

History of Valley Stream Presbyterian Church

During the 1920s, Valley Stream experienced significant growth and in the early and mid-twenties, Valley Stream, still primarily a rural farming community, soon changed as people moving from Brooklyn, New York City, and other states began to build homes. There were several active Protestant churches, but none were Presbyterian. A young couple from Jersey City contacted their former pastor to establish a Presbyterian Church in Valley Stream. At the next meeting, the Presbytery empowered the Field Director of the Church Extension Board to investigate.

In his survey, the Field Director contacted eight Presbyterian, and early in 1927, all met in the home of the couple, the pastor of the Far Rockaway Presbyterian Church, and a representative of his Young People's Society. After discussion, they made a house to house canvas of specific sections of the village. After a few weeks, on May 22, 1927, those who desired to attend service met at the Junior Order of United American Mechanics Hall at 30 W. Jamaica Avenue in Valley Stream.

By September 26, 1927, the Presbyterian Church in Valley Steam was officially organized and recognized by the Brooklyn/Nassau Presbytery. On October 28, 1927, VSPC was born. There were fifty-seven persons present, forty-six of whom became members of VSPC. On November 11, 1927, the state incorporated VSPC, and the Far Rockaway Pastor became the Acting Pastor; and on December 13, 1928, a new Pastor was installed.

By 1930 the growing congregation was looking for a permanent house of worship. VSPC then purchased a small synagogue from the Congregations Temple Gates of Zion. May of that year, the church dedicated the property, and a year later, a new wing was built and dedicated. Many pastors later and three moves of location, VSPC has been at its current location on 130 S. Central Avenue in Valley Stream since January 6, 1957. This coming January, VSPC will celebrate ninety-three years of ministry.¹ After much renovation, and remodeling, the church was rededicated on Thanksgiving Eve in 1971.

The small but caring, friendly and diverse congregation of the Valley Stream Presbyterian Church celebrated its 75th Anniversary in 2002. This congregation was founded in 1927 by a small group of loyal Presbyterians. Most of whom has moved to this village from Brooklyn or Queens 10-15 years earlier. Details of the church's origin and development in its first half century were recorded in articles written in booklet marking the church's 50th anniversary in 1977. This history is reprinted in this booklet. Other articles in this booklet with deal with what was going on in the community and the world in 1927, and events and developments in the life of the church in the life of the years between 1977 and the present.

The high point in the church membership was reached in the 1950's when the congregation numbered over 300 members and the Church School has 150 members. Every grade level in the Church School had 10-12 students, Elder George Reda recalls. He tells us that Sunday School members participated in Annual Anniversary Day Parade on Rockaway Avenue with young people from other churches. Activities were numerous: Sunday School picnics were held in Eisenhower Park, the Youth Group and Women's Group met regularly.

¹ 50th Anniversary Valley Stream Presbyterian Church Journal, 1927-1977.

Elder Reda- who attended Church School for 15 years -grew up in our church. He remembers that the Youth Group occasionally held weekend retreats upstate. One of these, which took place at a dude ranch, was particularly memorable.

Pastor Paul Price conceived the idea of an Easter Sunrise Service at the band shell in the park behind the Village Hall. This event has continued ever since and is always followed by the hearty breakfast for all in the Fellowship Hall.

Changes came in the late 1960's and early 1970's when all major denominations started losing members. Some disagreements arose with our congregation. As a result, moved away and others transferred their membership.

The Choir was also hit hard by these changes: during 1983, for example, the church and no choir. When the organist resigned, she was replaced by the Music Director, Tom Pollet. Earlier, Mr. Pollet had served as sexton and played piano for the Church School. A new, smaller choir was formed in the following year.

During the oil embargo of the 1970's, winter worship services took place in Fellowship Hall, according to Elder Sheila Donnelly. The room's lower ceiling enabled it to be heated comfortably using far less fuel than would have been required to heat the high-ceiling of the sanctuary.

Between 1979 and 1980, when membership had declined to just over 100, the Presbytery wanted to close the church or merge it with the Malverne Presbyterian Church. In 1981 the 104 faithful members, with two dozen or so committed leaders decided they would, indeed, find a new direction and create renewed enthusiasm and do it the eighties what was strongly felt God wanted them to do-continue worshipping and praising him in Valley Stream.

With the Presbytery's permission and encouragement they called an interim pastor, Rev. Harold Lloyd, pledged themselves to an almost unlimited amount of volunteer work, greatly increased their financial giving, went out and found some new members, doubled church attendance, tripled the size of the Church School, and developed among themselves a confidence and spirit that changed the entire nature of the congregation at that time.

A call was issued to Pastor Lloyd, who was still serving as interim pastor and he became the church's part-time pastor.

In the early 1980's Rev. and Mrs. Lloyd led a delegation consisting of Alice and Lawrence Currie on a successful mission to Brazil.

Later in the same year a number of members of the church-and their children - participated in a peace demonstration as part of a worldwide series of similar events. One of those making banners and postcards for and attending the Centra Park meeting was Elder Sheila Donnelly, who was a Sunday School teacher at the time and was a member of the Session.

Pastor Lloyd also started a Sunday morning Adult Bible Study class, which continues to this day.

To provide a community outreach and increase income at the same time, Pastor Lloyd in the late 1980's invited local organizations and support groups (such as ALAnon) to use Fellowship Hall and the rooms of the education building for a small donation. In 1987, when the Business Informatics Center next door needed classroom space for its growing student population, the center (new Business Informatics, the College for Business) began to use these same facilities five days a week. Previously, only church

related groups have been allowed to meet in these rooms, generating no income for the church.

For as long as most members can recall, the church has sponsored an annual fall fair. This has featured the sale of home-made baked goods, crafts as well as tables loaded with “white elephants.” Another popular part of the fair was the “Café on the stage of Fellowship Hall, which served as breakfast and lunch.

In the early 1990’s the church closed one summer Sunday and the members traveled to the Currie’s summer home in Southold for an inspiring outdoor worship service.

Treasurer Frank Sturm recalls that because funds for badly needed repairs to the manse and Fellowship Hall were unavailable, Project Renewal was conceived in June 1994. A committee was formed to raise the necessary funds. Members were asked to fulfill pledges over and above what they had already pledged. The result: extensive improvements to the manse, new energy efficient lighting for the larger second floor classroom and Fellowship, fresh paint throughout the education building rooms and new floors throughout, including the kitchen. New carpeting was installed in two classrooms and the Narthex.