

St. Andrew's Anglican celebrates 225 years

By Joanne McDonald
For NewsNow

Many hands have held open the doors of welcome at St. Andrew's Anglican Church.

And for more than two centuries the message shared with the Grimsby community has always been the same - Glory to God from generation to generation.

Long before the Great Western Railway ran through Grimsby, before the War of 1812, even before the town got its current name, a small log church, a first in the peninsula, was built at The Forty on land given by Col. Robert Nelles who came to Canada during the American Revolution.

St. Andrew's is honouring its 225th anniversary - 1794 to 2019 - and everyone is invited to celebrate the milestone Saturday, May 25, 2-4 p.m. during a 'Celebratory Tea' steeped in church history.

"I sit in the pews and I reflect on the many people who have been here before and how the church brought that same spiritual blessing to them," says longtime church member Gwen Medcalf. "To us, as well as them, it's a feeling of family and love. It's my family."

May 25 will be a full afternoon with tea and tours and talk of the United Empire Loyalist pioneers who brought their families and their faith - building community and three churches including the 1794 log church replaced by a frame structure in 1804 and the existing picturesque stone church built in 1819.

Loyalist Andrew Pettit came to Canada in 1787 and initially led services in his home before the first church was built. He died the year the stone church was built and it is in his honour that the parish is named. After years of waiting for a settled clergyman, The Reverend William Sampson was the first parish priest to serve the community from 1817-1822.

He sustained a gunshot wound while hunting. The injury was not properly treated and he died three days following the accident.

Buried in the cemetery are many ancestors of the families who founded The Forty, the epitaphs on each headstone a bridge to the past.

"We have suffered together and we have worked hard together and it's been that way since the foundation of the parish," said St. Andrew's rector, The Venerable Max Woolaver.

Any tone of suffering turns quickly to celebration as Rev. Woolaver shares the collective joy and activity that fills the parish hall every day.

At the moment, there are about 110 regular church attendees, a number that fills the building with as many as 500 during special holidays and events.

"We're doing more than holding our own in a very challenging age. We have to get more in touch with the Gospel that brought us to this place and more importantly, apply the Gospel that we have received to the present moment in which we are living," Rev. Woolaver said.

"We need to emphasize what the church is doing in this community." God may have rested on the seventh day, but St. Andrew's

is a hub of activity that fills every day of the week.

"We have hundreds of people move through this parish hall on an ordinary week," Rev. Woolaver said.

Sunday services are at 8 a.m. and 10 a.m.; Tuesday at 7 p.m., 'Revive', a program of spiritual formation, is an intimate, contemplative and

restorative experience each week; Wednesday at 7 p.m. is 'Night Prayers' a quiet celebration of the Eucharist in an informal way; Thursday at 10 a.m. is Bible study and a celebration of the Eucharist.

From a busy pre-school program to cancer support, free trade coffee, Girls Guides and euchre games the last Friday of each month, the parish never stops. And St. Andrew's has become a healing place in its own quiet way with Shiastu therapy,

yoga lessons and tai chi instruction.

The Right Reverend Susan Bell, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Niagara is the 12th Bishop of Niagara and first woman to serve in the role.

The Grimsby church "is also a conduit or a doorway to engage with the complexity of our world. There are lots of folks who want help mother earth, refugees....," Rev. Woolaver said, citing a few of the good works.

From the 1994 Bicentennial 'A History of St. Andrew's Anglican Church' compiled by Alfreda (Bingle) Jeffries: "What a precious possession old St. Andrew's is to the whole church. Long may it continue to be spared."

The words, penned to the Rector, Rev. George Robert Field Grout in 1946, expressed the sentiments of generations.

"There is a grandness, a tragic beauty to life, and we have plenty of moments, especially with our own children, when we recognize the presence of God, even though not all of us would describe these moments as such. We feel that we - all of us - are supposed to be here, that we are part of a bigger story," quotes Rev. Woolaver, reading from words by Ryan Tahmaseb, parent, teacher, author and editor at Spiritual Parent.

"Those words are as meaningful today," Rev. Woolaver said.

Saturday, May 25, the church will be open to the public from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. to view a 'festival of flowers' the exquisite stained glass windows and the church's many unique architectural features. There will be an organ recital at 4 p.m. and tours of the cemetery throughout the day.

There are \$10 packages of stained glass greeting cards commemorating the 225th anniversary available at the church office. Anniversary T-shirts are on presale at \$20. St. Andrew's has also embarked on a music ministry initiative for its 225th year 'From Here and Bach' and invites people of all ages to bring their voices, instruments and enthusiasm to enrich their lives together with all forms of music. Tickets are \$20, in advance only. Call 905-945-8894.



The community of St. Andrew's Anglican Church invites all to celebrate the church's 225th anniversary Saturday, May 25. Outside the picturesque stone church at 154 Main St. W is St. Andrew's rector The Venerable Max Woolaver and long-time church member Gwen Medcalf. McDonald - Photo