a Son-rise service on the property before going to Goodfellow Public School to celebrate Easter.

### **Acquiring the portables**

Owning land also meant having the dream of possessing a multi-purpose building. To work toward that goal, the leadership developed an eight-year strategy in 1992 to pay down the mortgage by the year 2000. The people prayed for 200 partners to donate \$100 every year. Pastor Don called this group of people, Foundation Partners 2000. This truly was a step of faith, for at that time the congregation averaged seventy with 1/3 of them new believers.

In 1993 the fundraising committee of Ron Aitken, Ron Russell and Joan Miller asked everyone to pray and make a list of those whom they could ask to become a Foundation Partner. Afterward they compared everyone's list to make sure that there were no duplications.

Meanwhile that spring New Life had to move from Goodfellow Public School. During the summer they worshipped with Belle Ewart Baptist Church until New Life could find another place to rent. Pastor Don shared the preaching with Rev. Harry Percy. That September the town of Innisfil finished building the Churchill Community Centre. Therefore the church began to rent those facilities for \$39/Sunday. The people of New Life gladly held their first service there on September 19, 1993. The building looked like a church with seating for 120. It had air-conditioning and four rooms for the Sunday school and kitchen.

The Lord continued to bless this work. In 1993 Pastor Don baptized nine people. In 1994 John Blyth, along with his wife Wendy, joined New Life and began a two-year part-time pastoral internship program to learn church planting with Pastor Don. The New Life family also invited their Foundation Partners 2000 to a special appreciation Sunday on May 15, 1994. After the morning service and a luncheon, everyone gathered on the church property to dedicate it to the Lord. Pastor Don prayed their thirty-two partners would grow to seventy-five or eighty.

By the fourth anniversary in September 1994, New Life continued to pray for a building by the year 2000. This involved planning for a future septic tank, well and electricity. That

year more people had accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour; ten more people were baptized; and the average morning attendance was eighty, many of whom were new believers.

In 1995 New Life surpassed its aim of over 100 in weekly attendance, but thirty-four adults were believers less than three years old in the Lord. The congregation continued to fluctuate. When five families relocated, four others replaced them. That year Pastor Don baptized five people. In a letter to friends and supporters dated April 27, 1995, Pastor Don wrote, "We need a building now!" Once again, New Life held an appreciation day on May 28 to encourage those who could to pray and give so that the church would reach its financial goal of paying off the mortgage on the land. At that time the church leadership decided they should figure out the cost of putting utilities on the property and fundraise for money to test the soil.

During three Sunday evenings in September 1995, the people of New Life shared ideas on their vision, goals and plans. In October they said farewell to the Blyths and prayed for God to direct them in their future ministry. The congregation continued to pray for a multi-purpose worship centre on the property by the year 2000. That was why Mike Koch introduced the idea of recruiting 150 more Foundation Partners 2000 at the annual business meeting in January 1996. Those people would promise to pray or donate money toward that goal. By September 15, 1996, Dave Throop reported fifty-three foundation partners and sixteen New Life partners.



Congregation of New Life Fellowship in 1996

In his annual report Pastor Don described 1996 as a special year of Divine surprises and miraculous provision from God. He attributed God's blessing to the 40 Day Spiritual Adventure in which the whole congregation participated. That year New Life averaged 100 on Sunday mornings, and Pastor Don baptized six people.

One Sunday in March, 1996, the property committee announced an incredible opportunity for New Life. The owner of a two-year-old modular building had advised the deacons of its availability. It happened this way. The owner, Marilyn Roy, hired a contractor, Vic Priestly, to excavate her property to make way for a new building. When he arrived at the site he was surprised to find a building standing there. Since his contract did not include demolishing a building, he phoned his friend in Innisfil, Jack Blyth, who was in the real estate business. Now Jack's son John Blyth was a member of New Life. John asked Keith Sinclair on March 15 if New Life would be interested in this building.

The 2400 square foot building, located in Toronto at the bottom of Bathurst Street, was a former Day Care Centre. The owner was willing to donate the building, worth \$120,000, if New Life took possession of it within ten days and paid for its transportation to the church property. God blessed this endeavour when Bradford Baptist gave \$3400 and Emmanuel gave \$2000 to cover the cost of moving the building in three sections.

At a business meeting on May 19, 1996, Steve Paris presented Phase I—the cost of putting the building in place on sono tubes. Mike Wall presented Phase II—the cost of a septic system, drilling for a well, installing hydro and a parking lot. The church unanimously authorized the property committee to proceed with this site development at a maximum cost of \$80,000. At the same meeting Keith Sinclair presented Phase III—a modular village concept.

Phase II required the work of many volunteers. Greg Hart, the site supervisor, oversaw the work in conjunction with the deacon Keith Sinclair. Some cleared trees to build a winding driveway and parking lot. Others dug up tons of gravel on the property, which saved the church from needing to buy gravel. Still others dug a trench from the newly positioned hydro pole at the front of the property to the building.

Finding water turned out to be an expensive challenge since each test cost \$1200. The first two test holes at 510 feet and 350 feet revealed very little water. The following Sunday morning people prayed, "Lord, you wouldn't have given us this land if there was no water to make it usable. Show us where to dig." The third drilled hole at 240 feet produced ten gallons per minute of good water coming through very fine sand. Praise the Lord!

By October 1996 the portable was ready to be used as soon as the church received the transformer to hook up the electrical power. But the deacons realized their new building was not big enough to hold the Sunday morning congregation. Therefore they decided to use it

only as a multi-purpose resource centre. Nevertheless, because of his sovereignty and foreknowledge, God had prepared a place of worship for New Life before they realized they were in need.

In June 1997, the town proceeded with plans to restructure the facilities at the Churchill Community Centre. Innisfil Parks and Recreation had decided to expand their offices into the space used by the nursery, toddler, and Sunday school. Therefore on Sunday June 1, 1997, New Life celebrated the Lord's Day in their own building with 168 present. In his 1997 annual report Pastor Don wrote, "1997 FINALLY HOME! On our OWN LAND in our OWN BUILDING. Praise God!"

Although that building was a wonderful answer to prayer, God knew it was very crowded on Sundays. Furthermore the leadership agreed they needed a building for Sunday school and the church office. Therefore in August the Lord led Keith Sinclair to a quad of modular buildings similar to the first one. Since Barrie Hydro was downsizing, the company had four portables (3500 square feet) available as a package for \$30,000. On Sunday September 7, the members unanimously moved to purchase those buildings. Meanwhile a mining company from Sudbury began a bidding war for them. But God overruled. Barrie Hydro sold the buildings to New Life for \$35,100.

Thank you to all the volunteer labour enabling the congregation to worship in the new sanctuary on November 16, 1997. Special thanks to Keith Sinclair and Bronno Niemeyer who connected two of the portables together to make the sanctuary. They removed one wall from each portable, joined the two of them together, and built a support pole to hold up the roof.



Within six months God had blessed New Life with a total of 5900 square feet to use for his glory—three years earlier than planned. However, now that New Life was a growing

almost self-supporting church, Pastor Don felt God's call to begin another church in Oak Ridges, Ontario. Therefore on Sunday January 4, 1998, he resigned as the pastor effective March 1, 1998. During the previous seven months, when New Life had been in the portables, the average attendance was 105. In 7 ½ years, Pastor Don had baptized fifty-three people. The church would miss him because God had blessed New Life under his ministry. Nevertheless God was preparing another man to lead his flock.

### **Stephen Johnson**



The Johnson Family

(Back row: Emma and Michael; front row: Stephen, James, Bev, and Grace)

Through God's providence, Steve and Bev Johnson had moved to Innisfil and joined New Life on May 19, 1996. Although Steve had been to Bible College, he had been working for a number of years in business as a consultant to dentists. During the six months New Life was without a pastor, God made it clear to the pastoral search committee that Steve Johnson was his choice. Therefore on Sunday August 23, 1998, the church voted unanimously to call Steve Johnson as its pastor. He began on September 1, 1998.

On September 27 New Life celebrated its 8<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Pastor Steve's induction service. Rob Davis, pastor of visitation and care from Forward Baptist Church in Cambridge, delivered a charge to the pastor and congregation. Many long-time supporters of New Life and pastors from the York-Simcoe District attended. One month later New Life said farewell to the Millers as they relocated to Emmanuel Baptist Church for health reasons. Many considered John Miller to be an elder.

This was Pastor Steve's prayer:

He gave some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people, for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11–13, NIV).

To that end, Pastor Steve preached a series on the seven churches in Revelation and another on 1 Corinthians. Then in the year 2000, the church held a ministry fair to showcase the ministry needs at New Life. It gave people an opportunity to see where God might want them to use their gifts in the body of Christ. That year Pastor Steve baptized two people.

### **Financing a Church Plant**

The sacrificial giving of our sister churches and of individual donors has made the existence of a Bible-believing Baptist Church in Innisfil possible. The percentage of the general fund received from other churches:

1993—43% (\$26,000)

1994—30% (\$19,255)

1995—18% (\$10,351)

1996—21% (\$13,620)

1997—14% (\$8443)

1998—3% (\$2393)

1999—self-supporting—Praise the Lord!

### **Illuminating The Big White Cross**

In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16, NIV).

In September 2000 the church celebrated its tenth anniversary. Since this was a special anniversary, the church collected an offering for several weeks previously. Because of the generosity of many, New Life was able to install electrical lighting for the big white cross near the entrance to the property. Now the illuminated cross reminds passers-by at night that Jesus is the light of the world.

The tenth anniversary celebrations spanned two days. Some people spent Saturday afternoon at Chappel farms. Then in the evening everyone gathered at the church for a barbeque chicken dinner, followed by "the longest ice cream sundae." A member of the media took photographs and wrote an article for the local paper. Some New Life people entertained with readings, skits and presentations. On Sunday morning Don Clark read God's Word; Stan Walker, pastor of Bradford Baptist Church, led in prayer; and Lance Johnson from Feb Central brought the message. David Brubacher came as Emmanuel Baptist's representative.

### Growing out of the portables

By 2001 Pastor Steve and the deacons became convinced of the necessity of moving toward a plurality of elders and deacons. According to the Bible, elders are responsible for the spiritual needs of the congregation while deacons take care of the physical needs. This means that elders give their “attention to prayer and the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2–4). Meanwhile deacons are responsible for the administration of the church. Presently deacons oversee both functions. At this time the leadership privately recognized Bruce Crowder as an elder. When Bruce went home to be with the Lord in 2001, the church mourned his loss.

In 2002 the deacons developed a child and worker protection policy or an abuse policy. The insurance industry was beginning to insist that churches provide such a policy in order to receive insurance coverage. By 2003 the deacons and everyone working with children had to have a police check. New Life covers the cost of those checks. If anyone reading this history needs to have a police check done, please do it.

New Life continued to grow numerically; in 2003 Pastor Steve baptized six people, and in 2004 he baptized four more believers. At the annual business meeting in 2004, Pastor Steve closed by saying, “We are the best kept secret in the community. Repentance is most important. We do need to look at debt reduction. We also need to pray about our space problem. In small groups we have been studying the purpose-driven life. We must be willing and obedient. Everyone has a purpose and we must do it. A pastor’s duty is prayer, reading Scripture, and counselling. God is sufficient. We don’t need some fancy program. Any program must not be higher than God’s Word.”

By January 28, 2005, thirty-eight people remained active members of New Life since the days of Don Clark. Five of those were charter members—Carol Rackham, Gord and Grace Kent, and Keith and Ruth Sinclair.<sup>1</sup> Counting all members, including recent additions, and adherents, the church was very crowded on Sunday mornings. Moreover New Life enjoyed a baby boom in 2004. Within a six month period God blessed eight families in the church with a newborn baby. The property committee quickly installed a larger nursery. New Life needed a larger permanent building. That was why the deacons announced in the bulletin on July 25, 2004, that they would soon select a Building Committee. Graig Adair headed that committee, and he has been trying to work himself out of a job ever since.

By the annual business meeting in 2005, everyone rejoiced because the building fund had already received over \$7100. There was some discussion about whether or not New Life

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<sup>1</sup> Since the majority of workers in Innisfil are commuters, the church has struggled with a transient population. That is the main reason why only five of the original twenty-six charter members remain fifteen years after inception.



should have a building fund while still owing money. Rob Simpson promised to go back to the deacon's board to discuss the issue. After their meeting the deacons still felt strongly that the current building fund program was best for New Life. If anyone wanted to pay down the debt, that person could contribute more to the general fund. Nevertheless the deacons decided to have a special debt reduction offering on Sunday May 1, 2005.

The church family began to anticipate God giving them a permanent building in which to worship him. At the same time everyone appreciated the present building—especially when it almost burned down. On the fourth Sunday of Advent 2005, everyone in the congregation exited the church and unwittingly left the four advent candles burning. But God, in his providence, had Ruth Sinclair return that afternoon. Free to burn unchecked, the fire had reached the floor. Thankfully, the fire was quickly extinguished leaving two square feet of carpet damaged as well as soot and ash throughout the sanctuary. Many hands rallied to repair the damage. Needless to say, the Christmas Concert scheduled for that night was cancelled. Ironically, the following year the Christmas Concert was cancelled for the opposite reason—no heat because of a broken furnace.

In his annual report for 2005, Pastor Steve reminded New Life of God's spiritual building. He wrote, "The year began and ended for me, with a focus on **the building**. The tangible earthly building that houses us, and the spiritual living building that we are becoming. **And in him you too, are being built together to become, a dwelling place in which God lives by His Spirit. Eph. 2:22.** In both instances, the joy of the Lord has been multiplied in my heart!" By the end of 2005, the church had saved \$40,000 toward a new building and had also paid off a \$20,000 line of credit. This was reason to celebrate God's goodness.

In his 2005 report for the building committee, Graig Adair wrote:

As I look back at "New Life's" inception and development I am so grateful that our past leadership had the vision to secure such a strategically placed piece of property for future growth and development. I believe God was gracious in supplying our current buildings at such reasonable cost; however our buildings when purchased were seen as a temporary step toward a permanent building. As these buildings continue to age and decay we are left with the responsibility to replace them with a permanent structure that will fill our present and future needs. We are on the edge of one of the fastest growing communities in the country and if developers have their way thousand more acres will be developed in the coming years. We have a challenge, an opportunity and a responsibility as followers of Jesus Christ to reach out to our community.

### **Preparing for a Permanent Building**

Incorporation is a legal document giving members of the church certain rights and

protections. By 2006 the leadership viewed incorporation as a necessity before construction could begin on a permanent structure. Without incorporation, anyone can sue the pastor and leadership for any reason. Moreover members would be responsible for any defaulted mortgage payments. At this point everyone thought the church must have a new constitution before incorporating. This means members would have to resign, accept the new constitution, and then become members again.

Now New Life had voted to incorporate in February 1995. However in 1996 they decided to wait until the church could save \$5000. Four years later, in the annual deacon's report for 2000, Rob Simpson wrote, "The important matter of incorporation has been a focus for this year and progress has been made on the legal document, which covers not only the incorporation, but also sets out to define how we function as a church body (constitution), and how the local church leadership is to function (elders and deacons). We are on track to present to the church in 2001 a finished document. There will be meetings scheduled to cover all the aspects of our work before a vote is called." It was not to be. However, when the members of New Life changed the constitution in 2002 to streamline their elected positions, the leadership believed they were one step closer to incorporation in 2003.

While incorporation suffered setbacks, plans for a permanent building pressed forward. In 2006 the building committee consisted of Graig Adair, Jack Campbell, Len Brownlee, Keith Sinclair, Carol Rackham, and Marilyn Holt. This team prayed and asked God, "What do we build? When do we build? What can we afford? Are our decisions pleasing to the Lord?" At the end of the year, Graig presented preliminary plans and drawings from Hawkey Church Management Inc. He said, "What a way to end the year, \$300,000 in the bank and some plans that appear to have the approval of God and God's people. We would encourage the people of New Life to continue praying, giving and serving." If people thought that New Life was close to having a permanent building in 2007, they were wrong. God had other plans.

### **A Time of Transition**

The church family wanted their pastor to become ordained. Therefore they granted Pastor Steve a sabbatical in 2006 to prepare for his ordination. Nevertheless, when Pastor Steve returned, he did not feel prepared for ordination until Friday October 12, 2007. This was a bittersweet moment for New Life. Everyone was glad that the council voted to ordain Pastor Steve. In fact, the family of New Life held a reception in his honour the following Sunday October 14. But two weeks earlier Pastor Steve had resigned from New Life effective October 31, 2007. God had called him to become a pastor to pastors as a regional director with Focus on the Family.

In 2007 Pastor Steve baptized eleven people. During his nine years as the pastor of New Life, he had baptized twenty-three people. The church had continued to grow numerically

and spiritually. Thankfully, we did not lose him or his family after he resigned. The families of New Life welcomed him as a member and not as their pastor once again.

That fall the deacons continued to plan for a permanent building as well as for Pastor Steve's ordination. On Sunday September 23, they asked the congregation for input on what was bothering them. They wrote:

At issue is this: the healthy balance between congregational ministry in our community and church construction. New Life exists for the purpose of ministry, and a church building is a tool which supports that ministry. But how do we measure whether, in light of our ministry, our timing on construction is correct or incorrect? The consequences of getting it wrong could be felt by this entire generation of members. The blessings that come with getting it right are probably too many to mention...

The first area where direction is needed is in the matter of a vision statement for the church. The purpose of a vision statement is to encapsulate our reason and motivation for existing. This will help us maintain a focus on ministry; help us shuffle priorities; and define our present and future direction.

The second area where direction is needed is in the matter of guiding principles. What is our policy on God's provision? This will greatly affect our borrowing decisions—from whom we will or will not borrow or whether we will borrow at all. This will also influence the timing. But by prayerfully establishing our position, then we greatly simplify the debate and distribute the responsibility for decisions taken.

As a result of those concerns, the church held vision meetings after lunch on three Sundays in November and December to gain input from the congregation. On Dec 23, 2007, John Hebb announced the new mission statement:

To Love God, Share Christ and Make Devoted Disciples

Instead of immediately choosing a pastoral search committee, the deacons decided the church should call Brian Baxter as the interim pastor. Since he worked for Outreach Canada, he could help the people of New Life develop their vision and assist in the pastoral search. Moreover, at the annual business meeting in 2008, Keith Sinclair recommended that New Life pay off the Fellowship loan as fast as possible so that the church would be debt free in 2008. On Saturday April 26, 2008, Brian Baxter held a leader's meeting to formulate the goals of New Life. The next day the church chose a pastoral search committee. By the end of June, Brian Baxter had completed his work here, and Stan Walker became the interim pastor until God called the man of his choice to lead New Life. Meanwhile Steve Johnson baptized two people that summer in the Sinclair's swimming pool.

During 2008 the building committee, consisting of Graig Adair, Carol Rackham, Keith Sinclair, Len Brownlee and Jack Campbell, travelled to various churches in Ontario and

talked to builders and architects. They wanted to get a better idea of what New Life needed in a permanent building and what its people could afford. They considered a “Quick Build” program with the Fellowship. By doing this, the church could erect a building quickly using volunteer labour, both skilled and unskilled. Graig Adair urged the church to:

Commit your way to the Lord.

Trust also in Him

And he shall bring it to pass

Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him (Psalm 37:5, 7).

“Those are not always words we want to hear, however, as a congregation and a building committee we are learning to wait,” Graig wrote. Meanwhile in 2008, the building fund grew to over \$410,000 and the church became debt free. Thank you, God.

### **Darren Johnson**



**The Johnson Family**

(Back row: Danielle and Darren; front row: Kai, Baylee, Tobias, and Levi)

On Sunday November 16 members voted by secret ballot to call Darren Johnson (no relation to Steve Johnson) as the new pastor of the church. The Lord was with Pastor Darren because he sold his house in one day in London, Ontario. He loaded the moving truck on January 12 and moved into his family into their new home in Alcona on January 13, 2009.

Once again, the subject of incorporation came up at the annual business meeting in 2009. Keith Sinclair explained that the matter had become dormant when Don Clark left and again in 2003. These are the advantages of incorporation:

1. Limited liability for members.
2. Church separate legal entity from members.
3. Possibility of a more formal structure.
4. No dependence on trustees.
5. It allows the church to deal with some of adherents involved in ministry in a responsible manner.
6. If followed fully, by-laws and policies provide significant protection against challenges by former disgruntled members or third parties who may not be pleased with a decision made by the church leadership or membership.

Over the years New Life has gone through three lawyers. They keep on quitting. Keith Sinclair said that the Fellowship recommended the lawyer Warren Griffin in Kitchener.

Sunday October 4, 2009: This was an exciting day for New Life. The building committee had settled on an architect, Hicks Partners, and had discussed his plans with ministry leaders. Afterward members voted in principal to the architect's plans. Everyone could finally visualize what the permanent building would look like. Moreover the incorporation process was progressing. It was established that the deacons would be the provisional Board of Directors; proposed letters patent describing the objectives of the corporation were completed and have had board review. How the people rejoiced!

In his 2009 annual report Pastor Darren wrote:

My prayer in coming to New Life Baptist Church was simply that this church would live up to its name. We won't do that through brainstorming new creative programing or adapting a business plan. The church will live up to its name when we understand the things that God has called us to do and proceed. The work is to keep in step with God Himself allowing Him to lead the way. Our pillars as a church family that we've studied and are foundational to the health and effectiveness of the church are: *The Truth, Fellowship, Prayer, Worship and Witness.*

During 2009 the leadership continued to pray and move toward an elder and deacon's board. Pastor Darren started to celebrate new life in Christ with a balloon in the church service whenever someone had trusted Jesus as Lord and Saviour. That year he baptized four people at the Sinclair farm. At the annual business meeting in 2010, Rob Simpson gave everyone some good news about incorporation. The lawyer said that it was better for the church to do it with the existing constitution although there may be some minor changes. Moreover members do not have to disband and then form again under a new constitution.

In 2010 Pastor Darren handed out more balloons to new believers and baptized seven people. He also began to present new parents with a faith box. He explained that parents are dedicating themselves not their baby. In August the deacons reported, "The upcoming year is

going to be a busy one. Three major things remain on the table: incorporation, new building, and leadership shift from 'deacons' to 'elders and deacons.' A timeline is being formed for the latter. Please pray for these major issues as we continue to work towards them."

That December Rob Simpson chaired an information meeting to explain how the leadership had been praying about hiring a pastoral intern as a youth pastor. They had a man in mind but could not reveal who he was yet. Later, at a business meeting in January 2011, members voted to include money for an intern in the budget. He would need to raise support from his present church and find a part-time job as well to cover his costs. In February, Pastor Darren announced that Jon Buck of Emmanuel Baptist Church had accepted the call. On Sunday April 10, New Life welcomed Jon, his wife Erica, and their baby Eli at the morning service.

At the annual business meeting in 2011, Graig Adair commented, "We have been waiting for site approval for ten months. We are at the mercy of administration and the Innisfil town council. As soon as we get preliminary approval, we can apply for a building permit. It is a process. We can only go with the flow." He continued by saying, "We hope to raise money in-house, not a lending institution. How does God put up a building? Planning, prayer, sacrifice and giving. Five years ago it looked like a mountain too high to climb. Now we have over \$1,000,000 in assets. This is God's house and it will be God's timing."

Rob Simpson added, "Incorporation is closely tied to our building. We have a motion not to build until incorporated. We appear to be at the mercy of the town council, but they are at the mercy of our sovereign God. We don't want to be seen as pushing. This is a spiritual battle. We should be praying."

Pastor Darren pointed out:

This year will be huge for New Life. We need to believe in God for big things even though we are a small church. We have a new building, a youth pastor, and a New Life mission trip to Nicaragua in October to look forward to. They will build our faith. We have been looking at the five c's: curb, coach, chair, community and core. We are a family. Each ministry should send people to the curb and core. Our ministries are not one dimensional. Let our vision be to see those five things strengthened.

In his annual report for 2011, Graig Adair wrote:

The Lord has been teaching us, at New Life, to wait. However, for my part, not always patiently. For various reasons, one being outsourcing, our site plan application has yet to be approved. The Town of Innisfil did extend us an olive branch of sorts in that they would allow us to apply for a "foundation only" permit to get us started. We declined the offer as we did not want our foundation exposed to months of winter weather.

## **Our Permanent Building**

At the annual business meeting in February 2012, Jeff Forrest announced that Pastor Darren had just received an email from the lawyer. The church has received its letters patent. "No one is sure exactly what that means. Are we incorporated or not?" Then on March 4, 2012, Graig Adair announced that the Town of Innisfil will allow New Life to submit an application for a building permit.

On the following Sunday March 11, Jeff Forrest announced good news. "We are officially incorporated! In fact, we have been for a while without knowing it." On February 23 the lawyer sent New Life the official incorporation documents, but somehow the letter ended up lost in a snow bank. When Gord Kent changed the sign, he noticed an envelope lying on the ground. It had been there for a couple of weeks.

Then on Sunday March 19, Jeff Forrest told everyone that the site plan is not technically approved although the church has applied for a building permit. Therefore it is time to pray how every person can take part in this project. The church must also file some papers to complete incorporation.

Jeff Forrest chaired a business meeting on May 6, 2012, to discuss incorporation. At this point the deacons were technically the only members of New Life Fellowship Baptist Church. The lawyer advised the deacons to offer a two week window. During that time those who no longer wanted to be members could inform the deacons. Otherwise they will be seamlessly added to the membership. Incorporation is complete!

By August 2012 the town agreed that New Life had fulfilled all the requirements to apply for a building permit. The future building would be located in front of the portables, closer to Yonge Street.

Therefore on Labour Day weekend a group of men began to cut down close to 500 trees and drag them away to the back of the property. The deacons officially applied for a building permit in September, which the town, so they thought, has to process within twenty-one days. In addition, the deacons decided to cover the cost of the new building with in-house loans. They determined that New Life needed \$1500 per month to pay for the interest on those loans and to pay down the debt. That is why Graig Adair began to accept pledges for monthly giving over regular giving. This money would cover those loans. By December the church had received \$5245 a month in pledges but no building permit.

Soon afterward Charlie and Juanita Hellinga told the deacons how Christian Stewardship Services specializes in loans to Christian organizations. In March 2013 the church received approval of a \$500,000 loan to be received on completion of the building. Thankfully, the deacons already had bridge financing in place.

## The Building Permit



Pastor Darren and Graig Adair

On Christmas Sunday December 23, 2012, the congregation gathered to celebrate the birth of Christ. At that time, Graig announced that the church had received \$5245 a month in pledges. Then he told those men who had completed the WHMIS training that cards were available for their wallets. After that, Graig asked David Tracey to present Pastor Darren with a present. After ripping off the wrapping paper with David's help, Pastor Darren held up a framed building permit for all to see. What a celebration! The congregation stood to sing "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow."

Because the church had waited so long for the building permit, it was not surprising that construction began right away. After the service on January 6, 2013, everyone gathered outside for the official ground breaking ceremony. Construction began the next day.

In his deacon's report for 2012, Jeff Forrest wrote:

At New Life, we have no complaints about how and when the events of 2012 unfolded or about the long road leading up to our building project. God's provision and timing are perfect and we trust Him to lead us in the coming year. We remember that as we are building a physical structure, God is building us, His church. As we move into what will likely be another monumental year for New Life, may we as the body of Christ honour our Heavenly Father by demonstrating love and care for one another and by being united as we labour shoulder to shoulder.

On Sunday April 28, 2013, Graig invited the New Life family to visit the new building after the morning service. He urged everyone to be cautious because it is a dangerous work site. Parents must supervise their children. All the people walked carefully on a designated



part of the concrete slab laid the week before. At this point, the church had used up half of its saved money while the work was half done. As long as the work continued to progress on schedule, New Life would be in the new building by the end of August. Then in May everyone gathered around the new building to pray for Pastor Darren and to write the names of loved ones needing prayer for salvation on the walls.

In June, finding the water line became an important issue. Clive Jewett, Kevin Richardson and Keith Sinclair dug trenches in order to find the water, gas and electrical lines. They did not have any problem finding the gas or electrical lines. However, they could not find the water. After praying, the Lord laid it on Kevin's heart to go back at 6 am the next morning and dig deeper. He found the water line! Also, because more volunteers were needed to complete the building, Len Brownlee became the point man to arrange for workers. By July Dino, the construction manager, had finalized his plans on which subcontractors he would hire to finish the work. At this point everyone expected that the building would be completed by the end of October.

On Sunday January 20, 2014, Jeff Forrest asked the congregation to pray for a meeting with the town the following Thursday. According to town policy, the church had to be out of the portables before being allowed into the new building. This means that the portables would have to be demolished within one week. But we could not remove the portables and recycle their contents wisely in less than a week.

Jeff asked the congregation to pray that the town would allow the church to have a grace period of sixty days to dispose of the portables and their contents. That Thursday Jeff Forrest and Keith Sinclair met with the new chief building official, Danny Rogers, who had recently moved from North Bay to clean up the bad publicity regarding the building department. God placed Danny in authority at just the right time. When the men asked for sixty days, he replied that may not be enough time. In fact, the church could take six months to demolish the portables!

Afterward Doug Smith explained how this good news allowed the church to go ahead with *In Search of Jesus*, an Easter inter-active play, after missing Good Friday last year. The building committee could time the removal of the portables so that it would be safe for people to walk around the property. Removing the big portable right away would leave a large hole to deal with. Eventually Doug decided to hold the first ever *In Search of Jesus* inside as a play. This was wise since the church grounds were still a construction site at Easter. The actors repeated their performances six times—once for the helpers and five times for the public.

On Sunday February 23, 2014, Jeff Forrest announced that the architect must send a letter, requesting occupancy of the new building, to the town. If granted by Saturday March

1, Sunday March 2 would be the last service in the portables. Then Sunday March 9 would be the first service in the new building. However due to a couple of minor building code violations, the inspector did not grant a temporary occupancy permit. Moreover the furnace broke down shortly after Jeff's announcement. Therefore the deacon's decided to hold the last service in the portables on Sunday March 9. Everyone stayed in the service, including the babies and preschool children.

That Sunday morning was a celebration of God's faithfulness to the New Life family for providing the portables. Jack De Winter explained how a leaky roof in numerous places, a broken furnace, and resident critters determined the deacon's decision to close down the portables after the service today. Since the church does not have the occupancy permit for the new building, nobody knows where we can meet next Sunday March 16, but God does.

Pastor Darren briefly related the history of New Life. Then he invited people in the congregation to tell what God did here for them. After many testimonies of God's goodness in the portables, the congregation sang "Great is Thy Faithfulness," and closed with a loud "Amen!"

Thankfully, Innisfil did grant the church a temporary occupancy permit, and over two hundred people gathered in the new sanctuary on Sunday morning March 16. The owner of the Fork and Plate restaurant supplied cake after the service.

### **Dedication Sunday**

The official opening was Sunday May 25, 2014. Since Don Clark was the founding pastor, he had the honour of preaching in the morning on the reality of heaven and hell. After the service, everyone gathered outside the front door of the church.



Rob Simpson led a short dedication ceremony. He asked, “Are we dedicating a building or ourselves?” Three founding members, Gord and Grace Kent, and Carol Rackham stood by the covered cornerstone. Everyone shouted, “One, two, three!” Then they pulled off the cloth to reveal a plaque with the words, “To God Be the Glory 2014.” Rob commented that we are rededicating ourselves. We dedicated ourselves when Don Clark started this church plant; when we bought the land; when we moved into the portables; when we made plans for this permanent building. The glory was never for man or a pastor but for God. After Rob prayed, all the people said, “Amen!”

The official opening celebration started at 3 pm in the afternoon. Pastor Darren opened in prayer. After singing some worship songs, everyone watched a slide presentation of the construction of the new building. Graig Adair explained how, as the building manager, he has been working feverishly for one and one-half years to become unemployed. Then he acknowledged all the gifted people who helped make this building a reality. He thanked the building committee, the deacons, the decorating committee, and the sound committee. He explained how Clive Jewett was so often the first on the site and the last to leave. Bonnie Smith has had an increased work load dealing with rebates from the government. He paid special tribute to Steve Johnson for starting the building fund. By the end of his talk he had many people in the room standing to acknowledge their part.

Jeff Forrest acknowledged some of the guests: Steve Jones, the national head of the Fellowship, Don Clark, Howard Courtney from Innisfil Community Church, Steve Bell and Lance Johnson from Emmanuel, and Stan Walker. Mike Thiessen from Grace Baptist Church in Alliston and Graham Maw from Victory Baptist in Newmarket represented the York region pastors. Steve Johnson had a prior commitment and could not be here. He thanked Emmanuel Baptist Church for providing the refreshments.

Barb Baguley, Innisfil’s mayor, spoke next. She said this is a great location for a church, and she recalled working with Don Clark to help make it a reality. A church is where people come together. She praised the art work that the children drew on the pavement earlier that day. Then she presented Pastor Darren with a certificate in which Innisfil congratulated New Life on this new space.

As chair of the York Pastors Association, Mike Thiessen sent greetings on behalf of Bob Flemming and himself. He read a letter from Bob congratulating the church on the opening of this new facility. He looked forward to visiting some day and continues to pray and support this ministry. Afterward Mike encouraged the people of New Life to continue on in their steps of faith. He understands the struggles involved in completing this building. The people of New Life kept on doing it without taking their eyes off the prize. Now it is time to go into the neighbourhoods and reach others for Christ.

Next Evan Champagne, Pastor Darren's friend, provided special music. He sang a rendition of "Amazing Grace," and a song, which he composed, "I Just Want to Thank You."

At this point Jeff Forrest thanked Joanne Butcher for being the official photographer for the day. He also acknowledged the presence of former New Life families and thanked them for the work they did in the past. After that, he introduced Steve Jones.

Steve said that 512 Baptist churches congratulate you! Wouldn't it be great if this church planted another church in the next ten years? Ministry is messy. This building is going to get messy. In faith you get to choose how much God chooses to bless you. There is an interrelation between my capacity to believe and God's blessing. You sew what you reap. Our faith needs to be exercised. We live by faith, but sometimes we map it out so closely. Do we live by amazing faith? Then he told the story of the centurion's slave in Capernaum. Jesus was amazed at his faith. The centurion was generous, merciful and humble. But Jesus did not praise those qualities. He praised his amazing faith.

Do we really believe in Jesus? We must continue to reach out to others or we shall become nothing more than a club. God still parts the Red Sea. Fear will kill your faith. Your faith will make you fearless. So many churches in North America have died because some deacons refused to step out in faith out of fear of what the congregation might say.

Afterward Steve Paul of Emmanuel Baptist Church led the congregation in a prayer of dedication. The worship team concluded with "How Great is our God." Pastor Darren gave a few closing remarks and prayed. Then congregation filed out to the Christian Education room for refreshments.



New Life Congregation at the Dedication of the Cornerstone, May 2014

## **New Life Ministries**

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it (1 Cor. 12:27, NIV).

Many are working and praying quietly behind the scenes. Others, like the greeters, ushers, worship team, pastor, and deacons are more visible. Nevertheless, if you are a believer planted in Innisfil, then you belong to the church, Christ's body. What part are you playing in New Life's vision to love God, share Christ, and make devoted disciples?

Pastor Darren and the deacons do not want the congregation to focus only on the physical building. Therefore on Sunday July 7, 2013, the ushers handed out a card for everyone to keep in his or her Bible. This card is a visible reminder of the church's vision to love God, share Christ, and make devoted disciples. Our pillars are truth, prayer and worship. Our practices are to lead people from the curb to the couch, and eventually into the core of the church.

### **Sunday Morning Worship Service**

As the worship co-ordinator in 1996, Ruth Sinclair wrote, "In '96 we anticipate God leading us into an even fuller understanding and expression of worship that will glorify Him and edify the Body. We look forward to worship services where more and more believers actively participate, celebrating their Lord and His Church—singing, praying, testifying, breaking bread, listening and responding to God's Word and Holy Spirit." These goals have not changed throughout the years.

### **Sunday School**

Sunday school classes for all ages, including adults, began in November 1990 following the morning service with Ken Brown as superintendent. By 1994 there were fifty children divided into four classes: nursery, primary, junior, and junior high. Hope Fitzgibbon of the Treasure House provided Sunday school material free of charge that year.

In 1996 the preschool and nursery were separate entities but remained under the umbrella of the Sunday school. When the church moved into its new building on June 1, 1997, space was very limited. Graham Rayner, the Christian Education Co-ordinator, had to make some drastic changes. In September 1997 a children's church program replaced the after-church Sunday school program. He divided the children aged four to eleven into three classes. After New Life acquired the other portables, the youth began to use one of them for their class in January 1998. In 1999 Junior Church was renamed Prime Time for Kids. The preschool and nursery were no longer part of the Sunday school department. However, the twos and threes received a short lesson every Sunday, which prepared them for their transition to the Sunday school at age four.

By 2011 there were four classes: the four and five year olds, Grades 1 and 2, Grades 3, 4 and 5, and the Junior Highs. The Junior Highs still met in their own portable. On the fourth Sunday of the month, the children had their lesson first and then came into the sanctuary and sat with their parents during communion. On the other Sundays they were present during the first half of the service and went to their classes just before the message. In this way the children gained an appreciation for how their parents worship the Lord. By 2014 communion changed to the first part of the service with the children present. But in September communion reverted back to the end of the worship service with only the two oldest classes present.

### **Small Groups**

Small groups, composed of men and women, have been an important part of fellowship and Christian growth for New Life since its inception. But in the spring of 2000 Pastor Steve began a Cell Group Facilitator Training Series. Twenty-three people signed up. Sixteen of those people formed the first cell group at New Life with John Hebb as the leader. They made a commitment to meet every two weeks for the first six months of 2001. Pastor Steve wrote in his report:

In September we reconvened, but we had a problem. God had previously laid on my heart the desperate need for a deeper fellowship for believers. This first group was only the beginning; in fact, it was a demonstration as to what a cell group is. It was time to open it up, to expand, and to share this with others. There was resistance. The group did not want to split up—and neither did I. This was the evidence, this was the proof—cell groups work.

That September forty-five people wanted to join cell groups. One group had multiplied into three! Everyone did have another slight problem. After 9/11, the expression “cell group” had dangerous connotations. Once more, people joined “small groups”. “Cell groups” became obsolete. Yet, even in 2011, one might occasionally hear people explaining what their “cell group” was studying.

### **Bible Studies**

Bible Studies have performed a similar function as small groups—except that people may join part way throughout the year. It has also been easier to invite non-believers into those groups. In 1990 there was a ladies’ evening Bible study in Gilford and a Thursday morning study in the home of Denise Vanderwielen. In 1993 the ladies continued to hold one study on Thursday mornings. The next year it had grown to two studies—one for young women with babysitting available on Thursday morning, and one for older ladies on Tuesday mornings. Both of these groups still exist in 2014. Grace Kent has faithfully looked after the Tuesday morning study since it began in 1994. Meanwhile Linda Hebb has often co-ordinated the

Thursday morning study. In later years the ladies have sometimes held another study in the evening for women who work outside the home during the day.

Meanwhile the men have held Bible studies of their own since 1999. They have an early Tuesday breakfast and prayer time at a local restaurant and a Wednesday evening Bible study. Sadly by June 2011, the evening study was cancelled because of poor attendance. However, three years later it began again with Graig Adair as the leader.

## **Youth**

In 1995 Greg and Roselyn Hart, and Rhonda Wall organized a bi-monthly social for teens. In January 1996 Mike and Tracey Koch began a bi-weekly Friday sports program at St. Francis of Assisi because they had already been teaching those teens in Sunday school. By 2002 the youth met regularly under the leadership of Gianni and Chantel Barbaro. They began with a weekly Bible study and a monthly social. Since then, the leadership has varied from those within and without New Life. In recent years Allison Simpson and Steve Johnson lead the youth in Bible studies and social activities. In September 2013 Dirk and Margaret Stubchen, along with Ralph and Lisa Leitner, began taking turns in leading the youth meetings. This ministry is important since the youth are the future church, and they need mentoring.

## **Kid's Clubs**

Don Clark believed in reaching out to the children of Innisfil through kid's clubs. In September 1993 forty children, in grades 5 to 8, attended the Alcona Junior Hi Club in the Alcona Lion's Hall. In January 1994 those in grades 7 and 8 split off from the younger ones and began to meet weekly at St. Francis of Assisi. Linda Mullins (now Hebb), Cindy Allan, Gord Preston, Donna Wall, Catherine Lamoureux, Lesley Shields, Doug and Bonnie Smith, and Don Clark were the leaders during those early years.

In 1998 Bonnie Smith became the co-ordinator of the Innisfil Kid's Club for grades 4 to 6. Lorie Wild and Valerie Little-Smith were her helpers. In 2000 they resigned and nobody, so far, has taken their place.

## **Local Outreach**

Jesus commanded his disciples to go into the world and preach the Gospel. The people of New Life have continued to share Christ to the lost in Innisfil. The food cupboard and benevolent fund are tangible ways to show God's love to needy people. Also, the church takes turns with other churches ministering to the seniors at Lakeside Retirement Home. In recent years Ron Huibers and June Palmer have been faithful musicians at those services.

Over the years many have participated in Vacation Bible Schools and summer backyard clubs. The Drama team has either performed or sponsored many dessert theatres. The ladies' ministry have had special outreach meetings; for example in 2005, Debbie Adair and Brenda Freer hosted a day away at a local golf club with a special outreach speaker. Meanwhile, the men have befriended non-believers at their hockey games and have taken others to Promise Keepers or Real Dads.

In 1999 Bruce and Grace Crowder founded the Friendship Club for those over fifty. This is a good meeting to invite non-believers to for food and fellowship. Gord Kent replaced Bruce as leader after Bruce passed away. In late 2013 Len and Elsie Brownlee took over this responsibility.

In 2000 Tom Freer arranged two men's breakfasts and two golf days. However, men's breakfast did not become a monthly event until Karl Reich started it in 2008. When Karl moved away in 2009, Kevin Butcher took over its leadership.



In 2007 Doug Smith wrote the script and directed the interactive play, *In Search of Jesus*, for Good Friday. This has continued every year since, except during the construction year of 2013. This play draws crowds to hear the Gospel, perhaps for the first time.

For many years New Life has had a float in the Santa Claus parade to remind people of the reason for the season. Lynda Throop often used her artistic talent to design the float.

Finally, the church has encouraged and sponsored youth to go to summer camp. Sno Camp in February has been an excellent outreach tool for the youth. Pastor Darren was the special speaker in 2010 and 2011. Sixty-seven young people gave their hearts to Jesus at that camp in 2011.



## **Prayer**

Jesus told his disciples, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5, NIV). Only with prayer can New Life accomplish great things for God. For that reason the leadership spend much time in prayer at their meetings. Many others pray at Tuesday evening prayer meeting or in their small groups and Bible studies.

From 2002 until 2008, Pastor Steve held a Prayer and Praise service for one hour on the last Sunday of the month. It was an informal time to praise God in song, sometimes with or without, an accompanist on the piano or guitar. This was followed by a time of corporate prayer.

Since the summer of 2012, Pastor Darren has organized summer prayer clusters because the regular prayer time disbanded during the summer. In the fall of 2013, Marilyn Holt began to organize drive by prayers on Tuesday evenings. Instead of asking people to come to prayer meeting a few would go two by two to people’s homes for prayer. This lasted a few months. In addition, Pastor Darren began to hold monthly prayer meetings at the church after a day of fasting.

## **Missions**

Even when New Life was a church plant, its people supported missionaries. Pastor Don encouraged them to give a faith promise offering for missionaries. In those early years they gave the missionaries whatever they received from their faith giving. It had nothing to do with the general offering. In 1994 these are the missionaries who received funds: Randy and Cathy Burke, Rob and Kathryn Fleming, and Don and Suzanne Harrison. By 1999 the giving for missionaries depended on a percentage of the general fund. In 2004 the mission’s budget was changed to 1% of last year’s budget up to 20%. Then the missions committee would know exactly what each missionary would receive during that calendar year. For several years Lorie Wild directed Operation Shoebox, sponsored by Samaritan’s Purse. After she moved away, the Sunday school children continued to learn the joy of buying gifts for needy children in other parts of the world.

Quite a few from New Life have gone on short-term mission trips. In 2002 Dave Throop took a group of junior highs to New Brunswick to help out at a Christian camp’s expansion. Some young people have gone on their own with various missionary societies for short-term assignments. The longest time occurred when Michael Johnson left for two years with Operation Mobilization on the ship Doulos. This was a good experience for the youth because they supported one of their own. In 2008 a group of six participated in Hope for Quebec by distributing Gospels of John in Quebec City. Emma Johnson worked for one year with Urban Promise in Toronto, and now she is part of their full-time staff. In 2011 the whole church family prayed and supported a New Life to Nicaragua ten-day mission trip in October

led by Jack De Winter. Twelve people participated including Pastor Darren and his wife Danielle. On March 5, 2012, Grace Johnson left for a one-month mission trip to work at an orphanage headed by Vijay Babu in India. He was overjoyed to welcome her as the first person to come to his mission. Then in February 2014 her brother James left for a short-term mission trip to help Vijay for three months. Finally, a group are about to leave on a mission trip to El Salvador on October 19, 2014.

### **The Constitution**

The constitution defines who New Life is and what church members believe in the eyes of the government of Canada and the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Canada. For that reason it is a very important document. Members may only change it if 75% of those present at a duly called business meeting vote in favour of the amendments. So far, members have voted three times on amendments in the governing of New Life.

#### **June 12, 1994**

On June 12, 1994, New Life members amended the sections concerning the deacons and trustees. Originally, deacons were not allowed to serve for more than four continuous years. Members deleted this stipulation. They also added that amendments to this section on deacons will be subject to a review every five years and amended as the church deems necessary.

Moreover, in 1990, members were to elect four trustees for a two-year term. Those trustees served as a property search committee. They were also responsible for the maintenance and security of church properties under a budget approved by the church. Since New Life bought land in 1991, church members needed to amend this article in the constitution. Therefore the church decided to elect trustees in perpetuity, health permitting. In addition, members would elect yearly the property and stewardship committee to oversee the maintenance and security of the church properties under an approved church budget.

#### **February 24, 2002**

The second amendment occurred at the annual business meeting on February 24, 2002. The church voted to simplify the annual voting process and choose a nominating committee every June. These people would be responsible for finding candidates willing to serve in the roles of deacons (for a two-year term), church clerk and treasurer (both for one-year terms). Subsequently New Life would hold a duly called business meeting to vote on those people. Thus members eliminated the need to vote annually for the property and stewardship committee, the Bible School superintendent, the head teller, the envelope secretary, the hospitality and hostess chairperson, the nursery coordinator and the music committee chairperson.

## **June 27, 2004**

Finally, members held a short business meeting on June 27, 2004, to amend the constitution again. At the National Conference in November 2003, delegates were divided on the issue of whether or not women should be pastors/elders/overseers. The Fellowship continued to hold to the biblical view that only spiritually qualified men should be pastors/elders/overseers. However delegates did not make it a requirement, or a by-law, but a recommendation to hold this view in order to be part of the Fellowship. Then at the National Conference in 2004, delegates voted that only biblically qualified men be appointed as pastor/elder/overseers in the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists of Canada. In the meantime, in order to clarify New Life's position, members changed the wording in the constitution to read "As such, no one will be called or referred to as pastor/elder/overseer unless he meets the biblical qualifications."

### **The Testimonies of Charter Members**

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others (Romans 12:4, 5, NIV).

Since Christ's church consists of people, not a building, it is important for the reader to catch a glimpse into how God worked in the spiritual lives of the founders of New Life Fellowship Baptist Church. These are their testimonies.<sup>2</sup>

#### **The Bainards**

In Dave's life, and more recently in Liz's life, it has been Dave's remarkable mother who has been and is the greatest Christian influence. She celebrated her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1991, a lifetime of revealing God's love by example, biblical teaching and counsel. She regularly took her five children to church where they heard the Gospel. At one point, because of some difference regarding the minister's teaching, she felt it necessary to make a change and was led to take her family to the Pentecostal Stone Church in central Toronto. The minister there was sound in his teachings, and evangelistic services were held Sunday evenings. After about a year, David at age eleven responded to the invitation to acknowledge he was a sinner in need of his Saviour.

After that, Dave longed to be able to witness to others, but he was a shy boy. He could pray, however, and he did along with other Christian kids. They prayed for a Christian

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<sup>2</sup> I have copied the testimonies of charter members from *Celebrating Our First Year* by Marg Ryckman.

ministry to open up among the students at Humberside Collegiate in west Toronto. The Lord answered their prayers and brought into their midst a young teenager who was gifted in being able to counsel other teenagers. Young David Caldwell had a marked influence on young Dave Bainard and other students. His personal ministry among them led several students and one adult sponsor of the program to the Lord. Dave went on in his young life with an ever-growing hunger for fellowship with his Lord and for the truth to be found in Christ his Saviour.

For Liz, it was a great aunt who initially had the greatest Christian influence. Her father's aunt who raised him taught him well the "letter of the law" of God's Word. But it was a Christian with whom Liz's father worked that had a greater influence. As the two families became friends, Liz's parents were led to the Lord because his infinite love was known and revealed in the life of that family. Liz was then in her early teens, and she went along with her parents mainly to keep peace with them. When Liz moved from her home in the Soo [Sault Ste. Marie] to come to Toronto, she eventually was led to the Stone Church for worship and fellowship, where she met Dave who would become her husband.

Later when they made their home in Simcoe County, and had been attending Bradford Baptist Church a short time, Pastor Don Clark came along to give leadership in the planting of a daughter congregation in Alcona. They were attracted to the idea of the smaller congregation, and Dave's spirit was stirred by Pastor Don's hunger for people to come to the Lord. Dave wanted to be in a church that was challenged to win others to Christ. In other ways as well, the Lord was leading Dave and Liz to the new congregation. Liz had not been baptized, and that first summer of 1990, she had the experience of being baptized in the quiet waters of Lake Simcoe at Innisfil Beach. The Lord had been teaching Liz the importance of obedience in her discipleship, and as a young mother she wanted to be an example of obedience to the Lord for her little girls. Dave and Liz desire most of all, both as individuals and along with New Life Fellowship, to learn to surrender to God's will, to grow in a servant and ministry attitude, and thus in obedience to Christ, to find maturity in Him.

### **The Berteits**

Mark and Gloria were both blessed in being born into Christian homes. Mark's life was very much influenced by his Christian parents and some of his Independent Baptist pastors, two in particular who helped him by sharing their own personal faith and spiritual experience with him. Mark was first baptized on profession of faith at age seven, but he had a deeper experience at age twenty-four when he privately committed his life fully to the Lordship of Christ. That was in 1984, and that year he became a member of Willowdale Fellowship Baptist Church. It was there he met Gloria.

Gloria's mother remembers when her four-year-old daughter came home from Sunday school and told her mother she had asked Jesus to come into her heart, an invitation our Lord would respond to with his infinite love and grace. Gloria well remembers the Christian influence of her mother, as well as two of her Sunday school teachers and two leaders of the young people's group at Willowdale Fellowship. She was baptized in her mid-teens, a personal decision and baptism classes helped her to understand the step she was taking.

After marriage, Mark and Gloria moved to Lefroy in 1988 and started attending Bradford Baptist Church. When that congregation began to move on their decision to plant a daughter congregation in Alcona, the Berteits were interested in being part of the new congregation, as they wanted their church to be close to their home. Their wish is for the new church family to be caring about each other, its members to be growing in Christ, and thus the gradual numerical growth will develop on a foundation of Christian love and discipleship.

### **Brenda Bisio**

With a Catholic background, Brenda grew up believing that the purpose of life was somehow linked to God. She writes: "Although as a child I didn't really know God, I faithfully prayed to him. As I grew older the deeper my longing grew to really know our God. After I had my first baby, so precious but so fragile, my need for God deepened more than ever." She joined the local church thinking this was the way she could feel closer to God, but found it wasn't. Around this time, a pastor's son started working at the same trust company. Mark was obviously living to please the Lord, and had a real peace. "I knew that he had some special link to the Lord that I myself had been longing for," says Brenda.

When she left the company some months later to stay home with her first daughter, Mark gave her a Bible as a gift. Inside he had written that this is God's guide to all the questions of life and death, and holds amazing promises to all who would know God. In closing he wrote, "I will continue to pray for you and your family that you will all come to know the Lord as your personal Saviour and friend." The Bible and Mark's words were very precious to her, but it wasn't until a couple of years later that the Lord moved again in Brenda's life.

A new neighbour down the street in Gilford dropped by to tell Brenda she was starting a Monday night Bible study at her home, and would Brenda like to come. "I was never one for visiting new neighbours, joining such groups or evenings away from home, but something drew me to accept this invitation. It was through this Monday night group that I really came to know God."

In the group's study, however, Brenda came to a stumbling block about how Jesus could be God. She was praying fervently about this, when she came across a little booklet that said, "Jesus is God spelling himself out in language that man can understand." Brenda writes, "Finally I understood, and was overwhelmed—yes, Jesus truly was and is God. I instantly

felt a deep love for God, because Jesus covered my sins (past, present, future) by his death. God also promises me that I will live forever with him because of my faith in Jesus!” This happened to Brenda about five years ago, and her faith in the Lord God, her heavenly Father, has been growing ever since.

Brenda was interested in being part of a new church planting because in the small congregation it would be nice to know everyone and to get to know new people as they joined. She appreciates too that Sunday morning worship is the main focus, without the pressure of weekday meetings. Brenda believes that the Lord would have the new church concentrate on the needs of people in the community, and not be caught up in a multitude of church activities that weaken the family life in the homes. She realizes, however, that Christian friends and activities are necessary for children and teens, especially in this world of increasing unbelief.

### **The Browns**

In His story of New Life Fellowship, Ken and Tracey have both been led by their Lord, but they came from very different home backgrounds. Ken was raised in a Christian home in Moncton, New Brunswick, with parents who took their children with them to church, Sunday school, evening service and prayer meeting. In addition to the Christian principles displayed at home, Ken was influenced by godly Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, other Christian friends and leaders, all who encouraged him to live for Christ.

At the age of eight, in a morning worship service, Ken had a deep awareness, however, of his inadequacy to please God. He felt he had to get saved, and he went forward on altar calls again and again, because he knew he didn't please God. He had not yet come to an understanding of the full work of God's grace. Then, at age sixteen at summer Bible Camp, Ken finally realized that God accepted him as his spotless child, in Christ, and Ken was then ready to enter His service on that basis. His commitment to the Lord grew along with his growing understanding of the life in Christ.

Tracey's parents, though unsaved themselves, felt that their daughters should learn about God and the Bible, so off to church on the Sunday school bus went their girls along with other dirty-nosed little children. But Tracey liked people at church and appreciated the way she was treated. She had a desire to learn more about God, and she found church was a refreshing contrast to her home life.

She gave her heart to God at age eight, but was too shy and timid to witness to her unsaved family and friends. The Lord had his hand on her life, however, and as she grew older, she continued to go to church faithfully, was baptized and began serving in the church. When Ken and Tracey moved from New Brunswick to Ontario, eventually to become

members of Bradford Baptist Church, Tracey began to understand the meaning of personal commitment to Christ and his work.

Both Ken and Tracey were looking forward to being involved in a local church. For Ken, the opportunity to serve in the new church planting was all part of his interest in doing God's will, and the awareness that God had brought him to Ontario for a purpose. Ken believes that God can't show us his will if we aren't willing to take the first step, that God wants willing and obedient servants to take. Ken understands that his motives, willingness and obedience may have been questionable at times, but he has always wanted to please God. He also wants to follow the example of his father, whose faithfulness and wisdom always impressed his son. His father also helped to start a new church.

Tracey joins Ken in welcoming the challenge of involvement in a new work, not shying away from the unknown. She has seen Pastor Don Clark and Judy demonstrate a genuine commitment to Christ and to the winning of souls. She too always wants to grow closer to God and to learn how she can serve him. Ken wants to see a vibrant fellowship in the new Alcona congregation, one where God is honoured and served in Christian unity. He is determined under God to see this New Life Fellowship love one another onto spiritual maturity in Christ, and to see neighbours and community friends come to a saving knowledge of Christ.

### **Pastor Don and Judy Clark**

Pastor Don Clark tells of several people who were the greatest Christian influences in his life. His dad passed away when Don was eleven, but his mother was faithful in praying unceasingly for her son as a teenager and on into his adult life. A Christian high school teacher showed student Don the reliability of Old Testament history, and Nels Brown demonstrated the love of Christ to Don and his brother. A close friend to this day, Ron Femson became mentor to Don as a new believer, and disciple him for five years. Don also had two aunts who always believed in him and told him he could do whatever he set his heart to do.

At age twenty-one, Don was searching for real purpose in life. He worked for a Christian boss, Walt Harvey, whose strong Christian testimony on the construction site created a deep spiritual hunger in Don's heart. One Sunday evening in 1967 at Forward Baptist Church, Don raised the prayer, "Lord, if you're real, I want to know it." The thought of Jesus Christ the Son of God filled his mind, and Don prayed, "Lord, I believe you are the Son of God, so here I am!" From then on the life of that young man did a 180 degree turn about, the Bible began to make sense; he received specific answers to prayer; the Lord led him into extensive service, and on to training with the Navigators of Canada, Bible school, York University and Central Baptist Seminary.

Remembering this is His story in Donald's life, the question now is why Don was interested in becoming a "pioneer church planter." When he was at Bible school, the Lord began to stir his heart with a desire to be a church planter, to be involved in building a new congregation into a mature body of believers serving the Lord in effective discipleship and outreach ministries. Through another 13½ years, as student and associate pastor in two churches, then as professor at Bible College, his main ministries had been in evangelism training, teaching and discipleship.

When in the Lord's wonderful guidance, Bradford Baptist Church invited him to come and give leadership in their proposed church planting in Innisfil. He was delighted. The burden the Lord had laid on his heart was to reach a community with the love and gospel of Jesus Christ, to see a group of people mature in Christ, to reproduce themselves spiritually, and to serve Christ enthusiastically in the context of a loving congregation.

"His story" in Judy's life was in the influence of her parents who early introduced her to Jesus and raised her in a godly pattern of prayer, the Word, attending and serving in the church. Later with the Navigators of Canada, a parachurch organization, Judy was trained by Kathy and Charlie Johnson in B.C. to lead Bible studies, share her faith effectively, and to disciple new believers. It was there in B.C. she found her life goal, to be part of the Great Commission.

Judy's conversion came about at age seven when she began to realize that her parents were going to heaven, and she wasn't. A fear of dying developed, and one day she shared this with her Mom, and from John 3:16 her mother helped Judy to realize that Jesus died for her, Judy, because he loved her personally. Because of his death, Judy could have forgiveness of her sins, and the assurance that she too would go to heaven. Kneeling by her bedside, she invited Christ into her life, was immediately assured of her home in heaven and found total release from the fear of death. A verse that means a lot to Judy is Psalm 37:4-5. As she has delighted herself in the Lord, he has given many desires of her heart, a wonderful husband with a heart for discipleship, and three lovely children. Christ taught Judy that he was more faithful than she could ever imagine, as he took them through difficult times while Don taught at Seminary, the selling of two houses in a slow market, and now leading them wonderfully to New Life Fellowship.

Judy's Dad had prayed that if God would give them a child he would give that child to the Lord for full-time service. God answered that prayer. As she experienced the joy of her relationship with the Johnson's in B.C., the Lord placed a burden in her heart to pass on what she had learned to others that they too would be disciples. Church planting has been on her heart during the years of training in different church situations. It has been a deep burden to get involved, not in programs, but in people's discipleship.



Don and Judy have the same commitment to the Lord Jesus and in Him the same desire for the New Life Fellowship to become Christ's people, ready and able to reach out to neighbours and to lead them to the Lord, to bring them into discipleship in Him. "God has blessed us with a great group of families," Don says. Judy wants to see the New Life Fellowship as a group of believers who are excited about what God is doing in their daily lives, and in sharing that with others to reveal Christ to them. Don's desire is to see each one, as a member of the Church, the Bride of Christ, grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus, to love each other and our community, and thus to bring great glory and exultation to our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **The Denoudens**

John and Elaine came into membership in the summer of 1991, but not as church planters. A friend of theirs knew Pastor Don Clark, and suggested to them that they go and meet him and get acquainted with the new congregation.

Tracing His story in their lives, as in all these testimonies, continues to reveal the hand of the Lord in all history, in individual lives as well as in the history of nations.

The Lord brought the greatest Christian influences into John's life through Billy Graham, and two pastors. One was Pastor Norman Rowan of Vivian Baptist and of Second Markham Baptist Church near Stouffville. The other was Pastor Stan Johnston of Maple Hill Baptist Church in Keswick, who was also a great influence in Elaine's life.

John was saved at the age of fourteen, due mainly to a cousin's testimony. John went forward at a Youth for Christ meeting in Newmarket to make a public profession of his faith in Christ. When he came into his adult life, the Lord led him into leadership as a director of a Saturday night youth program in Harriston, "Crusaders for Christ," a role he filled for twelve years from the time he was twenty-one. He then became the youth leader for Senior High teens at Maple Hill for five years, during which time he also directed "The Turning Point Teen Centre." This was a Saturday night coffee house open to the young people in the community, with entertainment provided by Christian gospel music groups. Other Christian leadership roles fell on his shoulders in the various churches his family attended. He was deacon at Queensville Baptist for three years, at Maple Hill for six years, and at Heritage Baptist for six years. Another role he filled for several years was Bus Director, first at Maple Hill, then eight years at Heritage.

There were several Christian influences in Elaine's life. One was a dedicated Christian couple with whom Elaine was involved as their babysitter, and as one of the teen students in his Sunday school class. Elaine was also influenced by the "Back-to-the-Bible" broadcasts and by their youth books. John, who became her husband, also has been a great Christian influence in her life, along with their Pastor Stan Johnston.

By the time she was eight, Elaine had learned she was a sinner, as this was taught in the Palmerston United Missionary Church and Sunday school where she attended. She kept putting off accepting Christ, however, until she was ten. Then a special youth play she attended in another church brought her to a decision. She heard the words, “Depart from me, I never knew you,” and knew they were what she would hear when she saw the Lord. Going home in a neighbour’s car, Elaine just bowed her head, asked God to forgive her, and asked Jesus to be her Saviour. As a teenager she was involved in her church’s youth group. When she met John, she too was involved in the youth rallies, the young people’s groups and the teen centre, as well as the bus ministry. She also taught Sunday school much of the time.

As John and Elaine were led to the New Life Fellowship this past year, they liked the pastor and people, and became members. Elaine says they liked the love and dedication they found in the new church family, portraying a Christ-like Spirit that is so needed in churches today. John is looking forward to regular Sunday morning and evening services in the new church.

### **The Eisbrenners**

The Lord’s story began early in Kim’s life. She was brought up in a Christian family, accepted Christ as a child and was baptized at age eleven. Her pastor, Walter Kerber of Pinelands Baptist in Burlington, along with her parents were the greatest Christian influences in her life, as well as Mary and Jeremy Horne, a couple who were in the Navigators’ ministries.

In her teen years Kim went through a period of rebellion and difficult times in her personal and spiritual life, but the Lord led her back to Himself and she rededicated her life to Him. In Waterloo where she lived in 1983, the Lord led Kim to come under the discipling of Mary and Jeremy. They were in full-time ministry for the Navigators at two local universities, and it was in a home Bible study that they were able to take Kim through the 2:7 studies. When she and Ed moved to Gilford in 1985, the Lord opened the door for her in a wonderful way to have a Bible study group for some of the young women in the community who were eager for this.

Ed was also a Christian who rebelled as a teenager, after making a childhood commitment to Christ. The Lord drew Ed to Himself in recommitment—however, primarily through the influence of his wife Kim, through whom he came to know and experience the love of Christ. When he met Pastor Don at Bradford Baptist Church, Ed became excited about being involved in the new church, and looked forward to enjoying the intimate fellowship of the smaller group of believers in the new congregation.

Kim was brought up in a church extension that also started in a school, and had learned how nice it is to grow up in such a church. When pastor Don came to Bradford to talk about

the new church to be planted in Innisfil, both Ed and Kim were impressed by his heart for the Lord. They want to see the New Life Fellowship purpose fulfilled, as the new church family learns to love and encourage each other onto maturity in Christ.

### **The Kents**

The Lord's story in Gord's life began when a friend invited him to a Youth For Christ rally in the old Peoples Church in downtown Toronto. Gord heard a message that challenged him in a way he had not been challenged before, about the various wrongs in his life. At a later meeting, he made the long trip to the front of the church, and met with a counsellor. Gord writes: "He showed me from the Word of God that Jesus had taken the punishment I deserved. This was the answer to that inner need that I had been looking for all along, without knowing it!" As a recent convert, he was invited by a lady from the church he was attending (High Park Baptist) to a Bible study in her home. She encouraged the group to read the Bible daily and also to memorize Scripture. "This was just what I needed at that time in my Christian life. Some of the verses I memorized then, I remember best today," Gord says.

Grace's dad was the pastor of small churches, teaching in the children's and young people's meetings as well as in the church services, It was he and her mother as well as her church that were the greatest Christian influences in her life, as well as many of her Sunday school teachers. Grace became a Christian as a young child after a children's meeting led by her Dad. She remembers that she realized she wasn't going to heaven because her Dad was the preacher, but that she herself had to make a decision to give her heart and life to the Lord. As a teenager, Grace renewed her commitment to Him, and because of this early decision, she realizes the Lord kept her from trouble many times, and He has given her an abiding hope for the future.

Gord and Grace were glad to have a Fellowship Baptist Church established nearer to their home. Gord sees the need in a new church for people and other resources, which presents many opportunities for service. Grace sees the need for a "New Life Fellowship" in Innisfil where there are many people who need to know the Lord. They both hope to see a unified congregation whose continuing aim is to worship the Lord, to care about one another, and to reach out to neighbours and friends to win them to the Lord.

### **Barbara MacRae**

His story in Barbara's life is the thread that runs through a personal story that could be written for fiction readers; it is so full of people whose lives run the gamut of human nature and life's troubles. In her earliest childhood Barbara's parents took their family to the Roman Catholic Church, but then a change of location for their home and family broke the pattern, and by the time Barbara was ten years old, her parents had become "non-practising Christians." However, the Lord's hand was on Barbara, and in her early teens, her hunger for

his truth led her to strike out alone, and she began to find her own way to church again. Later in her adult life, she left the Catholic Church in Newmarket when she ran into problems with the priest about her marriage. Later, she found her way to the Bradford Baptist Church, and began to learn about a church quite different from her previous experience, particularly the rite of adult baptism by immersion.

The details of her personal conversion further show God's hand in her life as a lone seeker. Barbara had started reading books again, primarily for her own personal interest and pleasure, something she hadn't done for a long time. But she was led this time to Christian material going from lighter subject matter to more in-depth study. It was a book entitled "The Seduction of Christianity" by Dave Hunt that led her to understand that it is by God's grace we are saved. "I was saved," she says, "because of who God is, not because of me or anything I could do."

As the Lord continues to work out his purposes in and through Barb's unique life (and every one of us is unique in his love and grace), she was happy to become one of the ten families from the Bradford Baptist Church to be planted as a new congregation in Alcona. The new location is closer to her home, and she likes the personal closeness that is much easier in a smaller congregation.

### **The Millers**

For John Miller, the greatest Christian influence in his life is the fact that God, Creator of heaven and earth and all therein, cared about him, that God's precious Son died on the cruel cross at Calvary so that John Miller, and all mankind, could know forgiveness and eternal life. In the forty-six years that John has had the joy of knowing Jesus Christ as Saviour, many many Christian men and women have been an encouragement to him, but walking with Jesus Christ and his Word has been the greatest joy of his life.

The men and women who served in World War II can rightly be proud of their service to their country. John became an Assault Section Commander in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry, and saw front line action in France, Belgium, Netherlands and Germany, a service which he can always view with a sense of achievement. It was on the front line that the Lord claimed John as his own. A very brave Army Padre loved Jesus Christ so much, he came to John and his men in their slit trench one sunny Sunday morning, stood in full view of enemy snipers nearby, and very simply but forcefully explained John 3:16 to them. The great love of Jesus was laid on that handful of men as they fearfully awaited the looming danger and possible death in action with the enemy a stone's throw away. John didn't know then what "under conviction" meant, but it was the first time he heard the gospel. After the Padre left, John had a few minutes to quietly face the biggest question of his life for all time and eternity. He asked Jesus to forgive his sin and to come into his heart and life. Over the years since, the

Lord has used John to humbly share his personal testimony many times in places in Ontario, and lives have been changed as the Lord continues to win hearts and lives to himself by his amazing love, his amazing grace!

John is right when he says that Jesus Christ and his disciples, the apostles, initiated church pioneering, and as an officer of the church, he himself has had the joy of pioneering the building of two new churches. He found it a rewarding experience, an opportunity for sacrifice of time and substance for his Lord. John and his wife Joan want to have a part in seeing again a new church family in Christ planted. What does John want to see develop more and more fully in a “New Life Fellowship?” A rich agape love, with Jesus Christ as Lord! John wants to be a truly caring Barnabas to all in the fellowship. To encourage, and to take part in reaching out to the neighbours in the community, to people who are hungry to learn to learn about Jesus and his love for them—before our Lord’s coming in the Rapture!

Joan pays tribute to her Mom and Dad for their great Christian influence in her life: “My Mom’s loving, quiet, consistent Christian testimony, and my Dad who taught that we should never be discouraged, that whatever happens in life, the Lord has allowed it for a purpose,” to her husband John, “always forgiving people no matter what they have done;” and “to my Aunt Freda, in constant pain with arthritis for 30 years, and through it all, completely trusting in the Lord.” Camp Mini-Yo-We and church provided Joan with Christian friendships all through her life, and the Billy Graham and Campus Crusade for Christ associations taught Joan how to share her faith. As a teen, by herself one night in bed, Joan had asked Jesus to come into her heart.

John and Joan believe the Lord expects them to reach out to their immediate community, and they feel this is best accomplished attending a local church. Joan wants to see the church as the hub of family activities, and meeting the needs of the community: youth programs, seniors programs, daycare, food bank and clothing centre, and reaching out to those in prison.

### **Carol Rackham**

The Lord’s story in Carol’s life began when she was a child going to Children’s Bible Club at Willowdale Baptist Church in Toronto. One Friday night when she was ten years old, a lovely Christian lady leading “juniors,” asked each child as they left, “Do you know Jesus your Saviour?” When Carol’s turn came, she had to be honest and say no, she didn’t know Jesus as her Saviour. The lady took Carol back into the classroom and talked to her, and as a simple child, Carol accepted Jesus as her personal Saviour. As a teen, a friend a few years older took an interest in Carol, and she looked to her as a Christian example and mentor or teacher. When she was seventeen, she was convicted one evening at her church about living her life for Christ, but it wasn’t until 1974 as a young mother that Carol rededicated her life to Christ.

Sunday worship, praise singing and Bible teaching have greatly influenced Carol's life. As coordinator for Pioneer Clubs, a Children's Club ministry, she learned more about her life in Christ, and she hopes she too has been an example. Carol came to Alcona when she bought the home of her dreams, another gift of the Lord in her life. The Pioneer Clubs regional director, a friend of Carol, had visited Bradford Baptist Church, and suggested to Carol she would find a church home there until the planned Innisfil church became a reality. For a few weeks Carol visited some of the other churches in the area, but the Lord led her back to Bradford.

Carol's prayer is that the Lord will continue to bind the new congregation together as each one seeks to know the Lord better. She believes the Lord has brought us together for His purposes, and to reach the lost for His kingdom. She's thankful for the leadership of Don and Judy Clark, Ken Brown and Dave Bainard. Christ is Lord of Carol's life, and she finds it exciting to see how He leads and teaches her, how faithful He is in keeping His promises, and how He has brought her to become part of His work in and through the lives of the people who love Him and His Word, in the New Life Fellowship!

### **The Rayners**

The Lord's story in Karen's life began when she was a child with a Christian mother who led her daughter to Christ. Karen was just six, and as her mother read to her the story of Jesus and the woman at the well, Karen realized that God saw everything she did. She was trying to be a good girl, but she said she didn't like it that God saw everything she did. Her mother explained that if she told Jesus she was sorry and promised she wouldn't do that wrong thing anymore, Jesus would forgive her. Karen learned to do this, and found how happy it made her to know Jesus forgave her and would help her.

Graham grew up in an Anglican home, and heard about God occasionally from his mother and grandmother who went to church, but the children were not taken to church or instructed at home in the Christian life. As he entered university, he began to have inner struggles and felt very much alone. In his outward life he seemed to be in control, but he did not know how to deal with these inner struggles.

The University in Waterloo where he was a student had an affiliation with the Conrad Grebel Mennonite College where he was able to get his meals. He began to meet some of the students there, who were Christians, and to have Bible study with them and to go to their chapel services. Karen was also at Waterloo University and in the group of Christian students; she and Graham were friends. One day she asked in the lounge if anyone wanted a drive to church with her, and Graham took the opportunity to attend Kitchener Memorial Brethren Church with her. There he watched the people in Communion and was deeply impressed by this service and wanted to learn more. Going to Saskatoon for a short time, he

connected with a Mennonite church there and got to know the pastor who became interested in Graham's spiritual struggles. Within three weeks, Graham was convinced of his need to accept Christ. Four months later he returned to Waterloo and to Karen. This was 1984.

Both Graham and Karen had a burden for their neighbours who "had a lot of needs" but their greatest need was to know Christ. One day Karen was in the car alone, and telling God that yes, they needed friends, and it was great to be able to witness to these neighbours, but such witnessing was a drain on them, and she and Graham needed some Christian friends for support. That same moment, Graham was meeting a neighbour, Katleen Newton, discussing gardens at first, but then finding they were fellow Christians. Katleen told Graham about New Life Fellowship, and he and Karen came to "check it out," and found that all this was in answer to their prayer. They found a church that was going in the same direction as their previous church in Rexdale (C&MA) where believers were expected to grow and to discover their gifts in Christ.

### **Margaret Rykman**

The Lord's amazing love, amazing grace makes her life His story! The greatest Christian influence in her life was her time at Toronto Bible College, graduating in 1950. The other greatest influence was her baptism by immersion at age nine, its simple but profound significance being understood clearly at that young age. Her family were "church people" in that they went to church, but the love of Christ, the Bible and prayer had no part in the home life. As she went into her teen years, Margaret could not see that Christ and His Word made any real difference in the lay leadership in her church. Something was lacking, and as she entered her adult life, Margaret felt that great lack in her own life. What was it all about? This had not come through to her clearly as she grew up in that worldly Convention Baptist Church in mid-Toronto. But she did believe the Bible held the answers, and the Lord led her to Bible College. (Just around the corner from her church, it had originated in that church before the turn of the century, but now was never mentioned!) Every morning during three school years, the Bible was opened to her, page by page, as the students hour by hour were led in "Thinking Through The Bible." It was a rare privilege to sit under Dr. John McNicol, then age eighty, who had been a Bible scholar all of his years of service to his Lord.

After Bible College, she continued to serve her Lord in her home church, until her marriage in 1959 to a widower with a seventeen-year-old daughter, the family being members in that church. After several years as a legal secretary, she became church secretary in a large United Church in north Toronto. The lack of spiritual life in this, another such church for Margaret, was not a problem. In fact in her busy new life of marriage and full-time work, she mostly drifted in her Christian life. Finding it confusing to be involved in two churches, she persuaded her husband and step-daughter to transfer membership with her to the United Church.

Later returning with her husband to their home church after almost fifteen years absence, Margaret experienced some spiritual renewal in her life. Part of that was stimulated, however, by the comment of a saintly old deacon who said, “This is a dying church.” The statement hit her hard. A church die? Part of the Body of Christ? For so long she had been involved in churches that were barely alive spiritually if at all, now she began to observe and study the matter intently. Her experience covered fifty years in two mainline denominations and in one of their church headquarters. Her quest went on in another large United Church on the street where they lived, and more recently in a smaller United Church in a once rural community. In all these groups, the Lord has his remnant who love him and seek to know and obey His Word. However, people who do not fully accept the Lordship of Christ, personally in their lives, and corporately in the life of their church, are on the road to complete frustration; all their human efforts are in vain, ultimately worthless in his kingdom enterprise!

In the fall of 1989, Margaret left the United Church in utter frustration. The following June, Ken Brown left an invitation at her door, and she was led to become part of the New Life Fellowship on its first public service on July 1<sup>st</sup>. She felt very much at home among people who loved the Lord and loved His Word. Her prayer for this congregation is that we will, individually and corporately, ensure that Christ is the supreme love and Lord of our lives, that we will ever be a true fellowship in Him, ever faithful in ministry to each other in His love, and to ministry to others who need his love, who also need him as their Saviour.

### **The Sinclairs**

Keith gives Colossians 3:1–17 as one of his favourite scripture passages—raised with Christ, we set our minds and hearts on things above; we died, and our life is now hidden with Christ in God. Since we have taken off our old self and put on this new self, Christ is all in all. The Scripture continues with what our Lord expects of us in holy living as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly beloved, and with gratitude in our hearts to God, we do all in the name of our Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Raised in a Christian home, it was not until he was in his early twenties that Keith, through the influence of a Christian friend, faced the reality of his need to receive Christ as his personal Saviour. In mid-1950 at a Leighton Ford Crusade in Barrie, Keith took that step of asking Jesus Christ into his life and received the Lord’s gift of salvation.

Ruth gives Proverbs 3:5–7 as her “life verse”—Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in our own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.

There were three who were the greatest Christian influences in Ruth’s early years: (1) her grandmother, a joyful Christian who continually demonstrated her keen love for the Lord as



she loved and served people in practical ways, (2) her gentle godly mother, and (3) a kind and caring Sunday school teacher. At age sixteen, sitting alone in the back pew of a big downtown Toronto church, Ruth wanted everything she had heard about Jesus Christ to become real in her own life. She had been trying to fill the void with music, boyfriends, worthwhile causes and wholesome activities, but she was finally ready to admit her need of the Saviour who alone could provide forgiveness, meaning and direction in her life. Since that day she has been learning, sometimes through very painful experiences, to allow Jesus to be not only Saviour but also Lord of her life.

Ruth is looking for new opportunities to learn and serve as God leads, and sees the new church being planted in Innisfil as an ideal opportunity to be trained as a “home missionary.” She is particularly appreciative and excited about the emphasis on and teaching about our Great Commission as Christians, and the emphasis on discipleship and prayer. Keith is looking for a closer walk with the Lord in his own life, and his vision is for the new congregation to become a close loving fellowship with a unity of purpose in reaching others for Jesus Christ.

### **The Vanderwieleens**

It was Steve’s father who was the greatest Christian influence in his life, teaching him readily about salvation and Christian values. After his father had told him how to be saved, Steve decided at the age of seven to accept Christ as his Saviour. In the backyard of his parent’s home, Steve asked the Lord to come into his heart as his Saviour. How quietly and graciously the Lord speaks to the hearts of children, and claims them for his own!

Denise tells how she was enlightened by two very good and concerned friends, but that it was Christ himself who was and always will be her greatest influence. Being Roman Catholic, she truly believed she had Jesus in her life, but what was missing was the assurance of her salvation and the reign of the Holy Spirit in her life. The highlight came one evening at a Friday Night Coffee Hour. Nigel, 6’4” and a gentleman, one of her good friends, talked with her all evening. Then they prayed together, and Denise simply said. “Jesus, forgive me for my sins, and please come into my heart and help me to live the life of a true Christian.” As she left that meeting with Christ, she felt lighter than air, able to fly through the air and not fall. Later, she was aware of the demolition work the Holy Spirit had to do in her mind and heart, to free her of all the junk her spirit had accepted as truth. “Praise God,” says Denise, “for his patience and generous nature! And praise Jesus that he loved us that much to come and show us the way home to himself!”

Steven wanted to be a “church planter” because he thought it would help him to have a closer walk with the Lord. He would like to see an example of Christian charity in the new church family, that others would see our love for one another and be drawn to Christ.

Denise believes that, although readily attracted by the fact that the new church would be close to their home, the Spirit was giving them an excitement for his new work. They began praying for a share in the wonderful venture. In this first year or more, God has not only used them, but has shaken them and turned them around, for his glory, and they praise him for this! Denise has a very strong wish to see the women work together as sisters in Christ, meeting the needs of our church family, lovingly caring. She wants to see the men as brothers in Christ, helping each other with their homes and vehicles, generously giving and leading as God intended. With Christ's abundant love so evident, those in the community watching us, will want what we have!