

**Centennial reminds congregation of inherent dilemma:
the case of First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton**

A Paper presented to the Canadian Society of Presbyterian History Meeting

Knox College

Saturday, 29 September 2012

by

Kenneth Munro

Professor Emeritus,

University of Alberta

On Sunday, 2 June 1912, the city of Edmonton was abuzz with excitement as the most influential protestant congregation in Alberta prepared for the official dedication of its new church building at 11:00 am.¹ Those attending this dedication service were awestruck by the magnificence of the structure and the beauty of the sanctuary. One hundred years have passed since this remarkable event and on Sunday, 3 June 2012, the congregation celebrated the centennial of the dedication of the building which remains the home of the First Presbyterian congregation in Edmonton.

Over the past century, the congregation of First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton has had a splendid structure in which to worship God, an enormous building with a multiplicity of rooms in which to draw the congregational community together for various functions, and a solid base from which to reach out into the community supporting social justice and other Christian causes. Housed in a new building in 1912, the congregation could concentrate its efforts almost entirely on the work of the Presbyterian denomination. However, as time passed and the building required upkeep, more and more effort had to turn to keeping the structure in good repair, thus taking away volunteer hours and financial resources from Christian endeavours. By 2012, the dilemma, or choice, facing the congregation of First Presbyterian Church was how to keep a balance between the needs of maintaining a physical home for the congregation while still fulfilling the congregation's Christian obligations and maintaining a Presbyterian presence in society. This paper will attempt to assess how successful the congregation has been over the past 100 years in securing a balance between these two competing forces and explain why this dilemma was on the minds of congregational members as they celebrated the centennial of their church building.

After 100 years, this late-Victorian Gothic Revival structure still shines as a beacon of Presbyterianism in the very heart of Edmonton. The massive brick edifice inspires members to worship God with "its stained glass, hand-crafted wooden panelling...and a labyrinth of rooms."² Like so many major

¹ In his book, *McQueen of Edmonton*, E. A. Corbett has incorrectly stated that the dedication of the new church building occurred on 3 June 1912. The 3 June 1912 was a Monday; the dedication took place on Sunday, 2 June 1912. See E.A.Corbett, *McQueen of Edmonton*, Toronto: The Ryerson Press, [1934], 91. *The Edmonton Journal* indicates clearly that the building was dedicated on 2 June. See *Edmonton Journal*, Monday, 3 June 1912, 6.

² *Edmonton Journal*, Monday, 4 June 2012, A3.

churches in western Canada, the structure of First Presbyterian Church is merely an interpretation of early types of churches found in small Ontario towns, lacking a distinctive Western Canadian architectural style.³ Nevertheless, its Gothic architecture is distinguished and impressive in the modern age. Like the gnarled old maple at its south-east flank, this enduring and endearing edifice stands quite unique, surrounded by vacant lots used temporarily for parking lots and overshadowed by concrete high rises and towering business complexes which represent the bustling secular society of twenty-first century Edmonton.

The structure's exterior is clad in Redcliffe pressed brick from southern Alberta and Bedford stone trim put in place by the builders McMillan and Brown. Predominately English-inspired in style, the church also incorporates some French Gothic elements, such as the triple-arch motif of the main porch. As well, the large pointed arched windows on the side and front façade are filled with French Gothic flamboyant tracery, characterized by its flowing and flame-like motif. On the southwest corner of the church, a tower soars over 34 metres into the air. Aesthetically, the tower is a handsome structure which awaited chimes at the time of dedication in 1912. Because of cost over-runs, corners had to be cut. Consequently, the materials used in the top two stories of the tower and the brick used for the construction of the back of the church are of poorer quality than in the remainder of the structure.⁴

The interior features a basement of concrete and stone foundation. Behind the sanctuary is a huge handsome hall--- the Arthur Newcombe Room named after a long-time organist and choir director (1945-1972)⁵--- with hardwood flooring and beamed ceiling in the style of the medieval period. The minister's study and secretarial offices are housed on the north side of the hall and a small kitchen and room furnished like a drawing room are located on the south side, raised several steps above the sexton's living quarters below. The Sunday School is found above the Arthur Newcombe Room with a gallery with open cubicles; two small rooms are also nestled into the structure at the top of the stairs on the same level as the Sunday School. In addition, on either side of this Sunday School Room are steps

³Gilbert A. Stelter, "What Kind of City is Edmonton?" in Bob Hesketh and Frances Swyripa, eds. *Edmonton: The Life of a City* [Edmonton: NeWest Publishers, 1995], 8-9.

⁴ Kenneth Munro, *First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton: A History*, [Victoria: Trafford, 2004], 94-95.

⁵ Kenneth Munro, *First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton: A History*, [Victoria: Trafford, 2004], 200 & 304.

leading to two large rooms which have been used for various purposes during the history of the church. This complex of rooms constitutes a third floor of the church. The fourth floor, the size of the Sunday School main assembly hall has never been completed. In front of this myriad of rooms, stairs and balconies is the sanctuary, a visual gem with a U-shaped gallery, a semi-dome in the east wall housing the organ, a double vestibule, oak and fir woodwork, gothic stained glass windows and vaulted ceiling.

This sanctuary was built to be conducive to worship. The richly finished oak panelling and benches are enhanced with soft light shining through warm-coloured stained glass windows. All lines of sight in the sanctuary are directed up to the solid and heavy-looking oak engraved pulpit towering front and centre in this sacred area well above the main floor and built to aid ministers preaching the word of God. This sanctuary was completed in time to welcome the delegates from across the country who attended the Annual General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1912. Years later, this was the venue for the opening service of worship of the Annual General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 2005, the centennial year of the province of Alberta. In this setting, the congregation of First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton has worshiped God for over 100 years.

While the preaching of the Word is the high point of any Presbyterian worship service, the sermon is usually enhanced and supported by music. This has been the case at First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton since its founding. In 1909, the congregation then located at 103rd street and Jasper avenue bought an organ from Casavant Frères from Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec for this very purpose. Being frugal and wise, the congregation decided to move this organ, the Casavant Opus 371 built by the company, to the new 105th street location in 1912. Besides an oak case and mahogany console, the organ consisted of 1572 pipes which ranged in length from 3/8 of an inch to 16 feet and in dimension from 1/4 of an inch to one foot square. The choir and swell were enclosed and were governed by a balanced pedal from the console. There were three towers of pipes, separated by several flat panels. The case pipes were in guilt. When the organ was moved, some sections were added, pipes as well as a chime stop. This organ thus became an integral part of the church building and aesthetically, an integral part of the architecture of the sanctuary.

While caution prevailed in the area of music with the recycling of the pipe organ, such inhibitions did not prevail in deciding to build a new church

rather than adding on to the existing structure at the 103rd street and Jasper avenue location. The decision to build a new church was not taken lightly or without considerable discussion and many heated words. This debate began as early as 1906 when the Board of Managers listed the 103rd street property on the market. At that time, there were no buyers but as the economy of Edmonton flourished by the end of the decade, demand for this choice property on Jasper Avenue grew. In the end, the congregation accepted the proposal to build a new church with the handsome revenue received from the sale of the existing church property.⁶ Rev. Dr. David McQueen was most pleased with this decision and most willing to guide his congregation in a new grandiose edifice which suited his personality.

Born at Kirkwall, Ontario, on Christmas Day in 1854, David McQueen attended the University of Toronto and then Knox College. With the departure of the first Presbyterian minister in Edmonton in 1887, Dr. Andrew Baird, who had established the presence of First Presbyterian Church in the city, the Board of Missions sent out Rev. McQueen to take over the charge. Alas, he began his ministry with great trepidation as the congregation did not like the idea that he had been appointed without consultation with them. Nevertheless, they accepted him but reserved the right to issue a call only if and when the time was right. After serving faithfully for six years as an ordained missionary, he finally received, and accepted the call to serve as the Minister of First Presbyterian Church in March 1893.⁷ From that point on, there was no turning back and both the congregation and Presbyterianism in the west flourished under his guidance.

From his base in this 105th street building, McQueen was a key figure in promoting and maintaining the Presbyterian denomination in Canada. He was a force to be taken into account in both religious and secular matters. McQueen was the only Presbyterian minister to have served as Moderator of the Church twice, once in 1912 and secondly, as interim moderator in 1925 at the time of the “Union Crisis”.⁸ He was a person of weight in the Edmonton community.⁹ As the renowned leader of the congregation, it was appropriate Rev. Dr. McQueen preside over the laying of the cornerstone of

⁶ *Edmonton Bulletin*, Tuesday, 10 May 1910, 5.

⁷ *Edmonton Bulletin*, Thursday, 4 May 1893, 6.

⁸ E. A. Corbett, *McQueen of Edmonton*, Toronto: The Ryerson Press, [1934], 91-92 and 110-111.

⁹ E. A. Corbett, *McQueen of Edmonton*, Toronto: The Ryerson Press, [1934], 58, 74-77 and 88.

the new building on Wednesday, 26 July 1911.¹⁰ During that evening ceremony, he was presented with a silver trowel on behalf of the architect, a mallet on behalf of the builder and a plumb on behalf of the clerk of works--objects which remain on view in the Social Room today.¹¹

This celebratory ceremony masked concerns within the congregation about this new church. The proposed cost of the new building was established at \$85,000¹² with seating for 1,250. In the end, over \$172,000 was spent on construction and it was late in completion. The Board of Managers termed the “cost of the new church excessive”.¹³ The fact that the old Church property sold for \$195,000 and the new church cost \$172,000 may well have been the reason for the complacent acceptance of the final price for the new building.¹⁴ At the time, one journalist wrote that “It is expected that the new church will meet the needs of the congregation for some time to come.”¹⁵ How true that foresight has been!

Although the congregation left their old premises in March 1912 and re-located in the new unfinished building, everything was ready for a dedication service in the new structure on the first Sunday in June. Thus, on 2 June 1912, leading divines who had planted the seed of Presbyterianism in the West travelled to Edmonton and presented sermons and dedication addresses. Rev. Andrew Baird, the first minister of the church in Edmonton in 1881, took a prominent part in the services. He read the dedication act and offered the dedicatory prayer. In the afternoon, he addressed the Sunday school and dedicated the new Sunday school room.¹⁶ Rev. David McQueen who was celebrating his 25th anniversary as a minister, naturally took a prominent role in the services of worship as host of the celebration. One of the most outstanding Presbyterian preachers of this period, the Rev. G. M. Milligan, D.D. of Toronto, was invited to deliver the sermons for the morning and evening services.¹⁷

¹⁰ *Edmonton Journal*, Thursday, 27 July 1911, 4.

¹¹ *Edmonton Journal*, Thursday, 27 July 1911, 4.

¹² Harrold Morris, *The Presbyterian Church in Edmonton*, Master of Theology Thesis, Vancouver School of Theology, 1974, 47-48.

¹³ Harrold Morris, *The Presbyterian Church in Edmonton*, Master of Theology Thesis, Vancouver School of Theology, 1974, 48-49.

¹⁴ Harrold Morris, *The Presbyterian Church in Edmonton*, Master of Theology Thesis, Vancouver School of Theology, 1974, 48-49.

¹⁵ *Edmonton Journal*, Saturday, 22 July 1911, 1.

¹⁶ *Edmonton Bulletin*, Monday, 3 June 1912, 1.

¹⁷ *Edmonton Journal*, Monday 3 June 1912, 6; and *Edmonton Bulletin*, Monday 3 June 1912, 1.

In his sermons, Rev. Dr. Milligan revealed the dilemma, or choice, faced by the congregation. He appeared to contradict the message given by Rev. Dr. S. W. Dyde at the laying of the cornerstone a year earlier. Milligan spoke about what Christ wanted to teach the Jews about the Temple. He explained that “holiness was not confined to any particular place. The foundry and the machine shop were as holy as the church.”¹⁸ This simple truth exposed the dilemma faced by this Edmonton congregation. Here was a “handsome new building”¹⁹ with “beautiful features of ...structure”²⁰ but the Church was more than a building. Implied in this message was that while a church home was important, the Christian life of the congregation was even more critical.

On the other hand, a year earlier, Rev. Dr. Dyde, president of the Alberta Presbyterian theological college, had indicated that a building, a place of worship, was very important for a congregation. He explained that “Man is a political and social being, and must satisfy the needs of his nature by recognizing and worshipping God publicly.”²¹ Dyde believed that if Christians provided no places for social worship and ceased to organize our religion, “we would be left to our own ideas of God which might often become narrow, whimsical and inadequate.” He stressed that “It is good for us to meet together and worship Him in public.”²² And thus it was that this outstanding structure should radiate Christian teaching and service not only within Edmonton, but throughout the whole West. But on that dedication day of 1912, did the congregation of First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton hear Rev. Dr. Milligan’s ominous caution that the Christian’s primary task was to reach out into the community to do the work of the Lord and was not to focus solely on buildings? This question seemed irrelevant in 1912.

With a new well-built Presbyterian church in good repair, there seemed to be nothing to stop the spread of Presbyterianism in western Canada now. With the Roman Catholic Church as the other pole of Christian attraction in Edmonton, the Presbyterians dominated all aspects of city life. Members of this denomination were most influential in business, politics at all three levels of government, the provincial civil service, municipal affairs and the

¹⁸*Edmonton Journal*, Monday, 3 June 1912, 6.

¹⁹*Edmonton Bulletin*, Monday, 3 June 1912, 1.

²⁰*Edmonton Journal*, Saturday, 22 July 1911, 1.

²¹*Edmonton Journal*, Thursday, 27 July 1911, 4.

²²*Edmonton Bulletin*, Thursday, 27 July 1911, 4.

teaching profession. The minister of First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, Rev. McQueen was friends with all the movers and shakers of society. He not only preached to them on Sundays, but played golf and curled with them during leisure time. He associated with *la crème de la crème* of society and had their ear on matters of importance. The year 1912 was the climax of the boom in Edmonton and thus all things seemed possible.²³ The boom made life intoxicating and McQueen must have wondered if he could hold his congregation at 1,200. But as quickly as the boom appeared, the bust followed and was made more severe by the Great War when Edmonton lost over a third of its population.²⁴

Time also began to take its toll on the structure of First Presbyterian Church which meant more and more resources had to be diverted to the upkeep of the building rather than nurturing spiritual growth. Within twenty years of completion, the church building showed signs of wear and tear. Until the 1930s, regular restoration work had been successfully undertaken without jeopardizing the evangelical and social work of the congregation. Even twenty years after construction only simple redecoration of rooms within the structure was necessary. However, these “restoration projects” continued to occur at regular intervals. The “Social Room” for example, was redecorated and refurbished in 1934²⁵ followed by an improvement to the hardwood floor of the room a decade later.²⁶ Yet again in 1960, the room was renovated. The walls, ceiling and fireplace were repaired and redecorated. The unsightly water pipes and radiators were enclosed, the floors re-finished and a valance board erected along the east and south walls. All furniture was repaired and polished; two new Axminster rugs were purchased. A work party sorted, cleaned and replaced the books on the shelves and cleaned and re-hung pictures. By November 1960, all was in order for an “at home” to take place in the newly renovated room.²⁷ Finally, in 1986, the Social Room was again restored to its original beauty. In addition, new cupboards and a dishwasher were installed in the kitchen off the room.²⁸ This is but one example of the financial and human resources of the

²³ James G. MacGregor, *A History of Alberta*, Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, [1972], 217, and 219.

²⁴ J. G. MacGregor, *Edmonton, a history*, second edition, [Edmonton]: Hurtig Publishers, [1975], 226 & 240. Edmonton never reached its 1914 population numbers until 1929.

²⁵ Kenneth Munro, *First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton: A History*, [Victoria: Trafford, 2004], 155-156.

²⁶ First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1944*, 4.

²⁷ First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1960*, 21.

²⁸ First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1986*, 6 & 10.

congregation which were required to maintain one room in the church building in good repair.

In addition to the Social Room, the minister's office and secretarial office,²⁹ Sunday School,³⁰ Arthur Newcombe Room³¹ and Wallace room³² have all undergone repeated upgrading and repairs over the last 100 years. Most important, the structure of the building itself had to be maintained. In 1943, supports were placed under the auditorium floor (later known as the Arthur Newcombe Room).³³ Then, in 1984, the wooden columns in the boiler room supporting the Arthur Newcombe Room were replaced with steel.³⁴ In addition, support work was undertaken above the Sanctuary ceiling in order to eliminate sideways pressure on the outside walls.³⁵ The following year, an extensive project was completed: three "A" frames above the Sunday School were installed to provide much needed structural support for the building. At the same time, the south-east corner of the whole structure was raised.³⁶

Despite these improvements, repairs to the church continued decade after decade. In the late 1980s, the Board decided to repair the basement floor. Old rubble had been used as a base in the original construction, thus the entire floor was excavated, new steel re-enforcement was laid and the new floor was later tiled. Volunteers took care of moving appliances and furniture, disconnecting the gas and plumbing and the re-connecting of everything once work had been finished. The "Wallace Room" was restored by 1989 with new wiring; water pipes were replaced; lighting was intensified and the room painted. The kitchen was fully restored and new washrooms for Ladies and Gentlemen with facilities for the handicapped were built.³⁷ The electrical wiring of the building has been in constant need of improvement.³⁸ Recently, electrical wiring was extended to the third floor

²⁹First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1950*, 4-5 & First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1983*, 6.

³⁰First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1953*, 4 & First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1984*, 9.

³¹First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1984*, 9 & First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report, 1991*, 3.

³²First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1950*, 4-5 & First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1982*, 3 & *Session Minutes*, 17 January 1981.

³³First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1943*, 4.

³⁴First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1984*, 9.

³⁵First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1984*, 9.

³⁶First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1985*, 6.

³⁷First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1989*, 6.

³⁸First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1957*, 6; First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1984*, 9 & First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1987*, 6.

room on the south side and the fourth floor room. The sound system in the sanctuary and elsewhere in the church have required upgrading over the years,³⁹ the roof has needed replacing every few decades⁴⁰ and the steps and doors leading into the church have necessitated repairing.⁴¹ In the last 100 years the heating system has required attention. In 1946, the Board agreed to convert the heating system from coal to gas⁴² and in 1950, a provincial inspector's report forced the boiler's replacement.⁴³

As costs of the upkeep of the building mounted, the Board of Managers attempted to find extra resources so that the structure could be kept in good condition, but at the same time, the ongoing spiritual work of the congregation could continue unabated. A partial solution to this dilemma was found by turning to the province for financial help through grants designated for historic resources. The Board of Managers was successful in its quest for these funds. On 19 November 1978, the Board succeeded in having the province of Alberta designate First Presbyterian Church an Historic Resource of the province.⁴⁴ The one drawback in taking this route for funding meant that the church could not be sold, changed or altered in any way without permission of the Minister of Culture of the province of Alberta. But at the same time, the church became eligible for grants from the provincial government to be used in the maintenance of the building and the government of Alberta made expert advice available on upkeep of the structure.⁴⁵ These government resources have helped the congregation in its attempt to balance spiritual work with maintenance on the building. For example, in 2005 the steps to the entrance of the building were repaired and a matching grant of \$71,600.00 was received from the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation.⁴⁶ This provincial money ensured that the spiritual work of the congregation would not be starved of financial sustenance.

³⁹First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1950*, 3 & *Session Minutes*, 9 January 1951; First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1960*, 33 & First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1974*, 4 & First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1975*, 6; First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1993*, 6.

⁴⁰First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1980*, 5 & First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1990*, 7; *Edmonton Journal*, 18 August 1990;

⁴¹First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1980*, 5 & First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 2005*, 5; First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 2008*, 2; First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 2010*, 3.

⁴²First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1946*, 4.

⁴³First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1949*, 6-7.

⁴⁴First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1978*, 5; *First With the News*, 9.4(October, November, December 1978), 6-8.

⁴⁵First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1978*, 5.

⁴⁶First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 2005*, 5.

The congregation had earlier learned how to use government grants judiciously through the preservation and upgrading of the 1909 Casavant organ. The first major repair of the organ was undertaken because of the urging of Arthur Newcombe who became Musical Director of the church on 4 January 1945.⁴⁷ Persuaded by Newcombe, the Session decided to rebuild and enlarge the organ in 1951 at a proposed cost of \$9,000 with an additional \$700 to rehabilitate the chimes.⁴⁸ For the most part, the funds were raised within the congregation,⁴⁹ but the congregation also took advantage of a government program reducing costs if the organ were designated as a memorial to those who had fallen in World War II.⁵⁰ Casavant Frères sent a certificate attesting to that designation. A plaque was affixed to the organ stating that it was a War Memorial and a dedication Service took place on 23 September 1951 with an organ recital performed by Dr. Charles Peaker of Toronto the following evening.⁵¹ This positive experience paved the way for the decision to accept the provincial designation of the building as an historic resource and the acceptance of government matching grants in 1978. The tapping of this source of money was deliberate on the congregation's part in order to keep the balance between structural restoration and the spiritual outreach of the church.

Since that time, the church fathers have continually sought help for the upkeep of the building from the Alberta government. For example, another project which dealt with the music of the church was partially funded by government grants. As the decade of the 1990s drew to a close, the then choir director, Kevin Heshedahl promoted the restoration of the chimes in the tower. They had not been in working condition for some time and the pigeons had found a comfortable home there. By 1998, the Tower was made secure from collapse and the offal from the pigeons was taken away in a huge industrial garbage bin. Work was then begun on the restoration of the louvers and chimes and operating mechanisms and the work completed because of a donation from a congregational member which matched the government's generosity.⁵² Finally, on Sunday, 17 September 2000, the

⁴⁷*Session Minutes*, 8 January 1945.

⁴⁸*Session Minutes*, 10 September 1951.

⁴⁹First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report, 1951*, 5.

⁵⁰*Session Minutes*, 9 January 1951.

⁵¹*Edmonton Journal*, Monday, 24 September 1951, 13 & First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1951*, 3.

⁵²First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1998*, 7.

freshly restored Chimes rang out and Rev. Fourney re-dedicated them at a “Service of Celebration to honour all those who had helped build the Church and the congregation over more than a century.”⁵³ The Chimes could be played from the console in the sanctuary or from a newly installed keyboard in the tower. Unfortunately, the Chimes cannot be heard once one enters the sanctuary, but for those outside, it provides sheer joy!⁵⁴

The third refurbishment of the organ in 2007 revealed the dilemma the congregation faces today. No government funding was required to repair and enhance the organ as a musical instrument. All of the \$300,000 was raised by the congregation for this project. The purpose of this refurbishment was undertaken so that it could be used not only for worship, but for outreach through concerts. The work done on the organ was intended to keep the original warm characteristic sound and to re-voice and re-wind some stops and replace others. Some stops were added, including a 32 foot stop in the pedal. Finally, a modern wind system and new combination system which is electric was added. The organ now is certainly one that can serve a wider variety of purposes and be used by organ societies for concerts. In addition, more than the required \$300,000 was raised. Unfortunately, the congregation is not able to raise such large sums for the ongoing Christian mission of the church.

After 100 years, the congregation is now faced with restoring the stained glass windows at a cost of over \$2 million. In addition, the fourth floor is finally being prepared for use year round. The cost of this initiative has not been presented to the congregation as yet. Such repairs and enhancements of the building were not required in 1912 and thus the congregation was able to concentrate almost solely on the Christian mission of the congregation.

At that centennial Sunday morning anniversary in June 2012, members of the congregation undoubtedly reflected on the spiritual work of the church in 1912. Then, the congregation had a splendid home from which to carry out His work in the world. First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton was the leading Presbyterian congregation in Alberta and the congregation rose to the challenge of Presbyterian religious evangelization. One of the responsibilities of leadership involved the training of ministers for the new

⁵³First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 2000*, 7.

⁵⁴First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 2001*, 13.

areas opening in the West. Consequently, McQueen was very open to the suggestion by Dr. Henry Marshall Tory, president of the University of Alberta, that the Presbyterians establish a Presbyterian Divinity College affiliated with the university. Synod agreed and the General Assembly gave its approval at its meeting in Halifax in 1910.⁵⁵ Robertson College was duly founded with McQueen on the Board of Management and on the Senate. He remained in those positions for the brief life of Robertson College which merged with the Methodist College at the time of Union. In these early years, fifty-two young ministers of the Church in the West were trained at the institution.⁵⁶ The congregation of First Presbyterian Church supported the College through an organization called *The Roberson College Guild*.⁵⁷ Church Union in 1925 brought a sudden halt to these endeavours.

Besides supporting Presbyterianism through the theological education of ministers, the congregation of First Presbyterian Church also helped establish new churches in the Edmonton area and beyond. In 1909, Robertson Presbyterian Church was organized with the help of First Presbyterian Church and a new home for the congregation dedicated in 1910.⁵⁸ Not only was this new congregation mentored by First Church members, many of them living in Edmonton's west end left First Church and joined the new congregation. A similar situation occurred on the south side with Knox Presbyterian Church. Under the leadership of McQueen, the congregation of First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton started not only these congregations, but several others as well.⁵⁹ These new churches were visible signs of the vigour of First Presbyterian Church and the leadership role in things spiritual it assumed in Alberta.

It was not only new congregations which First Church members established. The congregation helped set up "school homes" in Vegreville and Belmont to teach families with boys and girls learning the regular curriculum and mothers and fathers learning English. A Presbyterian sponsored Stony Plain

⁵⁵Edmonton *Bulletin*, Wednesday, 27 April 1910, 3.

⁵⁶A brief history of Robertson College can be found in a chapter of one of Alex Mair's books on Edmonton. "Robertson College" in Alex Mair, *Gateway City*, [Calgary]: Fifth House, [2002], 114-115. Also see John Thomas McNeill, *The Presbyterian Church in Canada 1875-1925*, Toronto: General Board, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1925, 83-84.

⁵⁷First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1912*, 28-29.

⁵⁸Harrold Morris, *The Presbyterian Church in Edmonton*, Master of Theology Thesis, Vancouver School of Theology, 1974, 45-46.

⁵⁹Raymond Grant, *Helen Learmonth's Reminiscences of Early Edmonton*, First Presbyterian Church Archives, 9.

school taught “practical lessons” about farming as well as reading writing and arithmetic.⁶⁰ Rev. McQueen had served as Protestant School Inspector for four years for the area north of Red Deer under the North-West Territorial government.⁶¹ Presbyterians also sponsored hospitals at Vegreville and Lamont. The Women’s Home Missionary Society was very adept at working with new immigrants and helping new congregations in mission fields within Alberta. For example, the Women’s Home Missionary Society donated a communion service to Rev. Forbes who went to work in the Grande Prairie area in 1910.⁶² This group supported the Bonnyville and Cold Lake hospitals from 1917 until 1925. In 1938, the group helped equip and run a hospital at Rocky Mountain House.⁶³ A Foreign Missionary Society was formed within the congregation to work in areas beyond Canada’s borders. In 1947, Miss Hazel Reaveley from the congregation was sent as the first ambassador of Christ to go to India under the auspices of First Presbyterian Church.⁶⁴ The Women’s Missionary Society remains an active organization in the church in 2012, although numbers and energy have diminished from those early days when members showed spark and energy within their new 1912 church building.

Another organization whose presence within the congregation over the past 100 years helped spread the gospel was the Sunday School. It was thriving in 1912 and so large in the early years of the 1912 church that it split into several groups or “Branches” and classes were held in public schools as well as the church proper.⁶⁵ Today it is a shadow of its former self but still very active. The report to the congregation in 2008 indicated that there were approximately twelve children in all areas of the Church School⁶⁶ and that number remains about the same today with three youth from First Church attending *Canada 2012*, a conference for Presbyterian youth which was held at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario in July of this year. Although the Church School and youth groups are not flourishing, the members of the congregation through the Session have expressed a determination to continue to minister to the children and youth of the church. To help keep

⁶⁰Raymond Grant, *Helen Learmonth’s Reminiscences of Early Edmonton*, First Presbyterian Church Archives, 6.

⁶¹Kenneth Munro, *First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton: A History*, [Victoria: Trafford, 2004], 41.

⁶²Kenneth Munro, *First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton: A History*, [Victoria: Trafford, 2004], 66-67.

⁶³Kenneth Munro, *First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton: A History*, [Victoria: Trafford, 2004], 67.

⁶⁴First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1947*, 3.

⁶⁵Kenneth Munro, *First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton: A History*, [Victoria: Trafford, 2004], 90-91.

⁶⁶First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 2008*, 9-10.

the youth active, the youth ministry is jointly conducted in co-operation with other Presbyterian Churches in the city Edmonton and a newly hired Church School co-ordinator is injecting a new-fired spirit into this area of spiritual life of the younger children, and indeed, is already attracting more of them to Church School

In the 1980s, the church began two major outreach projects which have continued to this day: one was to help the Edmonton food bank distribute food to the needy⁶⁷ and the second was the establishment of a refugee committee to sponsor refugees⁶⁸ and to help the government in bringing refugees over to Canada. Both of these undertakings are more recent in origin and help with the social justice aspect of Presbyterian life in the city of Edmonton.

Other groups within the congregation have continued from early times to the present, but these groups have been more social than spiritual. For example, the Ladies Aid has helped decorate various areas of the church and is still active today, but there is nothing particularly evangelical about the organization. There have been many other groups such as the Craft Group and the Burns suppers in January which have been sponsored by the church and held on the premises. Many of these groups have come and gone with time and the aging of the congregation. The Board of Managers and Session continue to encourage more spiritual growth within the congregation. With the congregation eating into the principal of its endowments, the church is surviving and attempting to react with very slender means to necessary changes in society which require Christian undertakings. The dilemma of the congregation is to discover the balance between spending on the building and on the Christian mission of the church at the same time. Often, the building seems to be a very heavy weight on the balance scales. Yet, through ingenuity, the congregation has managed to bring these two seemingly opposite poles of attraction together to support both structural maintenance and Christian endeavour through judicious use of the church building in promoting Christian outreach.

⁶⁷First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1983*, 5. First Presbyterian Church joined the Food Bank group in the fall of 1983 and have continued to help the Edmonton Food Bank organization ever since that time.

⁶⁸First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1986*, 9. See also Kenneth Munro, *First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton: A History*, [Victoria: Trafford, 2004], 474-481.

The Church building has also been the site of numerous activities within the Edmonton community which have produced funds beyond the regular contributions of members. For example, the Christian presence of the Presbyterian community in Edmonton was reinforced when the first state funeral ever held in the province of Alberta took place at First Presbyterian Church. On 17 March 1937, the Lieutenant-Governor of Alberta, His Honour Philip Primrose died in office. Since he was the first representative of the Crown to die in office, he was accorded a state funeral and because he was a Presbyterian, the province held his funeral at First Presbyterian Church. The funeral service itself was conducted by D. F. Cameron, Librarian of the University of Alberta, assisted by the Rev. Dr. Andrew Osborn of First Presbyterian Church.⁶⁹ Other important funerals, not connected with our congregation have been held in the church building. The Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, attended the Memorial Service of the president of the Luscar Coal Company, Sir David Mitchell, when he died in 1983.⁷⁰ Then, when his successor, Mary-Jean Mitchell Green died in August 1990 and a Memorial Service was held at First Presbyterian Church, both former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and former premier Peter Lougheed attended along with 800 friends and relatives from around the world.⁷¹ These religious events brought national attention to First Presbyterian Church and its Christian presence even though the majority of funds received as gifts from the participating families went to support the building.

Other cultural organizations and business groups not directly connected with First Presbyterian Church, have held meetings, concerts and educational activities at the church which have also brought needed funds into church coffers and furthered the Christian mission of the congregation. For example, during World War II, some women in the congregation established a Red Cross Unit at the church with Mrs. Lillian Bailey as convener.⁷² Following World War II, controversy erupted within the congregation over whether to welcome community groups to use the church facilities. In 1949, the request by the Young People's Society of the Church which wanted to sponsor a series of symphony concerts by the Edmonton Philharmonic Society in the Church Auditorium was turned down by Session.⁷³ Yet within

⁶⁹*Edmonton Journal*, Friday, 19 March 1937, 1 & 13; *Edmonton Journal*, Monday, 22 March 1937 15 (pictures of casket leaving church).

⁷⁰First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1983*, 5.

⁷¹Kenneth Munro, *First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton: A History*, [Victoria: Trafford, 2004], 473.

⁷²Kenneth Munro, *First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton: A History*, [Victoria: Trafford, 2004], 204-205

⁷³*Session Minutes*, 14 February 1949.

weeks of this decision, Session granted the Royal Alexandra Hospital the use of the church facilities for graduation services!⁷⁴ Clearly those arguing that the sanctuary could only be used for religious purposes had set a precedence which could not be overturned. Thereafter, the church building was open for the use of community groups which conformed to the rules and regulations set out by Session. Monies gleaned from these organizations have helped provide monies for both spiritual work and building upkeep.

Although progress in this regard was slow, by 1967 Session had reiterated that service in Christ in the community involved the use of church facilities. Several groups made use of the church building that year alone: the Rotary Carol Festival, the Edmonton's Boy's Choir, the Retired Teachers' Association, a group of Writers known as "Words Unlimited" and others.⁷⁵ In 1970, the Young Women's AA Group held meetings at the church.⁷⁶ In 1979, Session approved the rental of the organ for practice sessions for students from The King's College and that institution held its opening convocation ceremony at First Presbyterian Church. The Sons of Scotland Benevolent Society and the Salvation Army also made use of the building.⁷⁷ In addition, Session approved the use of both the Arthur Newcombe Room and the sanctuary as practice space for the professional Pro-Coro Choir.⁷⁸ In the last quarter century, the church facilities have been used by a wide variety of organizations from aerobic dance movement classes⁷⁹ to the Festival City Winds. Wendy Grasdahl is the artistic director and principal conductor of this group with the advanced band having its home at First Presbyterian Church. Workshops and recitals have been held at the church in addition to concerts by such organizations as the *Sundays at Three organ concert series*. These are but a few of the "organizations outside the church" which use First Presbyterian Church facilities and provide limited funds for both spiritual undertakings and building repair.

While initiatives undertaken by the First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton to connect with the community are commendable, almost none of the honoraria

⁷⁴Session Minutes, 4 April 1949.

⁷⁵First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1967*, 6.

⁷⁶Kenneth Munro, *First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton: A History*, [Victoria: Trafford, 2004], 337.

⁷⁷First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1979*, 4.

⁷⁸First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1980*, 4.

⁷⁹First Presbyterian Church, Edmonton, *Annual Report 1981*, 4.

or donations given to the church by those groups is designated for the work of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Some money does find its way to the national Church through Presbyterians Sharing. However, none is designated to Presbyterian World Service and Development, or the Archives or *The Presbyterian Record*, for example. Only funds collected on special Sundays for this specific purpose are sent to this cause. Since no budget line in the church's budget indicates this amount, no one knows exactly how much First Presbyterian Church contributes to this cause. Most of the funds collected through gifts from these community organizations is spent on upkeep of the church or spent on the ongoing administrative costs of the 200-member congregation. In the struggle for limited funds and volunteer labour, the balance appears to be tipping in the direction of the building upkeep rather than towards the ongoing work of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

With the help of the choir and minister, this beautiful and magnificent building has inspired worship since 1912. However, now with a fraction of the membership of 1912 and with the needs of upkeep of the building more pressing than ever, this structure is taking a toll on the congregation and its ability to do the work of God. Nevertheless, defiant as always, the congregation is struggling to carry out the church's evangelization and spiritual work in the context of a very secular twenty-first century. As fewer people with less money join the congregation to replace older, wealthier members who depart, this balance between repairs and upkeep of the building and the work of the Lord becomes more and more difficult. The 100th anniversary of the church building raised hope in the congregation that members will be able to overcome this dilemma. Only the future will reveal whether this hope is satisfied.