

Elaine Longland, ground-breaking minister leaving St. Paul's church

Wants to spend more time with retired husband

By **STEVE LeBLANC**
Special to The Champion

St. Paul's United Church will close the pages on an interesting chapter in its long history next summer, when the parish says goodbye to one of its two ministers.

Reverend Elaine Longland recently announced she will retire in June, essentially the end of the church year. While admitting it will be hard to leave her congregation, she says the decision to retire has been weighing on her for some time now.

"My husband Herb will have been retired for seven years by that time (next June) and I feel that's a long time not to feel free to do things together as a couple," said Rev. Longland, who stressed in her announcement that she was not leaving for another congregation.

Next summer's retirement will end an eight-year association between the 58-year-old minister and St. Paul's — as well as a unique part of the church's history.

Rev. Longland is the first and only female minister to serve at St. Paul's. Although she doesn't remember any problems because of her unique status, fellow minister Bob Hyde said there were some parishioners who were reluctant to have a woman at the pulpit.

"There was some reluctance, but she quickly won them over," recalled Rev. Hyde.

Her call to the church came in the mid 1980s while serving as a lay person at Wellington Square United Church in Burlington, where she still resides. As an active parish member — through the choir, volunteer projects and adult Christian education — she said one of the church's ministers approached her with the idea of becoming a minister herself.

"I hadn't thought about it before that but after I couldn't get the idea out of my head, I guess it was God's way of nudging me towards the church," said Rev. Longland, who had worked in the home and raised two daughters before beginning her reli-

gious studies at Emmanuel College in Toronto.

"I consider myself lucky to be among a generation of women that could make a decision like this."

She was ordained in Guelph and joined St. Paul's in the summer of 1989.

In addition to regular weekend church services, Rev. Longland has continued her efforts in adult Christian education at St. Paul's and has also worked with parish teens. Her duties have included numerous volunteer and outreach programs.

Rev. Hyde, who handles the administration of church operations as well as regular pulpit duties, describes his fellow minister as a "strong, capable" person who has elicited confidence in her parishioners over the past seven-plus years.

"We work as a team and I think the congregation has come to think of us that way. She will be very much missed next sum-

mer," Rev. Hyde said. He added the replacement of his fellow minister will be a long process that will begin months before her retirement.

Serving 650 families in her parish, Rev. Longland says she is most proud of the fact that she's been able to build strong relationships with parishioners of all ages — from young children to seniors.

"I've also been able to watch the lay people here develop their own abilities and gain confidence in what they have to offer the church," she said.

Her retirement plans involve spending more time with her grandchildren and traveling to "warm places" with her husband in the winters.

"I have loved this church. It's not going to be easy to walk away, but sometimes you have to make hard choices and this was the right one for me," said Rev. Longland.



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Rev. Elaine Longland of St. Paul's United Church recently announced her retirement.

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