

## Our History

North Park began as a home-based, grass-roots Sunday School, operated out of the home of Lena and Oscar Greene, in the fall of 1979. The Greenes were new Bramptonians who still attended the Pape Avenue Church of God of Prophecy in Toronto. In their new city, they quickly became entrenched in the vibrant West Indian community that was being established. Given their desire to serve, as well as the rigour of the weekly commute, they turned their attention to the local community and started an outreach in Brampton, using the Sunday School platform. Their home became the base of operations, which accommodated twenty students at one time. With the aid of Rupert Miller, the transportation provider, students were able to attend consistently, which led to the inevitable growth of this class. Eventually, their home could no longer house the number of attendees and the relocation to Eastbourne Drive Public School was the solution. The growth continued and reached an enrolment of approximately fifty children and several adults. This necessitated a second move to a larger facility, Earnscliffe Recreation Centre.

This pace of growth did not go unnoticed by both the National and International Offices of the Church of God of Prophecy. The Sunday School had outgrown its original purpose and was ready to become a mission. Bishop Perry Gillum, the National Overseer of Canada concurred, and in June of 1980, just over a year later, the Bramalea Mission was born. Evangelist Hyacinth Lord was appointed to oversee the growth and operation of the mission. This was a major turning point in the establishment of a brick-and-mortar church in Brampton.

The journey from mission to local church was not a long one, and many leaders were at the helm to help shape the vision and chart the trajectory of the Bramalea Mission. On January 11, 1981, Evangelist Delano Smith was appointed Interim Pastor, the mission ended, and the Bramalea Church of God of Prophecy began. Pastor Smith served until July of the same year, and was replaced by Pastor Chris Stathis. Pastor Stathis served until July 1982 and was succeeded by Pastor Byfield. Pastor Byfield served from 1982-1987. In July 1987, Pastor Bernard Yorke was appointed to lead. Each pastor brought an individual style and flair that contributed to the rich and wide diversity of leadership and membership.

As the church's first full-time pastor, Bernard Yorke, was able to devote the necessary time to evangelism, property acquisition and fundraising. With the leadership of Keith Dennis, who spearheaded the Building Fund, the long-held dream of acquiring a building was closer to reality. As providence would have it, the sister church, Brampton Church of God of Prophecy, was on the same path. Separately, both churches were increasing numerically, and their leadership teams crafted visions for permanent places of worship. It took tremendous sacrificial giving of many of the pioneers of both churches before the vision could become a reality. However, the Brampton Church was further along in their plans and, under the leadership of Pastor Amos Daley, they acquired a property at 395 North Park Drive in 1985.

The amalgamation of the two churches became a logical next step of the National Office. This would allow for the concentration of the mission of the COGOP in the Peel Region and capitalize on the individual strengths of the two churches. The alliance would benefit both churches and enable their visions to come to fruition more quickly. In 1989, the National Overseer, Brother Phillip, facilitated the needed collaboration and the ultimate merger of the two

churches. This monumental decision could not be made without prayer, fasting and sacrifice of both churches. It took two years for the plans to be finalized. In July 1991, Church of God of Prophecy, Brampton and Bramalea Church of God of Prophecy officially merged into one, thus becoming the Church of God of Prophecy, Brampton. Woodroe Thompson, a young visionary, was appointed pastor of the newly merged church. Accompanying him on this journey in ministry, was his wife, Pauline, and their sons, Adrian and Christopher.

On October 9, 1991, Pastor Thompson was mandated by the local church in conference to commence preparation for building. As an electrician, and bricklayer by training, he was ready to take on the challenge of being at the helm of a building project. It was time to build. On September 26, 1992, ground was officially broken, and construction commenced on April 5, 1993. Pastor Thompson's expertise was invaluable in bridging all facets of building a church physically.

The congregants whole-heartedly embraced the erection of the church. It became an act of community building. The excitement was palpable. Construction commenced on April 5, 1993. During the various stages of building, the members were excited and made many trips to the site. Church members helped with laying of blocks and bricks, painting, cooking of meals, etc. Seniors, Women, Men, Youth, and Children answered the call for, "all hands-on deck" and could be seen on-site contributing towards the completion of the building. Through the tireless, unselfish labour of many passionate individuals, and of course God's divine favour, the difficult task of erecting the church was accomplished.

On August 15, 1993, a mere four months later, the first church service was held at 395 North Park Drive. The dedication service was packed to capacity, as individuals came from near and far to be a part of a great time of celebration. With a membership of approximately 90, Brampton Church of God of Prophecy had now established itself as a viable member of the Brampton faith community.

After the festivities were over, it was time to focus on developing leadership, administration and ministries within the church. Pastor Thompson recognized the need to build a team. He turned his attention to many of the leaders who had proven leadership; Pastor Bernard Yorke, Eugenie Brown, Deacon Edward Robinson, Alverine Dennis, Stephen Charles and Debbie Simmons-Charles. The team not only gave support to Pastor Thompson, but also assisted in the planning of services and revivals, visited the sick, provided spiritual encouragement for the church members and conducted home-based prayer meetings.

Pastor Thompson encouraged and supported various ministries, and his style of leadership allowed for new ministries to emerge. Some of the already functioning ministries were: Sunday School, Children's Church, Pastoral Aid Committee, Bus Ministry, Women's Missionary Band (W.M.B. – a ministry involving the ladies in the church, and which had a strong Missions focus). There was also the Church of God of Prophecy Markers Association (C.P.M.A.). Other ministries in existence during this period were the Little Darlings Daycare, Victory Leaders Band (V.L.B.), which was later changed to Youth Ministry. New ministries which were brought into focus were Singles', Men's, Music, Small Groups, Women's, Public Relations, Worship Team, and our school, Maranatha Christian Academy. They were assigned dedicated teams to develop and foster growth in each ministry area.

With the expansion of ministries, there became a greater need for administrative support. Initially, these duties were performed on a voluntary basis by Pauline Thompson and later, Debbie Simmons-Charles. Other volunteers who took on administrative duties were Carole Walker and Mirriam Bailey. However, as the administrative and ministry needs of the church increased, a part-time office assistant, Alvia Mitto was hired. Over the years, the church utilized many volunteers and ultimately hired its first full-time administrator, Stephney Davis.

After the ministries became established and began to function, other specialized ministries emerged; Sports, Special Events, Leadership Development, Ministerial Aid, Fundraising Team and Small Groups, to name a few. These ministries allowed the church to be more responsive to the needs of its members. The diversity of ministries allowed for individuals to find “their” place at North Park, and for a number of years, the church continued to focus on serving its membership.

After some time, Pastor Thompson, recognized that the church was in a “maintenance mode”, and that a change was necessary. The ministry of the Church of God of Prophecy Brampton needed to advance. The change would be reflective in leadership, and would also include redefining our mission and vision in order to have a greater impact in the community. A plurality of leadership underpinned the direction for the church. Associate Pastors, Ministers, Deacons, Operational Management, and a Board of Directors were added to help share and develop leadership at the local church level.

The year 2000, saw two significant changes for the church. In October of that year, Pastor Thompson made a proposal to the Eastern Canada’s Ministers Conference for a name change. He proposed that the Church of God of Prophecy Brampton, be changed to North Park Worship Centre (a Ministry of Church of God of Prophecy). The name would reflect the need for the church to become more integrated in the neighbourhood. In addition, the name ‘Worship Centre’ would indicate that we are a church where worship is emphasized. The other major shift came in the number of services offered. We moved from a single service at 11:00 a.m. to two services at 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. This was attributed to the blessing of growth both spiritually and numerically. The shift to two services yielded further numerical growth and by 2002, there was a membership of over 300. Pastor Thompson shared the preaching and teaching responsibilities with the Associate Pastors, Mark Lawrence and Fitzroy Matthews.

The reflection on North Park’s Mission and Vision statements was an on-going process that the leadership engaged in. As the church continued to grow, Pastor Thompson and the leaders reframed the vision to show our move from a neighbourhood church to a metropolitan church. After much prayer and fasting, Pastor Thompson was able to solidify the vision for the local church as follows:

- North Park Worship Centre would be a place where God is glorified.
- North Park Worship Centre would be a place where the hurting, the depressed, the frustrated and the confused can find love, acceptance, hope, help, forgiveness, guidance and encouragement.
- North Park Worship Centre would feed the hungry, present the Gospel to the lost, be a lighthouse in the community, equip the saints for the work of the ministry, model a standard of authentic righteousness and teach the Scriptures with a view of holy living.

- North Park Worship Centre would equip every believer for a significant ministry, by helping them discover their gifts and using them to glorify God.
- North Park Worship Centre would send the Gospel around the world through missionary efforts and church workers, empowering each member for a personal life mission in the City of Brampton and surrounding areas.
- North Park Worship Centre would start at least one new church.
- North Park Worship Centre would continue to grow spiritually and numerically, that our present facility would become too small, and as a result, we would again embark on a building project including a worship centre seating approximately two thousand, a counseling and prayer centre, a Christian school, classrooms for Bible studies, and training for lay ministers, also a recreational area for our youth.
- North Park Worship Centre would have a paid Pastoral staff with some of our work delegated to specialists within a multi-team environment with a strong emphasis on teamwork among all leadership.
- All this would be designed so that God would be glorified and the ministry would incorporate the total person, spiritually, emotionally, physically, and socially

The vision was then distilled into three core areas – Purpose, Mission and Objectives.

**Purpose Statement:** North Park Worship Centre exists to glorify God by mobilizing membership for spiritual maturity and maximum growth.

**Mission Statement:** Our mission is to bring people to Christ by sharing the Gospel. To equip, develop and empower them for ministry and service in the community.

**Our Objectives:** In order to fulfill our purpose and accomplish our mission, we will pursue four major objectives. To keep it simple and easy to remember, we will use the acronym, W.I.F.E.

My Church Family gives me...

- God's purpose to live for – Worship
- God's principles to live by – Instruction
- God's people to live with – Fellowship
- God's profession to live out – Evangelism

In keeping with the church's vision of becoming a metropolitan church, new ministries came into existence. The Benevolent Fund was launched in June 2003, along with the Visitation Team, which ministers to the residents at Tullamore Nursing Home. The Compassion Ministry held its first meeting in April 2004, to determine and respond to needs in the community. Fellowship Community Ministry (FCM), Family and Couples Ministry, Seniors, Titus I and II, Food for Life and Hospitality Ministry came into being.

North Park Worship Centre became intentional about developing mature leadership at all levels. The following ministers were licensed: Deacon Stanford Hartwell on August 10, 2003, Pastor Fitzroy Matthews on November 6, 2003, Pastor Mark Lawrence on February 10, 2004, and Sister Eugenie Brown on March 16, 2004. The Pastoral and Ministerial Teams were composed of the above licensed ministers and Alverine Dennis, Dorrel McDonald, Claudette Simms, Richard

Dennis, Rovel Dunn and Eric Shaw. These leaders, with their varying levels of experience and giftedness, provided support to Pastor Thompson as he shepherded the flock of North Park.

By 2007, the vision for acquiring property became a priority as we were experiencing the limitations of the building. Membership had now grown to approximately 500. As a result, the Fundraising Committee was given the directive to raise \$200,000 to pay off the existing mortgage to facilitate the acquisition of another property. This ambitious goal was to be accomplished in one year. Therefore, a wide-scale strategy was used to engage every member and friend of North Park. Although we did not reach the target within the desired timeframe, a significant amount was raised within that first year.

In January 2009, Pastor Woodroe Thompson was appointed Administrative Bishop of the Church of God of Prophecy, Eastern Canada. The position of Senior Pastor of North Park Worship Centre was appointed to Pastor Frank Douglas (Associate Pastor of West End Worship Centre). His wife, Jacqueline, and their children, Jeremy, Joshua and Kimberly embarked on this ministry journey with him.

Pastor Douglas embraced the existing vision of property acquisition, and encouraged North Park Worship Centre members and friends to continue to give prayerfully and sacrificially. The Fundraising Committee embarked on a renewed fundraising drive which was successful. The mortgage was completely paid off on Thursday November 26, 2009 at midnight, at the Royal Bank of Canada, Bramalea City Centre. A mortgage-free property made the vision of acquiring a Ministry Complex more attainable. To God be the glory, great things He has done!

After such a major accomplishment, it was time once again, to refine the vision and mission of North Park Worship Centre. Pastor Douglas started this process with prayer and fasting, then shared the length and breadth of his vision with the church. The fundamental objective was that the kingdom of God will be advanced, and that souls will be won. Pastor Douglas wanted to target the following areas:

- Worship
- Mission
- Evangelism
- Discipleship
- Stewardship
- Leadership Development
- Compassion and Social Ministry
- Maranatha Christian Academy
- Full Time Staff
- Radio and Television Ministry
- Church Planting
- Accountability and
- Property Acquisition

The leaders of the church were then invited to engage in a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis, to examine both the internal and external factors that would further, or could obstruct the accomplishment of the vision. The first step was a concerted look

at Leadership Development. Pastor Douglas then laid out his vision for leadership and the expectations were as follows:

- All key leaders would unite, become committed, serve passionately
- Live Holy
- Consistently give of their time and talent
- Have a strong level of excellence while serving
- Show mutual respect in ministry

To this end, the following leadership development opportunities were instituted:

- Foundational Courses on Saturday Mornings, ETA
- Mandatory attendance to Bible Study or Sunday School
- Subsidization of fees to Leadership Conferences and the Ministry Development Training (MDT) program

To better support ministry leaders and streamline the work of ministry, a tiered Divisional Leadership Structure was put in place. This structure also allowed for accountability in the work of ministry. Each ministry had the oversight of a Divisional Leader whose responsibility was to provide intentional support and mentorship for his/her team.

The acquisition of property was another major focus of Pastor Douglas. It was time to put attention on acquiring a Ministry Complex. It would be accomplished in three phases and the anticipated time frame was 7-10 years.

- Phase 1 – Acquiring the land
- Phase 2 – Utilizing the land
- Phase 3 – Paying off the mortgage on the new property

The expertise of many members was utilized as a result of this focus. A multi-disciplinary team spanning areas such as project management, finance, real estate, legal counsel, ministry team and many others was assembled. This team met to strategize on how to best accomplish the vision. Over the next few years, properties were visited, plans were drawn, fundraising events were launched, and meetings were held to update the members. The church oscillated between highs and lows. There were points when we thought the vision was in sight and other times, when hopes were dashed. Nevertheless, we remained faithful to the bold vision and made incremental steps towards achieving it.

Pastor Douglas' strengths in administration, procedures, organization, governance, preaching and teaching took North Park to new heights in all these areas. Because of his focus on Leadership Development, many emerging leaders were given the opportunity to develop their giftedness and talents. Additionally, his gift for remembering the names of members and visitors made a difference and helped to foster a sense of belonging and family in the church community.

The year 2019, saw yet another change in the senior leadership of North Park. Pastor Douglas was administratively appointed to lead another Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP) congregation. North Park was now under Administrative Oversight of the Eastern Canada's

Administrative Bishop, Woodroe Thompson. Pastors Mark Lawrence and Fitzroy Matthews along with Associate Pastor Rovel Dunn and Youth Pastor Kyrel Thompson were appointed to shepherd the flock. Each pastor, with his unique giftedness and leadership style was able to support the church as it went through this transitional phase.

March 2020 was the dawn of a new era in the history of North Park as the world responded to a pandemic. With a Canada-wide lock-down due to the spread of COVID-19, North Park's doors were closed. Church as we knew it changed, but ministry continued. The on-line and digital platforms opened numerous avenues for ministering within and without. Zoom and Youtube were the main mechanisms used. North Park embraced this new reality and sought out ways to support church members and the wider community.

Many ministries thrived and saw record numbers of on-line attendees. Sunday morning services were pre-recorded initially, then were moved to a live-streamed hybrid format once churches were permitted to reopen. Sermons, Bible Study, Prayer Meetings, Fellowship Sessions focused on the impact of COVID-19 on the Church, community and wider world. One of the topics explored on Wednesday evening Bible Study was Spiritual Discipline. It drew connections as to how the development of those disciplines would sustain us, not only in the current times, but also in the future.

Despite the obvious new challenges that everyone faced, all ministries sought new and creative ways to ensure that they continued to function.

For example:

- The Women's Ministry embarked on a weekly prayer ministry which reached beyond the borders of Canada. They also facilitate a 24-hour prayer line for requests, praise reports and prayers.
- Children's Church, Youth Ministry (Unit 3), Family Ministry, Men's Ministry, New Members class, utilized various platforms to maintain contact with individuals.
- The Pastoral and Ministerial, The Audio Visual & Technical, The Hospitality and Worship Teams, worked together to ensure a smooth and safe hybrid worship experience.
- The Community Outreach Department supported many North Park families and the community at large.

Additionally, our response to the needs in the community was not limited to our established outreach ministries. We saw the emergence of individual initiative coupled with ministry response. Wherever a need was identified, a response was given. One area that leaders saw the need to do more was for our Seniors, and the ministry, Helping Hands, increased its operation. The Compassion Ministry also responded to the needs in our community. Groceries were purchased and delivered to many households. The Men's and Women's Ministry visited Seniors' care facilities to appreciate Frontline Workers.

Leaders and members conducted wellness checks both formally and informally, connecting with regular visitors and members. These various ways that we have had to reimagine ministry, through digital discipleship, have helped maintain a sense of community among the church body.

North Park's humble beginnings from a home-based Sunday School, to a Mission, to a local church, to a Neighbourhood Church, and finally to a Metropolitan Church, took approximately four decades. Throughout the years, the church experienced many highs and lows. However, with God's Blessings, we have moved from strength to strength and strive to continue to offer effective ministry to the members and community.

We look forward to seeing where God leads us as a local church and chronicling North Park's journey beyond 2021.