Living Water Community Church

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Living Water also Connects to:

- Reba Place Fellowship - Evanston
- Reba Place Church – South Evanston

Historical Overview

In the mid-1980s, a "church-planting" team organized within Reba Place Church, a large Mennonite congregation located in Evanston, IL. The team, made up of mostly twenty-thirty year old members, wanted to create their own church—one that was smaller, more intimate, and not in an increasingly gentrified neighborhood, but still upholding the same values and teachings as Reba Place Church. Looking for "an under-churched, more needy city neighborhood with ethnic diversity," Rogers Park was finally decided upon as the best option, and members of the group began moving there in 1987.

For the next several years, the mostly white group attempted to reach out to different immigrant and ethnic groups around the city and recruit them to build a more ethnically and culturally diverse congregation. One early immigrant community to join the new church were the Cambodians. Arriving in the United States and Chicago in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of the US bombing campaign during the Vietnam war and the subsequent genocide by the Khmer Rouge government, several thousand refugees relocated to Chicago, and particularly the northern neighborhoods near Rogers Park. There was a group of Cambodian immigrants who attended Reba Place Church and several were connected with the church planting team themselves, so the new church seemed an attractive option as it was closer to where they lived and emphasized diversity within the congregation.

Beginning public worship in 1995 in a rented space at the United Church of Rogers Park for, the new church was initially called Reba Place Church of Rogers Park. It became Living Water Community Church in 1998, and by 2005 the congregation permanently moved into a new meeting and worship site on the corner of Pratt and Ashland in Rogers Park, where it remains today. With the stated purpose of being "a multi-cultural urban church with vibrant worship, warm hospitality, shared life, discipleship, and outreach in the Anabaptist Christian tradition," Living Water's most distinct feature is the ethnic and cultural diversity of the congregation. Being located in one of the most diverse communities in Chicago, the congregation accurately represents the large ethnic minority and immigrant population of Rogers Park and Chicago.

Sunday services are commonly spoken in four languages on a rotating basis: English, Nepali, Swahili, and Khmer. Pass the Peace during services are also spoken in French, Kirundi, Spanish, and Hindi, in addition to the four previously mentioned. Similar to the introduction of Cambodian refugees to Reba Place Church and later Living Water, many refugees and immigrants from Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, and Nepal arrived in Chicago, particularly the north and northwest neighborhoods, in the late 2000s.

The diversity of the congregation is not only seen in the physical appearances of the members and the languages spoken, but also through the messages and teachings during the services. To give one example, during 2023's Palm Sunday service, the Associate Pastor Stephen Lamb read a story to the children of the congregation. One message Stephen told to the children was the importance of non-violence and peaceful resolutions. As a large part of the congregation are members of immigrant communities fleeing war torn nations and regions of the world, the message is likely popular and commonly repeated during services. As Samrach Nuth, a Cambodian pastor within Living Water, explained, "I choose to be at Living Water because the Mennonites support peace. I lived in Cambodia where war separated families. The Mennonites have a good idea about how to deal with that."

Music is an essential component to Living Water services and the overall environment of the congregation. Similar to the variety of languages spoken during services, the worship music also varies each week, with groups like the African Unity Choir leading during the week when Swahili is spoken at service.

Living Water's history and current situation not only illustrates the cultural and ethnic diversity of Chicago and the importance of immigration to the city's development, but it also plays a role in Chicago's violent history of segregation and exclusion. Most histories about immigration to Chicago focus on Irish and Italian immigrants settling in Bridgeport and south side neighborhoods, or central and eastern European communities settling on the north side. These histories play a vital role in Chicago's history, particularly related to police violence, redlining and de-facto segregation, labor unions, and gangsterism, and need to be studied and taught to all Chicagoans and Americans. But also learning about Living Water can help teach the history of other immigrant groups, particularly in the later decades of the 20th century, and how many communities have worked to integrate immigrants from different countries to create flourishing and diverse neighborhoods.

Timeline

1957	Reba Place Fellowship is created in Evanston, IL
c. 1975 – 1985	Large Cambodian refugee resettlement in Chicago
1981	Reba Place Church is created and separates from Reba Place Fellowship
Fall 1986	Several members of Reba Place Church (RPC) show interest in developing a group separate from RPC.
2/1988	New "small group" forms with the potential goal of church planting.
8/1989	The group decides on "church planting" in Rogers Park, the northernmost neighborhood. of Chicago, and south of Reba Place Church in Evanston, IL.
1995	The group begins public worship by renting out the social hall at the United Church of Rogers Park at 1545 W. Morse Ave.
1998	Officially renamed to Living Water Community Church after becoming financially autonomous from Reba Place Church.
2003	Living Water purchases building at 6808 N. Ashland Blvd.
2005	Living Water permanently moves into the previously purchased building and continues to be the place of worship.
1/2006	First Service in new building.
2008/2009	East African immigrants and refugees resettle in Chicago.

2009	Founding member and Pastor Sally Schreiner Youngquist retires.
2011	Kristin Jackson hired as new head Pastor.

Annotated Bibliography

"About Us." Living Water Community Church, n.d. https://livingwatercommunitychurch.org/about/history/.

The official website for Living Water, which gives basic information about the history and details of the church and congregation.

Schreiner Youngquist, Sally. "How the Living Water Community Church -planting Team Chose Wear to Plant in Chicago," n.d.

Document written by retired pastor Sally Schreiner Youngquist, detailing the origins of Living Water Community Church, the process of choosing a new location and development strategies, as well as the early emphasis on ethnic and cultural diversity.

Schreiner Youngquist, Sally, Kristin Johnson , Sophorn Loeung , and Amos Shakya. "Living Water's Multicultural Journey," n.d.

Article within a Mennonite publication detailing the history of Living Water's focus on ethnic and cultural diversity, and how the diversity in the congregation influences the variety of activities and ritual occurring during Sunday services and throughout the week.