

A HISTORY OF AJAX ALLIANCE CHURCH

by

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This paper provides a history of Ajax Alliance Church (hereafter AAC) from its inception (1979) to the present day (2024). It presents the basic facts associated with its history as well as the nature of its ministry without trying to inject the writer's interpretation of its history or the nature of its ministry.

A NEW CHURCH (September 1979)

A bible study led by the Rev. Mel Shareski in the Pickering area was the impetus for the forming of a nucleus of people who celebrated their first worship service as AAC in the auditorium of Ajax High School on September 23, 1979. The average attendance for this group for the remainder of 1979 was fifty for morning services and eighteen for evening services. In February 1980 an invitation was extended to Ed Winker with his wife, Jean, and their daughter, Sarah, to come and preach for a call for this newly formed congregation. Ed Winker was completing studies at Canadian Theological College in Regina. After the candidating process, a formal call was extended and the Winkers accepted. Ed Winker began ministry as the first pastor of AAC on June 22, 1980 after an induction service officiated by the superintendent of the Eastern and Central Canadian District, Melvin P Sylvester.

Pastor Ed Winker's Ministry (June 1980 – Jan 1984)

The church was officially organized on November 12, 1980 as a member of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (hereafter Alliance). Reverend David Freeman, the acting district superintendent of the Eastern and Central Canadian District, officiated at the service in which 31 people were accepted as charter members of AAC. This also occasioned a changing of leadership by a steering committee to an Executive Board, an Elders' Board, and a Deacons' Board. In June of 1980, the congregation moved from the high school and began renting a church building owned by the Pentecostal Church on 55 Emperor St. in Ajax. The sale of that church building to an Associated Gospel Church necessitated another move and the congregation began renting Duffin's Bay Public School in Ajax, holding their first service in that school on September 20, 1981.

Pastor Winker stated the three major purposes of AAC should be to express the glory of God, evangelize the unbeliever and edify the believer. Ministries included a morning and evening

service, with average attendance of sixty-nine and thirty-seven respectively. A Pioneer Girls program began on September 26, 1980 with twenty-one girls registered and grew in numbers over the ensuing months. An outreach into the community with pamphlets describing the church and its ministry was undertaken in September of 1980.

Pastor Winker in the 1981 annual report reflected on how the change of location to the public school presented some serious challenges. It meant a change in Sunday evening format, meeting only one Sunday evening a month in the school and on the other Sunday evenings they met in three homes and those meetings were led by elders. Even more significantly, the change in location meant a need to find a facility to use for the Pioneer Girls program and that search proved fruitless and so the ministry was not available in September of 1981. There was an increased emphasis on missions with the highlight being the missions conference from October 18-25, 1981. The need for a permanent home was recognized and a church building fund was started resulting in almost \$4,000 by the end of 1981. Pastor Winker acknowledged that 1982 was a challenging year as the church witnessed a decline in numbers attending and finances that required cost-cutting moves and support from the district office. With declining attendance, a congregational meeting was held on November 14, 1982 and presided over by district superintendent Reverend Robert Gould. This signaled a turning point for the church with a renewed spirit and new optimism reflected in increased attendance. Pastor Winker called for the establishment of clear goals and objectives and a commitment to the prayer meetings.

The church moved again on February 6, 1983 to Lincoln Ave Public School which was more centrally located and closer to a church site that had been promised to the church on the Revenue property where homes were to be built by the summer of 1985. A five-year plan for the church called “Faith for Fifty Families” was presented in booklet form on November 6, 1983 to provide direction for the church and to aid in church growth. During these early years, AAC received occasional financial assistance from the district.

Pastor Ben Kononoff’s Ministry (May 1984 – July 1992)

In January 1984, Pastor Winker resigned from AAC and a steering committee was established of three elders and two members. In May, Pastor Ben Kononoff, a veteran Alliance pastor and church planter, with his wife, Jean, accepted a call to pastor AAC. It was indicated that John Boddy was

making every attempt to ensure the property promised to the church came into its hands, but the congregation was to make this a matter of prayer. Areas of focus and prayer included strengthening the Sunday School program, an emphasis on evangelism, discipleship and starting an Awana program. The Ladies' Coffee Hour and men's fellowship were resumed and invitations to the church were distributed. As attendance grew, AAC started identifying "associate members" for those who did not attend but had an interest in the life and progress of AAC. The building lot for the new church was to be 2.47 acres and serviced in 1986. A new extension from Highway 401 up Westney Road meant the new lot was located in a strategic location and the plans for the financing of the new church were being discussed with the hope of building within a twelve-to-twenty-four-month period.

There was continued numerical growth in 1986 and financial giving was up as well not only in total giving but in a per-person average. In October the finance committee presented to the congregation a program called "Equal Sacrifices, not Equal Gifts" with the goal to raise \$145,000 over twenty-three months. The total of the pledges already exceeded \$87,550.00 and the district superintendent, Rev. Gould had indicated that the district would contribute a \$50,000 grant. The building plans were designed to seat about 275 to 300 with a projected total cost for the building of \$454,750. The start of building was projected to be in the spring of 1988.

Attendance continued to climb in 1987 and per capita giving also increased. The labors involved in respect to the building program were about to be realized as the "sod was turned" and construction began in March of 1987. The financial statements indicate that during 1987 two and a half acres of land located at Westney Road and Ritchie Avenue were donated to AAC and for accounting purposes the land was stated in the accounts of the church at the sum of \$1.00.

The new building, completed in 1988, led to a growth in attendance figures. Sunday morning attendance exceeded an average of 100 for the first time at 102, evening services were at fifty-three, Sunday School at seventy-eight and Bible study at fourteen. Total giving was up but the per capita giving declined, which seemed attributable to the serious commitment and sacrifices of some during the building program.

The highlight of the year was the church dedication on October 2, 1988 which included an open house, church supper and dedication service with Alliance President Mel Sylvester preaching the opening message. The weekend theme was, "Love That Works" focusing on God's love that he

had shown for this work. Three key areas of need for the following year were presented as evangelism, church edification and prayer. The Advisory Board was replaced with an Elders' Board and a new Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees were responsible for finance, administration and operations functions. The mortgage was \$480,000.

The new building was in a prime location and average attendance continued to grow. In 1990, at the ten-year mark of its history, the attendance for Sunday morning reached 170, Sunday evening was seventy-two, and the bible study grew significantly to fifty-one. Yet, for the third year in a row per capita giving declined, total giving declined, and the church experienced a financial deficit. Pastor Kononoff mentioned that a major donor had been giving up to two thousand dollars a month but would no longer be giving in that manner. Pastor Kononoff remarked it had been a difficult year for him. This was likely traceable in part to the finances but also to the hiring of Pastor C. Tesarski to minister to the youth and his departure after only six months. A Board of Trustees was not able to be appointed for 1990 either adding burdens undoubtedly to the pastor and elders. A highlight during this period was the ministry of Pastor Eduardo Mercon, a student at Canadian Theological Seminary, who ministered during the summer primarily among Hispanics and from his ministry two families came to the church.

In 1991, average Sunday morning attendance topped 200 for the first time at 201 but Pastor Kononoff noted that there were 350 people on the roll and yet approximately only 120 attended every week, while the other 200+ did not come regularly. Although total giving rose slightly, the per capita giving declined for the fourth straight year. A part-time secretary was hired to relieve Pastor Kononoff of some of the administrative duties and an illuminated sign was purchased. The Awana girls' team placed first for the second year in a row at the Awana Olympics and the boy's team finished second. Some of the highlights during Pastor Kononoff's ministry included a strong emphasis on youth, with strong leadership from the Pauls and Wrights leading to the hire of a youth pastor. There was a strong emphasis on "cell groups" and the Awana ministry eventually had 125 kids with thirty-five volunteer workers. Missions and Global Advance were emphasized through the "Missions' Minute" update and one member, Mark Patterson, quit his job and went to seminary to prepare for work on the mission field.

Pastor Jack Hannah (July 1992 – July 1994)

In May 1992, Pastor Kononoff notified the elders that he was going to be leaving to plant a new

church in Winnipeg, and he left by July. A search committee was formed. In 1993, despite not having a Senior Pastor the average attendance fell only slightly. The Sunday morning attendance was 183, Sunday evening sixty-seven, the bible study thirty-five. Membership remained consistent at fifty-five. Financial giving decreased again in total giving and in per capita giving. Pastor Jack Hannah, who would become the pastor at Westney Heights Baptist Church in Ajax, came and preached on a regular basis during the pastoral search.

Pastor Mark Kotchapaw (July 1994 – Jan 2002)

In April 1994, Pastor Mark Kotchapaw, a graduate of Canadian Bible College, who was Associate Pastor at Milton Alliance, was contacted and he candidated on the weekend of April 22-24, 1994. He accepted a call from AAC and began on July 1, 1994 and his official induction service was on July 3rd almost exactly two years after Pastor Kononoff left. The new vision cast was, “Win, Build and Equip.” Average attendance only increased marginally while financial giving was down again and per capita giving was down for in essence the seventh year in a row.

A Community Celebration week began in 1993 and included a fun/fair carnival barbecue on Sunday evening August 26th. This outreach resulted in some families attending AAC. Sunday evening services underwent a change at this time to a more “relational teaching model.” Significant events in 1995 included the unexpected passing of the worship team leader, Brent Thompson, and another member Phil Wyatt plus the formation of a Management Team which essentially replaced the Board of Trustees. Membership grew to sixty-six and the average Sunday morning attendance rose to a record high of 211. The finances took a significant upward turn and the per capita giving was the best in five years.

In 1996, AAC added a youth pastor to the staff, Andrew Temple. With attendance reaching a new record high of 238, a portable was added for increased space. In 1997, average Sunday morning attendance remained strong with increased total giving and funding for missions. A church plant in Clarington started by “investing” three families to the work and setting aside funds to help support it. Membership increased slightly to eighty and plans for a second service were moving ahead.

A significant event took place on December 6, 1998 when Andrew Temple informed the church

he was stepping down to deal with family issues. He was shortly thereafter diagnosed with brain cancer. On March 1, 1999, Dave Easton was brought on as youth pastor and then on May 1, Corrine Smyth joined the AAC staff as the Christian Education leader. Dave Easton instituted what became known as “Hot House” for the youth in an effort to “grow” new leaders. A new vision and mission statement was presented in 2000 and core values were again presented as the church was encouraged to be involved in “Winning, Building and Equipping.” The Sunday morning average attendance reached a new peak of 266 and 180 were involved in the various bible studies. A new ministry called “In Sync” was formed to present the “Christ-centered Integration Model of prayer and counseling.”

In 2001, AAC had its first marriage retreat, a drama team was launched under David’s Ho’s leadership, the annual “Shoe Box” project to provide Christmas gifts to poor children saw a record 572 boxes sent, and AAC had its first Ministry Fair on September 9th. The average attendance for Sunday morning reached a new high of 273. The leadership of the men’s ministry team sent a letter to the Alliance President Franklin Pyles expressing its disagreement with the Alliance’s position on the role of women elders in the church and some of these men left.

Elder Led Church (Jan 2002 – Aug 2004)

On January 27, 2002 there was a commissioning service for Pastor Kotchapaw in preparation for his leaving to go to a mission work in Jakarta, Indonesia in February. The Kotchapaws felt a wonderful outpouring of love as they left for the mission field. With the departure of the Kotchapaws, the average Sunday morning attendance dropped to 223 and the number involved in small groups dropped also. Sadly, a power struggle and a number of criticisms erupted in the absence of a pastor and at the May 24, 2002 annual meeting the five elders came to the front and asked for forgiveness of each other and others who may have been wronged. In January 2003, the Elders’ Board took over responsibility from the Pastoral Search Team and in March introduced a new Pastoral Team Model. Dave Easton took on the role of Pastor of Adult and Youth Ministries. Brent Mackie who had credentials with the Alliance became the Pastor of Teaching, Andrew Temple became the Pastor of Care, and Rhona Breadner continued as Pastor of Children’s Ministries. After several months the elders and pastors decided to assemble a Pastoral Search Team again. For the second straight year the average Sunday morning attendance dropped significantly now to 149.

Pastor Ken Symes (Aug 2004 – Aug 2005)

In 2004 both Dave Easton and Andrew Temple stepped down from their pastoral roles. Andrew had a re-occurrence of cancer appear. On August 1, 2004 Ken Symes, who had previous ministry experience in the Alliance in Chatham and Regina, joined AAC as its new pastor with his wife Rebecca. The addition of the new pastor saw an increase in attendance and giving at a time when finances were tenuous. The average Sunday morning attendance declined to 130 but had picked up with the arrival of the new pastor.

AAC faced a major crisis on Tuesday, August 8, 2005 when Pastor Ken Symes was arrested “for luring of a child under 14 years of age and invitation to sexual touching.” Within a week Supt. Doug Wiebe, met with the elders and introduced Franklin Thomas, who was being appointed as interim pastor. Franklin had several years’ experience as an Alliance pastor and would stay on as long as was necessary. Ken Symes was terminated from his position with cause effective the end of August 2005. The area churches showed support for AAC at a Sunday evening service on November 13th where six local churches came and participated in worship.

Pastor Randy Mann (May 2006 – Dec 2022)

A new pastor was called and began on May 1, 2006. Pastor Randy Mann was the first AAC pastor who did not have Alliance roots, but he had previous pastoral ministry experience in several Fellowship Baptist churches in Ontario. The Elders Board had been studying together Mark Dever’s book, “*Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*” (Crossway, 2004). Dever argues that the first mark of a healthy church is a commitment to expository preaching and this is what the elders wanted to build AAC upon and not the popular church growth methods. Pastor Mann was committed to expository preaching and this approach as well.

The elders were unanimous in their support of the new pastor but told him prior to his accepting a call that there were a number of families who planned to leave if he was called as these people did not agree with this approach to ministry. Others were concerned that the new pastor did not reflect an Alliance mentality and background. Not surprisingly the average Sunday morning attendance dipped to 101. The sampling of the small number of surveys reveals that these members do not really recall the “Fourfold Gospel” being mentioned let alone emphasized at AAC. Jesus as Savior was always emphasized and there was a commitment to pray for healing. Missions was emphasized

but was not tied to hastening the coming of Christ. The perception was that AAC was or had become a small “a” Alliance church. Pastor Mann’s induction service was on May 14th and Franklin Thomas and Pastor Mihn Ho gave the charge to the pastor and congregation in the absence of district superintendent, Doug Wiebe.

A new vision and mission statement and list of core values were developed and presented in September. Training in evangelism took place in the fall in preparation for outreach in the spring of 2007. A congregational prayer time with a bible study was established on Wednesday nights. This was only sparsely attended at first with about ten to twelve attending. One special highlight for the year was the Send mission team that went to Hungary to help the Szabady’s in their mission work. A number of changes had to be made in the first year in a variety of ministries. The lingering effect of the Ken Symes situation was still being felt but he was officially removed from ministry in the Alliance in November, and the church hoped to put that incident behind them. More changes became necessary in 2007 but Easter Sunday was a special day of rejoicing at AAC with five baptisms and the largest attendance in several years with 185 present. There was a renewed commitment to God’s Word at AAC and its power to change lives, families and nations as the gospel of God’s grace in Jesus is proclaimed to the nations.

Pastor Randy Mann was the leader that God had granted to the congregation at this uncertain time in the history of AAC. He was a man solid in his faith who was committed to expository preaching and the doctrines of grace. This firm foundation was needed to steady the weary flock. In 2011, although the Alliance chose to allow women into the role of elders and pastors, AAC maintained a complementarian position. A few years later, in 2017, Pastor Mann signed on behalf of AAC, as a member of the Complementarian Fellowship of Alliance Churches. Pastor Mann would go on to serve at AAC for the next 16.5 years retiring on December 31, 2022. Pastor Mann was much loved and given a baseball themed retirement party as a send-off and a three-point fill-in-the-blanks summary of his life before, during and after his time at AAC, to correspond to his preaching style.

During Pastor Mann’s ministry, attendance was relatively flat over most of the years averaging just over 100. However, AAC’s finances were stable during this period and they were always committed to paying the 3% of donations towards District support. The Global Advance Fund and Missions was a big focus with “Missions’ Moments” presented once per month during the service.

Wednesday Bible Study focused on prayer and revival.

There were several tumultuous events during Pastor Mann's ministry. Around 2012, three of the four elders resigned over a position Pastor Randy had taken and Superintendent John Healey was called in to resolve the issue. Then during Covid, two of the elders stepped down due to the position the church had taken regarding masks and opening guidelines. Around 2013, 4 men from the Management Team took their families to another area church, Forest Brook. Then in 2015, five young families left the church to attend Harvest Community Church which had a thriving youth program. AAC survived all these challenges by the grace of God, and later that year, on October 15, 2015, AAC paid off its mortgage. There were many other events in the life of the church during Pastor Mann's time; like a yearly one-week Missions festival, a community festival held in conjunction with the church plants, an Agape Gala in February, and a yearly VBS done through the AIG curriculum. Finances were stable with many large gifts bequeathed to the church.

Back in 2011, Pastor Mann and the elders began discussing a church plant. A sum of \$5,000 a year was set aside to support this goal. By December 2014, there was \$20,000 in the Church Plant fund. On Dec. 2, 2014 DS John Healey met with Pastor Mann to discuss placing an Alliance Spanish church in the building. In God's providence, at the same time, AAC was in discussions with Pastor JD Fasolino about starting a Spanish church after our morning services. Their theological beliefs aligned with AAC as he was affiliated with the Southern Baptist denomination in the U.S. By the fall of 2015, those morning services began for Emmanuel Baptist Church East (EBCE).

Early in 2016, Pastor Mann was in discussion with Pastor Samuel Xie about expanding a Mandarin Bible Study group into a morning service that reached out to the Mandarin speaking community in Durham. By August 2016, those services began as the Cross Gospel Church

(CGC). These services continue to this day (2024) on Sundays with AAC followed by EBCE and CGC, and then AAC's evening service. A sad event was the sudden passing of Pastor Caleb Ng in 2023 from flesh-eating disease. These two church plants are an encouragement to all involved, as they are both like-minded in their doctrine. This was a big positive result of Pastor Mann's time of ministry at AAC as he mentored these young pastors.

Pastor Matthew Kratz (Jan 2023 – current)

For the first Sunday of 2023, Pastor Matthew began ministering to the people of Ajax Alliance the very Sunday after the retirement of Pastor Mann. Like Pastor Mann, he holds to the complementarian position and the doctrines of grace. Beginning with reinforcing foundational biblical doctrines, Pastor Kratz sought to minister to the spiritual needs of the people of Ajax Alliance while seeking to update various ministry operations, like a contact management system, a new Church app and website, an online video library of cataloged Biblical resources while leading various workshops like Spiritual gift assessments. Regarding overall leadership, the elders began specific areas of responsibility while new areas of service emerged from a new transportation ministry to a new care team. The evening services continue with a roster of elders and other men from the congregation preaching. A new part-time administrator was hired to help coordinate the increase of ministry and building usage activities. Facility usage expanded from weekly music lessons, day camps to a Monday-Friday music school. Future considerations include studying the viability of a new on-site multipurpose facility to a new Christian school. For the immediate future, the resumption of small group ministries and the robust commitment for missions' support and encouragement remain.

With two grown children, Ethan, and Garret, living in different cities, Pastor Kratz and his wife Lisa live in south Ajax where he continues to serve and seek growth with the people of Ajax Alliance Church that Christ would be known and worshipped.