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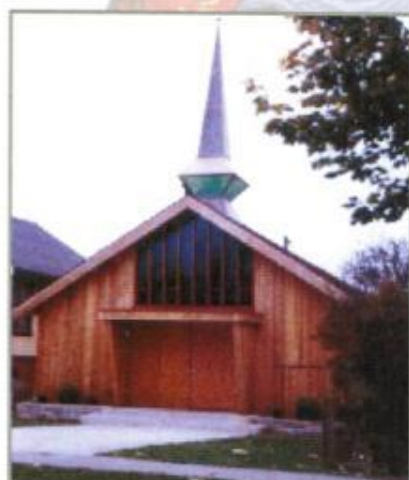


years in service

First Hungarian Presbyterian Church

(Calvin, Vancouver, 1955)

2791 EAST 27TH AVENUE
VANCOUVER, BC. V5R 1N4
CANADA



The Illustrated History

*of the First Hungarian
Presbyterian Church
(Calvin, Vancouver 1955)*

on the occasion of its

50th Anniversary

January 28, 1955. – January 28, 2005.

SOLI DEO GLORIA – TO GOD ONLY BE GLORY

2791 East 27th Avenue,
VANCOUVER, BC. CANADA

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1.

THE BEGINNING

- THE MINISTRY OF REV. DR. KÁLMÁN DÓKA AND REV. DR. FREDERICK METZGER.

Those who come to Western Canada now, can not even imagine what difficulties and hardships newcomers faced and had to overcome in the early days, who arrived at our shores in search for a better life and a new existence.

The Hungarian immigrants to Canada have been officially registered since 1886, which marks the first Hungarian settlement in Canada.

Hungarians began to settle in Vancouver around 1926. Most of them found employments as labourers in sawmills and other industries. But there were also entrepreneurs among them, who established profitable businesses over the years.

In 1935, these newcomers founded the first **Hungarian Literary Society** that eventually evolved into the present **Hungarian Cultural Society of Greater Vancouver**.

The first Hungarian Reformed (Presbyterian) church service was held in 1938, by Rev. Dr. Kálmán Dóka, at the time the minister of the Calgary Hungarian Presbyterian Church. It was his dream to establish a Hungarian congregation in Western Canada that would become the Mission Centre for the Edmonton, Lethbridge, Vancouver and Victoria churches.



Nt. Dr. Kálmán Dóka in
1952

The birth of the first Hungarian Reformed congregation is linked to the name of Rev. Dóka. He was initially school principal in Kipling, Saskatchewan. Receiving a call for the ministry, he enrolled at Knox College in Toronto. While on a visit to Abbotsford, B.C. in 1945, the local Hungarian Presbyterians approached him with the suggestion that by the time he completes his studies and is ordained, they will have collected the necessary funds to build a church and call him as their first minister.

The simple church was completed in 1948, with the assistance of the local Presbytery. Dr. Dóka arrived in Abbotsford with his family in August of 1950. This was the very first Hungarian congregation in B.C. The first Roman Catholic Church was founded only years later.

One day, Mr. Erős, a Hungarian Presbyterian from Vancouver asked Rev. Dóka to confirm eight local Hungarian children in the faith. The event duly took place on May 13, 1951, at the Mount Pleasant Presbyterian Church in Vancouver. As a direct consequence, he began to hold services once a month for 20-22 Hungarians of various denominations, at the Hungarian Literary Society. Recognizing the need for a permanent place of worship, Rev. Dóka urged them to raise funds for a church. He began negotiating with Mrs. Ledingham, the wife of the minister of the Mount Pleasant Church. In the end, Mrs. Ledingham gave over, as a gift, one of the lesser church buildings for the use of the Hungarian congregation.

As a direct result of this development, the Presbyterian Mission Board of Canada transferred the Rev. Frederick Metzger, founder of the Kalvin Hungarian Presbyterian Church in Edmonton, to serve the Vancouver congregation. Rev. Metzger arrived with his wife Margaret and their children in September of 1951, and began the building up of the congregation.



Nt. Dr. Kálmán Tóth in
1952

2. THE CONGREGATION BEGINS TO TAKE SHAPE

- THE MINISTRY OF REV. FREDERICK METZGER

My induction was conducted on October 23, 1953, by the Presbytery of Westminster. This was followed by 14 months of intensive congregation-building work.

The **Kálvin Evangelical Reformed Church of Vancouver** was founded by the unanimous decision of 63 Hungarian Canadians. In due time the first three Elders were elected, the **Board of Managers** and the **Bethlen Kata Ladies' Auxiliary** was formed. Twenty-five Hungarian children attended Bible study classes at the Manse, taught by Mrs. Margaret Metzger. As recorded in photos by our "New Life" monthly Newsletter, the Annual Dinners were generally attended by 120 people regardless of denominational affiliation.

October, 1956

Who would have thought that our small Hungarian congregation would, by the Grace of God, become strong enough to be able to rescue and support thousands of our countrymen!

At the outbreak of the 1956 Revolution, the British Columbia congregation was the only solid local Hungarian organization. There not being as yet a Hungarian Roman Catholic Church, the Abbotsford and Vancouver Hungarian Presbyterian congregations provided the first interpreters and founded the first refugee assistance centres. Dr. Kálmán Dóka, president of the Hungarian Refugee Assistance Council, negotiated with the Canadian Government in Ottawa for the Abbotsford airport to be used for planes arriving with Hungarian refugees. Within a year, 6000 refugees found here temporary shelter, were fed and provided with clothing.

The Manse also became a refugee haven. At times we had 30 people sleeping in every nook and cranny. Mrs. Metzger had to cook not only for the family, but at times for a veritable army! The bus used to deposit 50-60 refugees at our doorstep daily, from where we managed to transfer them to generous Canadian families. In the meantime, Mrs. Metzger, a native Canadian, had to learn Hungarian, whether she liked it or not, for I was in Austria making the rounds of the refugee camps.

This came about when a well-meaning judge, The Hon. Alex A. Manson had the capital idea that I should go to Vienna to bring back Presbyterian families. With the permission of the congregation and the Presbytery, I was transported by a CP Air special flight to Vienna as its sole passenger. As a representative of the Canadian Government, the Canadian Ambassador authorized me to issue 1800 visas to Canada. During the winter of 1957, I returned with two shiploads of Hungarian refugees. Afterwards they bestowed on me the name: "The Moses of the Hungarians", i.e. who brought them out of Communist bondage. Among the passengers were four Presbyterian ministers: Rev. Attila Csiszár, Rev. John Dávid, Rev. László Fejes and Rev. Ödön Seres, with their respective families.

The Second Church

Due to the considerable increase in the numbers of the congregation – as a direct result of the newcomers – the Presbytery gave permission for the sale of our small church and for the purchase of a larger one, a 140-seat church on 19th Ave., near Cambie Street.

The building was completely renovated by 30 members of the congregation. The church was consecrated at Pentecost, on June 9, 1958. *"...and I will bless thee... and thou shalt be a blessing."* (1 Moses 12:2.)

Our English language classes were attended by 528 strong. We were able to provide social assistance to more than 2000 of our countrymen. The Ladies' Auxiliary collected and sent 5000 lb. of clothing to Europe to the refugee camps.

The Vancouver congregation was able to find accommodations for 1300 Hungarians refugees, regardless of their religious affiliations.

In 1961-62 our membership rose from 86 to 106. Together with supporting members and children, the collective membership exceeded 350.

Ten years has passed, which were "*...in thy sight but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.*" (Psalms 90:4). By Spring of 1963, my church-founding time came to an end. Our Lord called me to a new congregation and entrusted the care of the Vancouver congregation to others: "*For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. For other foundations can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" (1 Corinthians 3:9, 11.)

3.

THE THIRD CHURCH

THE MINISTRY OF REV. SÁNDOR MÉSZÁROS

Rev. Mészáros was a student at the Budapest Theological College at the time of the 1956 Revolution. As so many others, he too, took the opportunity to seek freedom, and eventually ended up in the Netherlands.

He continued his studies there; and after graduation was involved in missionary work. During his stay in Holland Rev. Mészáros got married and they immigrated to Canada, where his credentials were recognized by the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

1964 saw the move from the 19th Ave. to the present location on East 27th Ave. The former church, although spacious and nicely renovated, did not have adequate space for a church hall where to hold Sunday school, luncheons and dinners, and other events.

Rev. Mészáros served the Calvin Church from 1963 until 1967.

4.

NEW AND RENEWED SERVICES

THE TENURE OF THE REV. ATTILA CSISZÁR JANUARY 1, 1968 – SEPTEMBER 1, 1976

Towards the end of 1967, Dr. Doing, Secretary of the Mission Board of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, paid me a visit to enquire whether I would be willing to serve as pastor of the Calvin Hungarian Evangelical Reformed Church in Vancouver, BC. I accepted the call and began to serve on January 1, 1968.

I was inducted on the 4th of January in the presence of the members of the Westminster Presbytery and the congregation of the Calvin Church.

My chief aim as pastor was the spreading of the Gospel and to live by its message in everyday life. I began visiting the members of the congregation to establish personal relationships.

In order to present an opportunity for the congregation to hear the Word of God from other ministers as well, we organized annual Fall Gospel Evenings in conjunction with an Annual Dinner, which remained a tradition ever since.

Although the Church experienced many difficulties over the years, by God's special Grace we weathered them all; the Church was saved, and is still going strong.

During the years I served the congregation, we endeavored to develop and maintain a friendly relationship with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters in Christ, as well, with the Hungarian Cultural Society of Vancouver. We collaborated and attended each other's events.

In 1973, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the founding of the Church with a special dinner held at the Hungarian Cultural Society. Our Guest Speaker was The Rev. Kálmán Dóka.

I retired in 1976. Although I encountered many problems and difficulties over the years; but with the Almighty's help if I ever could be a good shepherd in His hand may the Glory and Honor be to God!

Rev. Attila Csiszár

5.

TWO DECADES WITH THE CALVIN HUNGARIAN CHURCH

- REV. LÁSZLÓ SZAMOSKÖZI, SEPTEMBER 1, 1976 - APRIL 1, 1998

I began to serve the Kalvin Congregation on September 1, 1976, following the retirement of Rev. Attila Csiszár. It was the Rev. Kálmán Dóka who arranged my appointment in Toronto, where I was completing my last year at Knox Theological College.

I considered it my first duty as pastor to make order in the Church building; for if we like to live in nicely arranged homes, then we can do no less for the House of God.

I reinstated several congregational activities, introduced by Rev. Csiszár. The Ladies' Group resumed their useful services; I initiated prayer and Bible-study evenings. We started Hungarian language instructions and Sunday school. Summer Camps were also organized.

The Confirmation instructions were conducted in English in order to make it easier and more comprehensible for the youngsters.

In the meantime I continued visiting the families and the sick. I published a "Church Newsletter" ones in every three months in order to strengthen the contact between church members.

In the early 1980s, it became obvious that in order to provide more space, the back of the Church will have to be extended and an extra floor added to enlarge the common area and add lecture rooms and office space. Under the leadership of one of the Elders, John Baraksó, a Fundraising Board was formed; whose members very successfully raised the required funds, irrespective of creed. All Hungarians made generous donations, demonstrating admirable solidarity. By 1984, the building work was completed under the supervision of professional engineer, and the Chair of Board of Managers, János Szendrey. The initial plans were prepared by architects Esther Csutkai and Péter Nagy.

1985 marked the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Church, an event we celebrated with our annual Fall Dinner. The festivities were documented in a Commemorative Album.

In 1995, we acquired a new Manse.

In 1997 however, to my deepest regret, tensions and misunderstandings began to surface between the minister and certain members of the congregation in the matter of a baptism, which ultimately brought about a split in the congregation. The Presbytery of Westminster decided that under the circumstances, the best way to resolve the problem is for me to take early retirement.

My message to the Congregation and the new pastor is with the words of the Apostle Paul: "...love, serve one another" (Galatians 5:13) "*not with eye service, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.*" (Ephesians 6:6.)

Rev. László Szamosközi

6.

A SHORT REPORT

**ON THE RENOVATION AND ENLARGEMENT OF THE CALVIN HUNGARIAN CHURCH
1983 – 1984**

The renovations began in the summer of 1983; the thanksgiving service following the completion was held on October 28, 1984.

The members of the congregations, as well as other members of the Hungarian community contributed to the work selflessly and in great numbers with donations, with time, each according to his/her talents and means. Some worked tirelessly from start to finish. Church services and events were never inconvenienced by the construction work.

At the beginning the congregation lacked the sufficient funds to cover all the expenses; however, there were always individuals who came to the rescue with generous donations. Thus we were able to finish the work without going into debt.

We can say that the Lord built the church, Glory be to Him!

What did the building project consist of? First of all, we had to demolish the rear of the building and rebuilt it from scratch. The new upper level received three rooms; underneath it we updated and enlarged the kitchen and added modern appliances. Two new washrooms were added, each equipped with wheelchair access. To accommodate the emergency exists, we had to take out walls; thus the first floor common room and the pulpit area in the church had to be renovated.

In the common room the supporting beam had to be replaced. The old ceiling was replaced with a suspended one. Above the ceiling at both ends we placed ventilation systems. We lined the sub floor with heat insulation and covered the floor with carpet. The entrance was covered with linoleum.

Heating is being provided by three independent systems: one heats the upper story; the other two heats the common room and the church. All electrical wirings were replaced. Emergency exit lights and fire extinguishers were placed according to city specification.

With the renovations the building received a new roof; the outdated wooden eaves were replaced with aluminum ones. The outer wall bases were covered with aluminum sidings; the walls were covered with stucco. We surrounded the building with a concrete sidewalk, and created acceptable parking spaces as well.

*J. János Szendrey
Professional Engineer*

7.

OUR RECENT PAST

- THE MINISTRY OF REV. MIKLÓS SZIGETI AS OF MAY 6, 1999

After the retirement of Rev. Szamosközi, Rev. Elaine Nagy provided temporary pulpit service, under whose guidance the congregation began to search for a permanent pastor. From Advent of 1998, three ministers served for one month each.

From 1999, the Presbytery of Westminster appointed the experienced and deeply compassionate The Rev. Robert Garvin as Interim Moderator, who steered and guided the congregation with a sympathetic, yet firm hand towards a better future.

At the 1999 Annual General Meeting the congregation elected me, Miklós Szigeti, as their pastor. I was filled with wonderment how well organized the congregation was despite all the problems and upheavals of the past

few years. They had a functioning Session, regularly held luncheon, dinners and bazaars, and other events and activities.

Soon after my arrival I began to take up the long neglected missionary work by looking up past and non-active members. We arranged picnics for the young families in order to encourage the parents to bring the children to Sunday school and Hungarian language instructions.

The Guest Speaker for the 1999 Annual Dinner was the Most Rev. Dr. Mihály Márkus, Bishop of the Trans-Danubian Synod.

Since the fall of 2000, I visit and hold services in Kelowna four times a year.

Our Guest Speaker at the 2000 Annual Dinner was The Most Rev. Dr. Gusztáv Bölcskei, Bishop of the Trans-Tisza Synod (Debrecen), President of the Reformed General Assembly of Hungary.

In 2001, we organized a very successful summer camp together with the Hungarian Catholic Church, which contributed to the attendance of more children at church and Sunday school. In the Fall of the same year, The Rev. Zoltán Vass, Minister of First Hungarian Presbyterian Church in Toronto, and President of the Canadian Hungarian Ministerial Association was Guest Speaker at our Annual Dinner.

In 2003, The Most Rev. István Csete-Szemesi was our Guest Speaker, who heads the Hungarian Reformed congregations in the former Yugoslavia – now Serbia,

The 2004 Annual Dinner was already held in the spirit of our 50th anniversary, for which occasion we were honored to have as Guest Speaker The Most Rev. László Tótkés, Bishop of the Királyhágó region of Transylvania in Nagyvárad, now belonging to Romania. His great eloquence on the pulpit, and oratorical skill at the Dinner held all of us spellbound.

By the special Grace of God we were able to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of our Church on the 28th of January, 2005. On the 29th of May we held a special celebration here in Vancouver with the participation of the ministers of the Canadian Hungarian Ministerial Association. The anniversary year will close with our Annual Dinner on the 30th of October, with the Most Rev. Dr. István Szabó, Bishop of Budapest, as Guest Speaker.

For all these wonderful gifts in our Church we came by the Special Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit of the Almighty.



Rev. Miklós Szigeti

“Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endures to all generations.”

(Psalms, 100: 4-5.)

Members of the Session in 2004 and 2005:

Back row: Marika Herman, Elsa Talaber, Elizabeth Oszvald, Éva Kossuth, János Fülöp,
Next row: Zoltán Géczi, Joseph Simon, Csilla Zathureczky, Ida Márton,
 and Rev. Miklós Szigeti