



## Brief history of the Calvin Hungarian Presbyterian Church

**It was on September 11, 1927 that the word of God was first heard in Hungarian in the city of Calgary.**

Surely, it was a great day for those twenty Hungarians who gathered at Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church to pray in their native tongue. The population of Hungarians living in Calgary grew steadily in the late 1920's, and in the spring of 1929, when minister Károly Kovács from Békevár preached the word of God during a funeral service, 150 Hungarians, regardless of their denominational differences, gathered, thirsty for God's word in the Hungarian language. Károly Kovács visited Calgary several times during the 1920s & 1930s, bringing God's message of salvation, fresh water for thirsty souls. This little flock of Hungarians, clinging devotedly to the faith of their ancestors, was soon rewarded by the Lord with a permanent shepherd.

In the summer of 1930, in consequence of a mission established by the Presbyterian Church in Canada, Rev. Béla Bucsin arrived in Calgary. Under his leadership the Calvin Hungarian Presbyterian Church was founded in 1930.

In addition to being a place to serve God, the Hungarian church also became the guardian of national purpose and culture for Hungarians living abroad. From 1932 onward, they faithfully celebrated March 15th each year. In 1934 the congregation consecrated a Hungarian flag, and in the years to follow, Calgary's first organized Hungarian community continued its support of this dual commitment.

We were from the outset a member church of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. Our relationship with the Presbytery was always friendly, with our English-speaking sister churches always supporting us and watching over the flourishing Hungarian congregation. The reward for Rev. Bucsin's self-sacrificing work was that in 1938 the central Mission Committee delegated a second Hungarian minister to the western region, so that this enormous territory could be served by two ministers. As a result, Rev. Dr. Kálmán Tóth, a young, newly graduated minister, arrived in Calgary on June 17, 1938.

Sadly Rev. Bucsin, the congregation's first pastor, died in the same year and Rev. Dr. Kálmán Tóth took over the stewardship of our congregation in 1938. In the spring of 1939, Dr. Tóth travelled to Hungary. Prior to his departure though, the congregation purchased a building on 4th Avenue, which served as the home for the congregation until 1947. During this period the Lorántffy Zsuzsanna Women's Group was formed: ever since, this group has been faithfully hard at work within our congregation.

Because of WWII, Rev. Dr. Kálmán Tóth was not able to return to Calgary until 1947, and thus during this period Rev. Dezső Parragh and Rev. Jenő Molnár served our congregation. It was during Rev. Molnár's tenure that this congregation started organizing the "Hungarian-tent" at the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede, providing a great opportunity for the popularizing Hungarian cuisine locally, as well as



providing substantial funding for the sustainability and growth of the congregation for decades. In 1947 Rev. Kálmán Tóth and his wife returned to Calgary. In that same year the congregation purchased the corner lot at 101 – 14 Avenue SW, where in 1950 they began to build a church. In March of 1951, the church was consecrated. In 1955 Rev. Kálmán Tóth stepped down and over the next three years, Laszlo Györkös, Rev. Laszlo Báthory, Rev. Béla Károlyfalvi and Rev. Lajos Becske served the congregation.

From 1958 until 1964, Rev. Ödön Seress was minister of the congregation. In 1964 Rev. Balázs Dezső Nagy and his family were invited to lead the congregation. The thriving work with children, the benefits of which can be felt to this day, are attributable to his wife and daughter.

In 1966 the church and the manse burned to the ground in a tragic fire. Right away, the congregation started to rebuild the church, and in 1967 the new church and manse building, (still in use today), was consecrated. After Rev. Balázs Dezső Nagy retired in 1974, Rev. Kálmán Dóka, diocesan pastor, handled parochial affairs, assisted by Rev. Gábor Dezse of Edmonton and Rev. Lajos Becske of Lethbridge. From mid 1975 to Sep 30, 1977, Rev. Lajos Becske was minister to the congregation. After Rev. Becske's retirement in 1977, the congregation was served for over a year by supply ministers such as Rev. József Vásárhelyi and Rev. Erzsébet Nitsch.

On November 1, 1978 Rev. Dr. Kálmán Göndöcz and his family arrived in Calgary. His fourteen-years of service to our congregation was characterized by tranquility and peace. Rev. Dr. Kálmán Göndöcz was our longest serving minister (1978-1992). In recognition of his personal worth, in 1989 he was elected moderator for the Synod of Alberta. During this period the congregation's newsletter called "Hívó Szó" was launched.

Rev. Dr. József Pungur followed him as the congregation's next minister, serving at Calvin Hungarian Presbyterian Church until 2001, when he retired. Attributable to him is the founding of the Bethlen History Society, which supports the church both spiritually and financially through various ethnic and religious events.

From February 2001 until 2011, Rev. Károly Gödöllei and his wife Eva, as religious instructor, served in our congregation. During his period the congregation was able to benefit from modern-day technology, for example by watching Sunday services on the computer or listening to them on the telephone. Many young families and children were brought into the church through Family Services, which provided an opportunity for children to be actively engaged in worship services.

Since July of 2011, the congregation has been guided by Interim Moderators Rev Dianne Ollerenshaw and Rev Tom Brownlee. Thanks be to God, the preaching of the word of God in the congregation has continued uninterrupted, led by elders, members of the congregation and the moderators. The congregation is very grateful to Rev. László Szamosközi, a retired minister from Vancouver, who has come to serve several times over the past year.