

History moment #1: Planting seeds of a new city church
October 31, 2010

50 years ago yesterday, thirteen people gathered in the home of John and Hilda Warkentin for the first Sunday morning service of what would become Faith Mennonite Church.

At the time, this church had already been 50 years in the making. In 1910, the General Conference Mennonite Church decided to plant AN urban church; the finalists were Kansas City, Chicago, and Minneapolis. Chicago won out.

In 1956 a young graduate student named Warren Fuller inventoried the Mennonite families residing in the Twin Cities; this list became the ground from which a small group arose who wished to have closer Mennonite connections here. In 1960 there was increasing interest within the GC Mennonite church to plant urban churches.

A momentous meeting took place on October 16, 1960. Attendees included representatives from the Mountain Lake churches, as well as the small group of people who had been gathering for a year for mid-week bible study. Although attending the New Hope Mennonite Brethren church, this small group wanted to start a General Conference Mennonite church in the Twin Cities. J. J. Esau, a charismatic blind evangelist from the Mountain Lake area, addressed the group and exhorted them that:

“Faith Sees the Invisible
Faith Believes the Incredible
Faith Does the Impossible”

In the middle of the meeting, one of the participants* whispered to his wife, “they have been talking about this for 50 years; if they just want to keep talking, I want no part of it”; she nodded in agreement. The leader asked, “Walter, will you stand up and share with the whole group what is on your mind?” Taken by surprise, and fully expecting to be ushered out of the meeting, he said exactly what was on his mind: “We have lived in the Twin Cities for ten years but still have our membership in our church back in Philadelphia; we would like to belong to a Mennonite church. If we are really sincerely interested in starting a church, then we need to decide today to *do* something, not just *talk about* doing something. If we continue to do nothing, we surely will fail to do the right thing. But if we decide to act now—it could be right.” He further asked if the church had a treasury, and was told yes, but it was 25 cents in the red. He suggested that taking an offering then and there would cement the commitment to the new church. The offering was taken, the process was unstuck, and two weeks later the group

held its first Sunday morning service. One of the first hymns that the new congregation sang was: "Come thou fount of Every Blessing" which we will sing later in our service.

Shortly after, the new fellowship was aptly christened "Faith Mennonite Church", echoing Esau's visionary words. We have been meeting weekly ever since. Truly our church was born of the right words spoken at the right time, and a small group of people willing to take a leap of faith.

*the participant who "stuck his neck out" declined to become a charter member; he never joined the new church, although some 20 years later his wife and daughter did.