

St. Paul's Anglican Church to shut down at end of month after 150 years of serving the community

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One of Shelburne's founding churches is ending a more than 150-year-old chapter in history as they prepare to officially close their doors this month.

St. Paul's Anglican Church, located at 312 Owen Sound St. in Shelburne, will be closing its doors following a final service for the congregation on Sunday, Jan. 21.

"It's always sad seeing church close, but churches have closed for hundreds and thousands of years, and it's important that people focus on celebrating what this church has been to this community," said Marg Finlayson, People's Warden at the church. "I think of how many prayers of celebration and anguish that went up and also all the celebrations like weddings and baptisms; historically, churches have been community centres, and all of those moments have been part of the community."

The decision to close the church came in October of 2023 with a vote from church members after months of discussions.

"We did not do this lightly," said Finlayson. "We each went away and thought seriously about the gospel message and how we can continue to live that outside the walls [of the church]."

A number of factors played into the decision to close St. Paul's Anglican Church, one of which was the number of attendees for the weekend services. On average, the church sees around 12 to 15 regular attendees of the Sunday service.

"Many of our congregation has aged out, going into long-term [care] residences or subsequently passing away," said Finlayson. "People have also moved away."

The limited number of parishioner also led to a decrease in funding, putting a financial strain on the church.

"It's been a long time coming," said James Gould, Rector's Warden. "We were hopeful that it would get better, but it never really did, so it came down to a financial decision; you have to be able to pay the bills."

The history of St. Paul's Anglican Church begins well before the church's construction, with the first Anglican worship services in the area held once a month in a small log hall in Melancthon as early as 1855.

Construction of the first St. Paul's Anglican Church began in the summer of 1874 and was finished by Christmas of the same year. The first service was held on Jan. 17, 1875, led by Rev. J.J Morton, with planks used to seat the congregation and a borrowed organ.

The local Anglican church received its first resident rector in Rev. James Smythe in 1878, but the position was quickly left vacant following his death in 1879.

Discussions were held in 1910 with the idea of building a new and bigger church in the same spot as the original. The St. Paul's Anglican Church that sits in Shelburne to this day was constructed and completed in 1913.

In January of 1929, a fire broke out in the church's furnace room, and the church sustained damage from smoke and water, but fire insurance allowed for repairs and replacement.

During Canada's Centennial year (1967), the Shelburne parish and Dundalk church were amalgamated.

The Shelburne congregation celebrated St. Paul's Anglican Church's 150th anniversary in 2023. Since its inception, the local Anglican church has seen over 30 reverends oversee the congregation.

Over its many decades within the Shelburne community, St. Paul's Anglican Church has dedicated much of its efforts back to the community, including being a founding member of the Shelburne Food Bank, Shepherd's Cupboard, collecting for the Shelburne Rotary Christmas Hampers, being a part of Meals on Wheels, and volunteering with the local long term care homes and hospital. All of this while hosting pancake dinners, card games, and bake sales,

While they plan to close the doors at the end of January, Finlayson and Gould say they plan to still be active within the community.

?Just because the doors are closed, doesn't mean that the people that were here aren't going to keep doing things in the community,? said Gould.

The final service will be held at St. Paul's Anglican Church on Sunday, Jan. 21, at 3 p.m. with Bishop Susan Bell presiding.