

From Our History
Financing St. Matthew's

How does a congregation finance a church for more than 250 years? At St. Matthew's this challenge has been met in many interesting ways.

In 1787 the Treaty of Peace, which established 20 Rules relating to St. Matthew's membership, management, finances and governance, set out two basic forms of fundraising. The first was pew rents for members those who wanted their own seat in the meeting house. Pew rents were charged for nearly 100 years. The second fundraising method was loose collection, which was to be left at the church door after service. It wasn't until 1864 that the Session felt it was necessary to have an elder guard this collection!

Two popular ways to raise funds have always been special collections and subscriptions for specific projects. Early records indicate that special subscriptions raised money for a new pulpit for the Meeting House in 1788, and for a parsonage in 1789. This is how construction of the building that you see around you was financed between 1857 and 1859. Special collections were also held for church organs and various major renovations.

There have been others ways of generating income. In 1787 John Fillis donated a bell to the Meeting House, and the congregation charged 5 shillings to have it tolled at funerals. In 1802 the Session bought a set of mort cloths or palls, which were rented for 5 or 10 shillings as casket coverings. In an unusual entrepreneurial spirit, St. Matthew's even rented its cellars to local merchants. One of the grocers, Alexander MacLeod, used the space to store molasses, sugar and alcohol. His tenancy resulted in the anonymous posting of a poem on the door:

*Spirits above and spirits below
Spirits of love and spirits of woe
The spirits above are spirits divine
But the spirits below are the spirits of wine.*

Collection plates first appeared in 1884, and caused a general sensation when they were first circulated during the middle of the service. A special congregational meeting was immediately called, and the ensuing furore caused the Trustees to return to the custom of leaving the collection plate at the door. However, they warned the congregation that without increased donations the mid-service collection would be reinstated. By the following year collection plates were in permanent use.

Envelopes came into use about 100 years ago, encouraging systematic giving on a monthly basis. Today many families take advantage of the efficiencies of our modern banking system by signing on to PAR – pre-authorized remittance, or direct debit from a bank account – to make their weekly contribution to the church finances.