

Chapter 19

HAZELGLEN FELLOWSHIP

Hazलगlen Fellowship was located in Kitchener, one hundred kilometers west of Toronto. It had been in existence for over twenty years but had seldom seem more than thirty people in its congregation. During the past year an energetic pastor had seen several young people come into the church, mostly with little Christian background. The three elders were just in their thirties and only two 'professionals' were in the congregation, both nursing instructors. Most were unemployed.

Though there had been some difficulties in the previous year, the congregation received us warmly. During that first year there were many times we questioned why God had brought us here. There were no mature families with teenagers for our girls, and us, to fellowship with. Anne went through a deep struggle until she accepted that, if God had called me there, which she never doubted, He also had a purpose in her and the girls being there. And yet, the Fellowship was ideal for me as a new pastor, in that it really was a 'Youth Group' that met on Sundays, youth of the same age range that I had led in Wales. Anne was once asked what changes were in our life now that I was a pastor. She replied,

"None whatever. He is now doing full-time what he was always doing in his spare time before!"

I have many good memories of our four years in Kitchener but, as this story is regarding stepping stones toward our present situation, they will have to be told at some other time. However, when I think of God's leading, I must tell of my first-year experience. Each Wednesday morning I would start seeking what I believed God would have me preach during my one hour slot on Sundays. At that time the fellowship was from 2 to 6 pm each Sunday, one hour each of worship, teaching, eating a 'pot-providence' meal together and communion (the 'Lord's table'). During the worship time, members of the congregation might lead out in a worship song or read a scripture. Whenever Charlie, one of the elders, would get up to read a scripture, I would get excited. Several times during that first year he would read out the scriptures surrounding the text I had chosen, even though there was no way he could have known before hand unless the Lord had led him - and therefore led me in my preparation! You can imagine how that gave me confidence to preach what was evidently the Lord's word for that morning.

It was during that first year that I heard about "Wham!" - or that's what I thought it was! Rob and Tim were two fine young men who had just returned to the church after spending several months at 'The Ark' in Amsterdam. They had been working among the prostitutes and 'gay' community of that city. They told me that The Ark was a ministry of YWAM (pronounced Y-Wam) - Youth With A Mission. When I expressed further interest I was given the location of the Canadian headquarters, just six miles away in Cambridge, Ontario. Thus it was that, a week later, I was sitting in the office of Uli Korsch, Canadian director of YWAM, enjoying the beginnings of what would be a good friendship. He told me of the early days of the movement, of its founder Loren Cunningham and of its purposes and experiences. (The reader would enjoy reading this history in the book "Is That Really You, God?" by Loren Cunningham.)

After that first year we changed the format of our services to two hours on Sunday mornings, still emphasising worship and the preached word. Our numbers began to grow and mature families joined the church. Several times we had ministry from YWAM teams. Their outstanding musical "Toymaker & Son" was presented on our church lawn before a large audience. On another occasion fifteen YWAMers from Arkansas spent four weeks living in and working out of our church..... and we continued to grow.

After three years we all knew it was time to build a larger sanctuary. It was a very warm, humid Ontario summer's day and I was standing on the small veranda at the front door of the church talking to one of our newest attendees, Bill Williams. I knew that Bill had recently had a heart attack and, as a result, had withdrawn

from some of his other activities to start going to church again. As we began to talk about the need for another building, I told him of the research I had been making into the costs such a venture would entail. "There's no way we can afford it" I said. Bill replied, "In that case, we'll have to build it ourselves!" I began to laugh until I realised he was speaking sincerely. "How can we possibly build it?" I asked. "None of us know anything about building." I was amazed when he told me that, for many years, he had been the overseer for construction workers in that area of Ontario, within a circle of over 100 miles!! Is this why the Lord had brought him to our church? If so, it was only the first of many miracles we saw over the next few months as we built. The young people amazed us as they dug deep to finance this new building and we watched in awe as God performed miracle after miracle.

The plans were donated free and a large hole was dug for our basement by a christian brother owning a backhoe. We bought cement blocks at less than half price from a company going out of business, each one of which Bill and I handled as we transported them from the store to our site! We were ready to roll up our sleeves to start laying the footings. A telephone call came that week from a neighbour, asking me what we intended to build. He and I had sat together in local council meetings discussing the needs of the community. When I told him of our plans to build a church with a gymnasium that the local youth could use, he asked me who was going to be our builder. I almost heard his laugh when I told him we would be building the church ourselves. The following Saturday, he arrived on site with fifteen colleagues - all masons. He was the secretary of the local masons' union, and he had persuaded these men to lay our foundations and build our basement walls for us!!

They worked with us for two weekends at no charge - though, of course, we were delighted to give them small gifts for their kindness and lots of chilli con carne, coca cola and ice cream!

By the end of 1982 we had completed a fine sanctuary to seat 250 people, with a large recreation hall and fully-fitted kitchen underneath. The building was beautifully finished and contained chandeliers, comfortable chairs and a grand piano! Almost all the work was done by ourselves, overseen by Bill, , and would be completely paid for within three more years. But I would not be there to witness that!

In early March, 1983 I received a telephone call from Victoria, British Columbia, asking if I would consider a 'call' to pastor the Sidney Alliance Church on beautiful Vancouver Island. After much prayer and consideration of the future of Hazelglen Fellowship, we said our 'farewells' to our loving friends in Kitchener and prepared to journey further west.