



# THE HILLCREST CHURCH STORY

To know a community, you need to know its story.



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CHURCH STORY**

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# THIS IS THE STORY OF WHAT JESUS HAS DONE

## REVIVAL TABERNACLE

The story of Hillcrest Chapel begins with a Spirit empowered missionary movement. In the first half of the 20th century there was a Pentecostal revival in the Pacific Northwest. One of the churches at the center of it was a church called Bethel Temple in Seattle. They were holding full tent revivals where people were being set free from alcoholism and trusting their lives to Jesus. These tent revival meetings grew to become a large church in Seattle that sent out all sorts of missionaries. They planted and sponsored 33

Bethel Temple meeting in Seattle



churches in the Pacific Northwest, and one of them, in the 1940's was in Bellingham and called Revival Tabernacle.

Revival Tabernacle was incorporated in the State of Washington in 1946. In 1970 the name was changed to Hillcrest Chapel.

In our deepest DNA we are not a church of a certain ethnicity of immigrants that moved here, or a group of people fleeing persecution. Those would be different stories. Our deep DNA is that we were a missionary church plant from a Spirit empowered missionary movement.

## PASTOR RICHARD ELLISON

Revival Tabernacle continued on in Bellingham for several decades until the late 1960's, and it was still a small community at that point of about 30 people. In the late 1960s they invited Pastor Richard Ellison and Leona Ellison, to be their pastor. They were a couple that had been traveling the country in a bus serving as evangelists and they came to Bellingham with a heart for those who did not know Jesus.

As a young man, Pastor Ellison had not

Richard  
and Leona  
Ellison



attended college and he didn't come from a Christian family. When he was 16, his dad would chop trees down in rural Idaho. Richard would haul the wood into town to sell it and then use the money to buy beer. His family thought it was cute when he was drunk. All this changed when as a teenager, he had a vision of Jesus and he committed his life to following Jesus. Richard became a traveling preacher, driving a bus around the country with his wife and kids. This was the man called by Revival Tabernacle to become the pastor of the church.

Pastor Ellison began to lead Revival Tabernacle in the late 1960's and in the first year the congregation tripled in size. The next year it was over 150 people. And in Pastor Ellison's own words, they were seeing hippies come to faith and "long haired nut chewers coming out of the woods."

This turned into a problem for those who were there before Pastor Ellison came. They found the changes to their church to be too much too fast, and they left. In the early 70's the entire board and a large portion of the congregation left. Many others then drifted away because they didn't want to be around the conflict. By the early 70's the congregation was again down to 20 - 30 people. It is important to understand that the story of our community, involved conflict, pain and people leaving in our early days. This is not uncommon in the life of a church that is having an impact in the world.

## A NEW BEGINNING

When we talk to Pastor Ellison about this



Original church building at 14th and Larrabee Avenue ...you can still see those top windows

time he'll say there needed to be a humbling, or a stripping down, before God could do a new thing at our church. Then in the mid-1970's God truly did a new thing here.

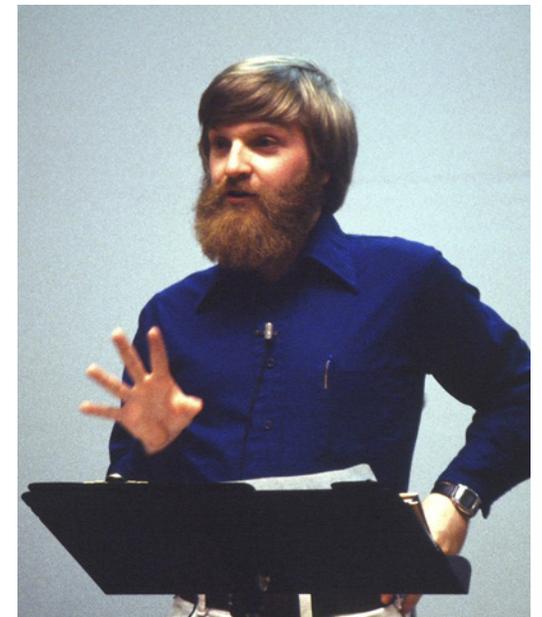
The group had been meeting in various places, including a building next to Diehl Ford that later became a real estate office and in a funeral home. During this time the church acquired a parcel of land behind Kmart on James Street on the crest of a hill. In light of that land purchase Revival Tabernacle was renamed Hillcrest Chapel. The church reached the point where they were

prepared to invest in a building project. However, in the meantime, a Methodist church in Fairhaven was preparing to close its ministry and was praying that a vital Jesus loving congregation would take over its building. It was the elderly Methodist congregation's heart and prayers for the Southside that helped to bring us to this part of town. Pastor Ellison heard about the situation and made contact with the Methodist group. In 1974 The Methodist group sold the property to Hillcrest Chapel. The building was comprised of what we now call the community room with class rooms and open meeting space on the lower floor.

## CAMPUS CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP — CCF

While all these events were going on, in the early 70's Brady Bobbink, a student at Western Washington University, became a follower of Jesus and was a member of a group of students who started an on-campus weekly student Christian group under the name Campus Christian Fellowship (CCF). Brady became one of the primary leaders of the group in the fall of 1972. He knew that Jesus was leading him to be involved with

Brady Bobbink teaching at CCF





WWU students worship at Friday Night CCF gathering

reaching and ministering to students on campus. However, he was not aware that his involvement as a student leader would have any bearing on his future. Brady graduated with a degree in Secondary Education at the end of the fall term in 1973.

Pastor Ellison heard about Brady and his leadership in the CCF group at Western and without meeting with Brady, he requested approval from the church board for permission to approach Brady with a question and depending on his answer, a proposal. The question was whether Brady was open to returning to Western to continue his ministry to students. If he was willing, Hillcrest Chapel would help him return by hiring him to be a mid-week teaching pastor. At this time the church board was not even able to fully pay Pastor Ellison's salary, but Pastor Ellison told the board he would give whatever came in from the Wednesday night services to Brady. On

a Sunday evening, Brady, having been invited by a couple of friends, visited Hillcrest Chapel. Pastor Ellison invited him out to dinner after the service. While they were eating, Pastor Ellison asked his question and told Brady that the church wanted to send him as a missionary back to Western's Campus. Pastor Ellison shared with Brady, "I don't care if the students ever come to our church, but I do care that we go to them to tell them about Jesus." Following this dinner conversation Brady came to the confident conviction that the proposal from Pastor Ellison was in fact the Lord opening a door that he was to go through. Brady said "yes" and returned to Western and began teaching at the Wednesday evening service at Hillcrest. This began a dynamic relationship between Hillcrest Chapel, its visionary pastor and board, its new young missionary and the student community of CCF. This relationship would result in an amazing world-wide impact. Deep in the DNA of Hillcrest Chapel, is a desire and dedication to reach the secular University regardless of whether or not the students ever become involved directly with Hillcrest Chapel.

## HILLCREST KIDS

With the move to 1400 Larrabee Avenue, Hillcrest Chapel now occupied a sizable building on the

Hillcrest Kids, a new daycare ministry born in Fairhaven



Southside. At this point in time Pastor Ellison asked two critical questions. One, how can we fully use this building? Pastor Ellison didn't want the building to just sit empty most days each week. Two, what are the unmet needs around us? What they saw on the Southside was a need to support single moms and working families with young children. And so they launched a daycare for kids.

It began with 3 kids and 6 staff. They didn't really have any money to buy toys, so they brought in old refrigerator cardboard boxes for the kids to play in. During many of the early years the Hillcrest Daycare program operated at a loss. However, two successive pastors as well as the Hillcrest Board remained committed to sponsoring this ministry to meet the needs of the families in our Southside neighborhood. This program now has been in existence for more than 40 years and is presently licensed to serve 162 children in what is now called Hillcrest Kids early learning program. The sacrifice by Hillcrest Chapel in the 70's has produced another positive outreach to our local community. Deep in our DNA is a commitment to kids and their families.

## ASSEMBLIES OF GOD

One more key thing happened in the mid-1970s. Hillcrest Chapel merged with the small Fairhaven Assemblies of God church, and Hillcrest Chapel joined the Assemblies of God. Up until this point Hillcrest had been an independent church, but this brought us into a worldwide community, and it brought support and accountability along with it. This important event in the Hillcrest story

took place after Pastor Ellison had moved on to another ministry opportunity. A Pastor by the name of Eldo Lindgren was the leader who moved us to join the Assemblies of God (AG). It was Pastor Lindgren who introduced us to the AG national college ministry which led to our partnership with Chi Alpha. It was Pastor Lindgren who laid down much of our fiscal accountability that has brought needed order to our fiscal affairs that continue to serve us well today.

So the mid-1970s brought a commitment to the Southside, a commitment to secular college students, a commitment to kids, and a commitment to being part of the larger Assemblies of God movement.

By the late 1970s Pastor Lindgren moved on to another service assignment. In 1977 a new young pastor by the name of Bob Stone, along with his wife Nancy, came and began leading Hillcrest Chapel.

Pastor Bob brought fresh vision and a very strong commitment to Scripture. It was common for him to teach for an hour verse by verse. Pastor Bob taught us to let Scripture interpret Scripture. Early in his tenure he taught for over two years verse by verse from the book of Ephesians. His



Bob and Nancy Stone

teaching outlines are still treasured and used by those still here from his original congregation.

Pastor Bob brought a heart-felt commitment to college students having pioneered a university church in Seattle prior to coming to Hillcrest Chapel. As a result of Brady's efforts at Western and Pastor Bob's support, a lot of students were attending Hillcrest Chapel. Pastor Bob's open support of CCF and his skills as a teacher brought substantial growth to students.

He also brought a desire to expand the Church's commitment to mission efforts around the world. Pastor Bob's leadership produced a very significant expansion of the mission's budget that came to provide support to more than fifty missionaries. This remains today as a lasting legacy from Pastor Bob's ministry at Hillcrest Chapel.

Another important part of Pastor Bob's legacy was to bring us new directions in family ministry and personal discipleship to the great benefit of our congregation. For example, Hillcrest began small home groups before small groups were common in the church world. He believed that it made sense to facilitate spiritual formation in small groups of people where you could really know each other. But again, just like when Pastor Ellison arrived, for some people this was too much change too fast, and about half the church community left when Pastor Bob started leading the congregation. Pain and tension continued to be part of the Hillcrest Chapel story.

Pastor Bob did not let this discourage him. He began to find and hire creative visionary people to join the pastoral staff. He firmly

believed in releasing talented pastors to develop effective ministry in their own areas of giftedness which resulted in several ministry directions being developed.

These included internship opportunities with both the college and church staff and also resulted in the development of our in-house savings program for members called the Capital Fund. The church staff now has a pension plan and an insurance trust to help provide healthcare benefits. There are other important ministries that also came out of the efforts of new staff hired by Pastor Bob.

## SOUTHSIDE FOOD BANK

Through the 1980s these values of loving Jesus, loving people, asking what the needs are, and being willing to try to new things continued.

For example, in the mid-1980s people kept coming into the Hillcrest office looking for food. So the office staff began keeping bags of groceries in the office in case hungry people came looking for food. As a result of seeing this need in the mid-1980s Hillcrest Chapel began the Southside Food Bank

to help feed folks in the name of Jesus on the south end of town. We continue to be a people who love Jesus and love people, and ask what the

Southside  
Food Bank  
distribution



real needs are. Pastor Bob described Hillcrest Chapel as a “Healing Community of Love, Acceptance, Forgiveness and Belonging”.

## ROYAL FAMILY KIDS

The same spirit continued into the 1990s. In 1991, our children’s pastor, Kathy Hill, was at a conference where she heard about a ministry called Royal Family Kids Camp. RFKC provided a week long camp every summer for abused and neglected foster kids. She brought the vision back to Hillcrest Chapel and decided to begin a chapter in Bellingham because it fit our vision of being people who love Jesus and love people and ask what the real needs are.

RFK meeting in original church building



## GROWTH AND BREAKDOWN

Through the 1990s and into the early 2000s the Hillcrest congregation grew very rapidly. Another significant part of Pastor Bob’s legacy is the major building expansion that created the worship auditorium that we enjoy today. The ultimate plan was actually to double the size of this new building some day. The meeting room we use today would be half of what the final room size would be.

Then in the mid-2000s, Pastor Bob Stone, who had been here for twenty-eight years, was asked to resign in what was a painful break for everyone and led to a “wilderness time” that was marked with staff challenges and leadership conflicts from Hillcrest. We tell you this because that’s part of our story too.

In the midst of those difficult years there have been beautiful seasons of peace and prosperity, where Jesus has done so much to sustain us. We did not rush to hire a new Lead Pastor because we wanted to take the time over the last few years to do the soul searching, listening, healing and preparing necessary to step into a new healthy season. It was the Lord’s strength that sustained our mission, reformed our personal relationships and guided us to a new organizational structure, in preparation for the new things He had for us. We are so thankful for God’s provision of the faithful servants that led and cared for Hillcrest through this time.

## A NEW ERA BEGINS

On August 7, 2017 we entered a new chapter in the story of Hillcrest Chapel. After a long extended search Pastor Christian Lindbeck and his family joined our staff as Lead Pastor. Pastor Christian came to us from 10 years of service at Canyon Creek Church in Mill Creek, Washington. We begin this new era with much prayer and great hope that Jesus will continue to guide us into ministry opportunities that he has for us.

Sam, Joe, Jen  
and Christian  
Lindbeck



## COVID-19

The COVID pandemic changed the world in 2020. Worship services moved from the Hillcrest building to online. The impact was significant. Congregation members missed the community fellowship with one another. Small groups meeting in homes became even more important and served as the primary means for people to support and encourage each other.

A positive effect coming out of COVID-19 was the great expansion of the population of people able to join in the worship services of Hillcrest Church. Our missionaries and many others around the world are now able to join the Hillcrest Sunday worship services through the online access. The result of COVID-19 was further growth in the Hillcrest family.

## 75th ANNIVERSARY

On August 29, 2021, Hillcrest Church celebrated its 75th anniversary. The work that began as a church plant in 1946 has been carried on through the years by many of our brothers and sisters who have gone before us. The present team of pastors and staff serving in the three divisions of Hillcrest Church continue moving our ministries forward. Hundreds of Hillcrest folks are now serving as volunteers in the various ministries of Hillcrest Church.

## THROUGH IT ALL

Through it all, the joyful times of expansion, the hard seasons, through the times of risk, through the fun times, Jesus has been at work here.

In the core of our hearts we remain a Spirit empowered missionary movement. We currently support over 116 full time missionaries around the world plus local ministries.

We are still committed to the mission to reaching the secular campus. UCM now has 16 pastoral staff, 2 administrative staff, 15 interns, and hundreds of students on 3 campuses. The internship has trained and sent hundreds of

graduates into campus, church, and market-  
place ministry around the world.



Recent CCF  
gathering

We are still committed to kids and families in  
the Southside and beyond.

Hillcrest Kids  
Christmas  
program

Hillcrest kids early learning center, what  
began as our daycare, now has 32 teachers and 6  
support staff serving 150 kids.



Royal Family  
Kids Bellingham  
serves to  
provide positive  
memories and  
break the cycle  
of abuse for kids  
in Whatcom  
County. For the  
past 25+ years  
there has been  
Royal Family Kids



Camp, a one week camp for abused and neglected  
kids ages 7-11, and for the past 6 years Royal Family  
Kids Clubs and Mentors has helped continue a  
relationship with the kids from camp through one  
on one mentoring. This summer we are pleased to  
announce our affiliation with TRAC - Teen Reach  
Adventure Camp for kids 12-15 years old. This  
program serves kids that have been through Royal  
Family Kids but have aged out of those programs.

Royal Family  
Kids Camp  
activities

Our food bank serves 115 people twice a  
month, distributing 2,000lbs of food a month.

And we are still part of the world wide  
Assemblies of God, gaining helpful support and  
accountability by being part of a larger Spirit  
empowered missionary movement. Yet at the  
same time, we have always been Jesus people first,  
and have found ourselves to be a landing place for  
people of a variety of denominational backgrounds.

And we keep trying new things! Over the  
years some ministries have come and gone, we  
once had a radio station and a counseling center.  
And some things have just begun. Just in the last

few years we formed a partnership with Skookum Kids, where they use our house across the street for short-term emergency foster kid housing.

But, at the end of the day this isn't what we've done. This is about what Jesus has done in and through this community. And to belong here, to be part of this community, is to become part of this story and the particular things Jesus has done with these people, in this place, in the past, to this present time.

And here's the great thing, we don't think Jesus is done yet. We believe Jesus has more to do in and through Hillcrest Church. We want you to understand our community's story. We want to honor and cherish the past. But we also believe that God has more ahead of us. We want to honor our past but not live in the past. We believe Jesus wants to continue this story.

Here is the question we want you to ask and reflect on. What stories do you want to be told about this community, 10, 15, 20 years from now? What dream for Hillcrest has God put into your heart? What is God inviting you to pray about and act on?

Is it about supporting Syrian Refugee's? Planting a new needed church in our area or a Christian study center on Western's campus? Perhaps you see ways to help see every foster kid in Whatcom county housed and cared for, or 50 new international missionaries being supported in the next 10 years, a study program for helping integrate faith and work, ending human trafficking in Whatcom county, a stream of new Jesus followers every year.

**HILLCREST**  
C H U R C H

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love God | grow together | care for the world