



NEWSLETTER

Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society
Fall 2025

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REFLECTIONS AT THE 130TH ANNIVERSARY OF FENWICK CHURCH OF CHRIST

By Glen Robins

I suspect that most of you are probably not familiar with the evangelical megachurch network called Mars Hill that was based in Seattle, WA. I say was, because Mars Hill formally dissolved on January 1st, 2015.

How large was Mars Hill? Over the span of 15 satellite locations across the Pacific Northwest, at its peak, Mars Hill had a weekly average Sunday attendance of 12,329 worshipers, with 6,489 of those worshipers identified as "members" of the Mars Hill network. Mars Hill garnered world-wide attention for their innovative use of the internet and social media to distribute the sermons of pastor Mark Driscoll.

How old was Mars Hill? When the network of churches folded in 2015, the whole movement was just shy of 20 years old. In the aftermath of its collapse, much of Mars Hill's decline has been traced to abusive and controlling leadership, and as a result, the faith of a few, if not many, was perhaps irreparably disturbed and abandoned. While there were indeed bright moments along the way -- many people, I believe, came to a genuine and saving faith in Jesus Christ through the ministry of Mars Hill -- eventually, and ultimately, Mars Hill could not keep pace to maintain its status as one of the largest evangelical churches in the world.

After reflecting on the rise and fall of Mars Hill, and recognizing, too, that many megachurches fail to reach even the golden jubilee threshold, (and don't mishear me: this is not to say that I don't want any megachurches to do well), I nevertheless humbly wonder if leaders from those churches look at congregations like, perhaps, the Fenwick church of Christ, and ask themselves, "How do they do it?" Maybe they don't; but as I was preparing for this afternoon, it was a question that I gave thought to. And the answer, I think, was humbling.

The answer to how a local church can keep its doors open for 130 years, I would submit to you, is twofold. First, ecclesial longevity does not lie in spectacular newcomer programs, weekly, revival-style preaching, or cutting-edge media technology. Now, that is not to say that any of those things are wrong, or that they don't have their place; they can, and they do. But a local church's lastingness does not depend or rely on those things. And I think we probably know that. So, what does it depend on? It rather depends on relatively boring things:

- 1) Intentional and frequent worship
- 2) Intentional and frequent teaching
- 3) Intentional and frequent fellowship; and
- 4) Intentional and frequent good works.

Again, don't mishear me: this is not to say that any of these are inherently or necessarily boring. But they, in the history of the church, and in the history of the Fenwick church, they are not novel. They are foundationally Biblical. And they work.

Think of it this way: I, myself, only remember maybe 3 or 4 sermons from my childhood and my youth. And at that, I can only remember just snippets. I remember a sermon where George Hipwell was once preaching. I remember a sermon that Don preached on grace. I remember the odd sermon from a gospel meeting preacher. And it's possible that remembering only 3 or 4 sermons may be alarming to some of you. But I would submit that remembering ought not to be the gauge of success. Because if we only go back as recently as the month of March, I would wager that none of you could remember more than 3 or 4 of the meals that you ate over the course of that month. And yet, none of us are alarmed by that. But perhaps that's the point: you don't remember what you ate, and perhaps you don't need to; but you know -- and you show the signs -- that you had been consistently and adequately fed and nourished.

But there's another part to this answer of longevity. And that second part is simply God's grace. None of us go a single day without relying on it. None of us go a single year. And the same is true of a local assembly. And identifying and remembering these points of grace should be part of such a celebration: in some sense, remembering God's grace -- rather than elevating our obedience to a simple formula -- remembering God's grace ought to be the fuel for worship on a day like today. Awe and wonder that God has tarried with us for so long. As the psalmist says in Psalm 8, "Who are we, that you should be mindful of us?"

In the same way, however, 130 years is, by God's grace, not to be the end. An assembly of the Lord's church is not meant to merely look backwards at such an occasion but also forwards. Forwards, because each assembly of followers of Jesus has a mission: a local, regional mission in the greater, cosmic work of the kingdom of heaven. And so, as we gather today to celebrate an anniversary, let us also gather to renew ourselves in several ways:

1) Let us renew ourselves by humbling ourselves before the LORD. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning...." One hundred and thirty-one years will not be captured by our own strength. And so, assuming a posture of humility is key.

2) Let us renew ourselves by gratitude. Today ought to be marked by gratitude. Gratitude for those who have come before us. Gratitude for faithfulness. Gratitude for the ways in which God has intervened and done what we could never have done in our own strength or wisdom, in individual lives, in families, in the leadership of the church, in orchestrating touchpoints with the community. Today is a day for thanksgiving.

3) Let us renew ourselves by prayer. A church's days are numbered if they are not ever convicted by the urgent need to seek the LORD in faith. And prayer in which there is a real sense of dependence, a real sense of being insufficient on our own; but also, prayer in which there is a real sense of hope and faith, of asking much, rather than asking little, and trust that God hears, and that he will respond.

4) Let us renew ourselves by repentance, both collectively, and individually. One of the things that can have a pernicious effect in a local congregation over an extended period of time is not necessarily practices, but subtle attitudes and beliefs -- things that are unspoken, and perhaps even unperceived by a church's very own members. This is a challenge for virtually every congregation, and it requires the courage of humbling ourselves, and even asking God in prayer to make clear what needs to be changed -- which he is able to do in such a way that those asking are able to hear, and see. But as Reformed preacher Sinclair Ferguson says, "Repentance is a characteristic of the whole life, not the action of a single moment."

5) Let us renew ourselves by extending ourselves in faith. It is no secret that the church in the Western world -- and when I say church, I'm speaking on a scale larger than just the movement of churches of Christ -- the church in the Western world is facing a crisis of loss of membership. Congregations of varying names and beliefs are closing all around us, including some from our own tribe. But a lack of seats in the pews should not be mistaken as a sign of a lack of faith in the spiritual. Perhaps some of you are aware of a rise in belief in witchcraft, in UFOs, in Eastern, pagan religions. People are aware that there is a world beyond that which we can merely see and touch. Many people, however, do not know the truth of that world. And many people are discovering the fear, and the oppression, and the darkness of that part of that world. And so, while the Fenwick church of Christ has, in many good ways, remained the same over 130 years, the world around us has changed, and the primary issues facing the

religious world 130 years ago are not the same primary issues facing the religious world today. And yet, if the issues are not the same, one thing is: people are ready to hear good news. If you are a member here at the Fenwick church of Christ, let me ask you this: is it because this is a place and a people of good news?

On Thursday evening, in conversation with a local believer from another church in Stoney Creek, I mentioned that I grew up in Fenwick, and her response was, "Is that up north?" Now, some people have a ready, or at least a passing, familiarity with Fenwick, but for many others, when I say, "Fenwick", they simply smile and nod, as their face betrays that, in their minds, they are searching frantically for the nearest major metropolitan point of reference. Even less surprising, then, is a familiarity with the Fenwick church of Christ.

But I grew up with the Fenwick church of Christ. And I am proud to confess that, in a very personal way, I believe I know it well. I certainly know the building: the ceiling tiles; the bathrooms; the baptistry wallpaper; the old broiler-style heaters up on the walls. But beyond that, I have vivid childhood memories of the life of this church, that fundamentally shaped me, and for which I am grateful. I have memories of Biblical instruction, and spiritual discipline. I have memories of (what I call) practice and ritual: I remember the giant tree of many colours on the auditorium back wall which displayed all of the books of the Bible that many of us had read in a concerted effort to read the Bible in a year. I remember the back classroom having been transformed into the pitch black belly of the whale in which we met Jonah during VBS. I remember sitting beside Richard Maddeaux and trying to mimic his bass line during the hymns. I have memories of fellowship at George and Fay's, in Aunt Grace's basement, at the Lion's Hall, at Dandelion Acres, at the Gilbert's lighting party, even at Louis and Nellie Pauls' apartment. I have memories of your charity and generosity, of which I am grateful, as I navigated life away from home in Waterloo while attending Great Lakes Bible College. I have memories. And so, while others may have no idea where Fenwick is, and even less, who the Fenwick church of Christ is, I proudly declare that I can't forget.

And so, my prayer is that God may continue to sustain you, and guide you, and strengthen you to continue doing for each other, and for the community, what you so confidently and competently did for me in my formation as a follower of Jesus. May God bless you.

Additional documents pertaining to the history of Fenwick Church of Christ are available in the CCCHS archive. Thank you to Glen Robins and the leadership at the Fenwick Church of Christ for permission to publish this address.

RALPH PERRY: ONE MORE SERMON

By Margaret Hibbard



Ralph Perry, September 28, 2025
Photo Credit: Vern Hibbard

The Fenwick Church of Christ has a custom to offer their preacher a break from his preaching duties on the last Sunday of each month. The men take turns filling the pulpit in his place.

On September 28, 2025, Ralph Perry, 97 years old, long-time preacher and missionary, took his turn to preach in place of his grandson Cody Glover. The congregation was greatly blessed by his lesson about Heaven. The service was live-streamed and has been uploaded to YouTube. It can be viewed at this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fziuvNnqOi0>

The CCCHS Living Legacies program also includes a video of Ralph telling about his life and his ministry. It can be

viewed at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Df8I0Uwe7Ww>.

The CCCHS is grateful for Ralph and Myrna Perry's permission to include this article and photo.

GETTING TO KNOW THE CCCHS BOARD: SHELLEY JACOBS



Shelley Jacobs

Shelley's roots are in Churches of Christ in Western Canada. She grew up on the campus of Western Christian College when the school was located in Weyburn, SK. In the late 1990s she became interested in the history of Churches of Christ in Canada and began collecting materials and writing about the history of the churches in the West. Shelley has served as Library Director and adjunct faculty for Western Christian College (WCC) when the school was located in Regina, SK. She transitioned the WCC archives collection to Saskatchewan Archives after the school closed in 2012. She has also served as Archivist for the Disciples of Christ Historical Society in Bethany, WV. Shelley holds a Bachelor of Theology degree from Western Christian College and a Master of Arts degree in Historical Theology from Harding School of Theology. Her Master's thesis focused on J. C. Bailey's work in Western Canada. Since 2022 Shelley has served on the Board of Directors for Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society and serves as an archival consultant to the CCCHS.

SAVE THE DATE: 2026 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: Saturday, August 15, 2026

Our annual meeting will take place on Sat., Aug. 15, 2026, from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm on the campus of Great Lakes Christian High School in Beamsville, Ontario. Coffee and snacks will be provided. Bring your own lunch.

WHAT SORT OF DOCUMENTS SHOULD CONGREGATIONS SAVE FOR POSTERITY (FOR THE ARCHIVE)?

Preserving Congregational Documents Guideline Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society Fall 2025

The following guideline will help congregations collect, sort, and retain documents useful for archival and historical research purposes:

Governance Documents:

- Founding documents, property deeds, bylaws
- Board/business meeting minutes, especially those that record staff or leadership changes, or changes to bylaws
- Audited financial statements, year-end financial summaries (not day-to-day financial records)
- Documents recording significant congregational decisions including: overview of the decision, details of the decision-making process(es), results/outcomes/decisions
- Mission, Vision, Value statements
- Church directory and/or membership records
- Birth, baptismal, marriage, death certificates and/or records

Congregational documents

- Congregational histories
- Newspaper articles pertaining to congregational history
- Digital copies of church bulletins and/or weekly newsletters saved on a thumb drive. We do not accept paper copies of bulletins and/or weekly newsletters.

Staff Documents

- Lists or timelines of staff members, elders, deacons, and years served.
- Biographical information pertaining to staff, elders, and deacons

Outreach/Ministry Documents

- Records pertaining to congregational special events, missions, or service groups
- Committee meeting minutes, membership lists, scope of committee, etc.

Photos

- Photos, in either paper or digital format, preferably with accompanying documentation (year, location, names of persons in the photo, etc.). Digital photos should be saved to a thumb drive.

The above list is representative of the type of materials congregations should consider sending to the Canadian Churches of Christ Historical Society. If you have questions about items that are not on this list, please contact us to discuss the items in question.

The CCCHS is grateful to the Disciples of Christ Historical Society for sharing their “DCHS Guidelines for Organizing Congregational Records,” on which this Guideline is based.

BOARD NEWS

Congratulations to CCCHS board member David Ford, who successfully defended his dissertation on September 2, 2025, at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS) in the greater Chicago area. David’s dissertation is titled, “Uncommon Grace: Nature and Grace in the Theology of Thomas and Alexander Campbell, Walter Scott, and Barton W. Stone, 1790-1874.” David’s dissertation committee included Dr. Douglas Sweeney (Dean, Beeson Divinity School), Dr. John Woodbridge (Research Professor of Church History and the History of Christian Thought, TEDS), Dr. Douglas Foster (ACU, Retired), Dr. Eric Tully (Director of Theological Studies, TEDS).

Board Members for the 2025/2026 Fiscal Year

Chair: Murray Hibbard
(Terms 1 & 2 Aug 20/16 expired 2022)
(Appointed Aug 20/22 - expired 2023)
(Term 1 Aug 19/23 expires 2026)

Vice-Chair: Shelley Jacobs
(Term 1 Aug 20/22 - expires 2025)

Secretary / Treasurer: Margaret Hibbard
(Terms 1 & 2 Aug 18/12 - expired 2018)
(Appointed Financial Officer Aug 18/18 - expired 2020)
(Appointed Aug 31/20 - expired 2021)
(Term 1 Aug 21/21 expired 2024)
(Term 2 Aug 17/24 expires 2027)

Paul Moore
(Appointed Aug 19/23 expired 2024)
(Term 1 Aug 17/24 expires 2027)

David Ford
(Appointed Feb 6/23 - expired 2023)
(Term 1 Aug 19/23 expires 2026)

Correspondence

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Welland, ON L3C 7G1
Email: ccchs1@gmail.com

Archives Repository

4875 King Street, Beamsville, ON L3J 2J1

Archives Consultant

Shelley Jacobs
shelley.jacobs@gmail.com

Membership

\$25.00 per year is due on July 1st.
Dues may be paid by cheque to
CCCHS, c/o Margaret Hibbard,
47 Madison Crt W, Welland, ON L3C 7G1
Or by E-transfer to donations.ccchs1@gmail.com.
Please provide password under separate cover.

CANADIAN CHURCHES OF CHRIST HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP REGISTRATION	
Name:	Phone:
Mailing Address:	Dues 2025/2026:
Email:	Donation:
I am an active member of the () congregation.	Cash ☐ Cheque ☐ E-transfer ☐ Total Amount Paid _____
Membership dues are \$25.00 per year. The membership year is July 1 st to June 30 th . Registration & membership can be mailed to CCCHS c/o Margaret Hibbard, 47 Madison Crt W, Welland, ON L3C 7G1	