

Brief History of EastRidge Evangelical Missionary Church

EastRidge Evangelical Missionary Church has a long and rich history in the growing community of Whitchurch-Stouffville. Originally named the Mennonite Brethren in Christ (MBC), EastRidge was founded in 1903 by Pastor R. Elthrington. The original plot of land on Main Street was purchased by the founding members, with the work of clearing the land and construction being completed by many of the founding members. In 1947, the MBC changed its name to the United Missionary Church and by 1967 had joined with the Missionary Church Association (U.S.A) to become The Missionary Church. For geographical, nationalistic and economic reasons, The Missionary Church divided from its American counterpart in 1988 to become The Missionary Church of Canada. With the merger in 1993 of the Missionary Church of Canada and the Evangelical Church of Canada, the congregation then became known as Stouffville Evangelical Missionary Church. Finally, in conjunction with its move to a new, larger facility in 2004, the congregation became known as EastRidge Evangelical Missionary Church. Further information about the history of the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada (EMCC) can be obtained at www.emcc.ca or by reading Common Bonds –The Story of the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada by Eileen Lageer.

Over the past 100+ years, the Church has experienced much growth and change. The original building went through several renovations and additions to accommodate the needs of the members and their hunger to serve the Lord. In 1940, Emmanuel Bible College - one of two Bible Colleges administered by the EMCC - got its start in the basement of the Church, before moving to Kitchener, Ontario two years later.

Since its founding, EastRidge has known 27 ministers with lengths of stay ranging from one to seventeen years, the most recent being Reverend Lou Geense who served for 16 years before resigning in January 2009 to pursue ministry with the EMCC in Global Initiatives.

In 2003 the Church congregation celebrated its 100th anniversary by announcing a major change. Recognizing it had out-grown its Main Street location, the church family announced the construction of a new facility. The new church was to be built on four acres of land next to the Stouffville Country Market, donated by Market owner, Norm Clements.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held in September of 2003, and the new Church, opened its doors in November 2004. The new building offers the congregation and the community a large auditorium, an expansive gymnasium and numerous meeting rooms. An inter-generational congregation, EastRidge continues to focus on establishing and equipping believers through a wide variety of initiatives and programs such as small groups, prayer, children's and youth ministries, adult education, and men's and women's Bible studies. Outreach takes numerous forms, from a monthly men's breakfast to a weekly night of basketball in the gym for local teens and young adults. In addition, the Church has a history of being active in the local community, as well as making global missions a priority. For over a decade, EastRidge has raised money through the

MotorFest Car Show to support Teen Challenge, a Christian-based ministry helping men and women overcome addiction. EastRidge has also participated in "Love Stouffille", an initiative to serve the local community by helping at various Town events. And from 1998 to 2003, members of the congregation were instrumental in the establishment of the Urafiki Health Clinic in Igoma, Tanzania as well as helping to facilitate the creation, in 2003, of the Stouffville-Igoma partnership (SIP) in conjunction with the Stouffville Town Council to support and build connections between the two communities.

EastRidge experienced some initial growth as residents from Whitchurch-Stouffville and neighbouring communities visited the brand new facility in 2005. However, over the past five years, the Church has experienced a downward trend in Sunday morning attendance, with the average in 2009 of 257 participants.

In January 2009, a Church Consultant was hired to evaluate the Church and help provide the congregation with the resources, guidance and support required to address concerns and issues raised as a result of the evaluation. Over the course of 2009, the congregation is continuing to go through a process of healing and spiritual renewal and is seeking to establish a new vision to move forward to become all that God has called them to be.