

Our Stories

Springridge Mennonite Church. April 2021

Pincher Creek, Alberta



2018 Anniversary Pig Roast — a Springridge tradition!

Written by Linden Willms and Tany Warkentin, with input from Linda & Jim Dyck, Ed & Leona Janzen, and Elaine & Abe Janzen and Del Willms.

Springridge is a small rural congregation of 30-35 people, near Pincher Creek AB.

The story of Springridge Mennonite Church goes back almost 100 years, to when leadership was supplied by local members gifted in preaching. In the past 50 years, we have moved from lay leadership to other models - full time pastor, part time pastor, lay leadership team, interim pastor to cover a sabbatical, commuting pastor from Lethbridge... to our present model of again looking to local members for leadership.

Very few in our congregation don't volunteer to play a role in the function of the church. We rotate through six worship leaders, half of us take turns in leading the "Time for the Young", and others are involved in ushering, maintenance/cleaning, teaching, music, event planning, and supporting each other in difficult times. Our congregation has learned to be flexible in letting programs close or adapt when energy and leadership declines, or creatively finding new solutions to maintain what we hold most important. Strong relationships and community are central, providing a safe space for people to offer and develop their gifts - even gifts in early stages of development. We try to show encouragement and gratitude for what is offered, valuing people and relationship over professionalism.

Our present model of "being the church" is not so much different from what we've done in the past, yet it has raised some exciting opportunities. We have called a church member, Tany Warkentin, to be our part-time Pastoral Leader. She plans worship, does visitation, officiates at funerals and weddings, and invites the involvement of others to keep our congregation organized and running smoothly. But she doesn't preach. *What?!*



2019 Covid Picnic at the church

How can a church invite a pastor who is missing such a key gift? Time for new solutions... and to draw from the rich resources available from being a part of a larger church.

All our preaching comes from the wider church. We invite guest speakers once or twice a month and make good use of worship service resources available through the CommonWord Resource Centre. We also use sermons shared from other pastors; many from within Mennonite Church Canada churches but we also appreciate the insights other denominations have to offer. Many church websites post sermons in written or audio form, with increasing numbers of video recordings during the pandemic. Churches and pastors have shown overwhelming generosity and graciousness in sharing these sermons. One of our local members has stepped up as our main adult Sunday School teacher, where pertinent faith and life issues are engaged through group discussion. In recent worship services, this discussion-based learning has also been used as our “sermon”.

Here’s what our members have to say about some of these changes: “Initially, I was scared that video sermons would be too impersonal – like watching TV – but I’ve been surprised at how well it works.” “I appreciate the variety of speakers – it makes me alert and brings new slants on how we look at things.” “Having speakers from different churches give us an idea of what’s going on across the nation.” “Visiting other churches is uncomfortable, so I like this way of being able to hear different speakers.” “When we hear a speaker and then talk about what we heard, those thoughts and message last longer than when we just listen.” “We’ve had to condition ourselves to be able to try new things... and that has usually happened out of necessity, in our stage of down-sizing.” “We are a small group of people, but it is still important enough to us to work to keep going.”

Springridge is not alone as a congregation needing to adapt in how we “are the church” today. We see other congregations also looking for hopeful options to declining energy and attendance, or unknown futures. Our story includes seeing God provide



2021 Kenai Warkentin — the Cala Lily keeper!

both through the gifts of local members and through the richness of our broader Christian family. We pray that others also find life and hope by adapting to new solutions and sharing resources and ideas.