

# Elm Street Presbyterian announces closure just short of 100 years of operation

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ALTON – Just short of 100 years serving North Alton, Elm Street Presbyterian Church will be conducting its last service and closing its doors on Dec. 30.

The church was founded in 1919 and has been a staple of the community ever since. Within its walls started the Crisis Food Center, which continues independently to help

those with food insecurity. It was the home of the first area Montessori school. It hosted Boy Scout meetings since the 1940s. Alcoholics Anonymous and other groups dedicated to kicking substance abuse also conducted their business in the sanctuary of the church. Some of those groups would still be meeting there if it was not for the closure.

Unfortunately, however, the church has dwindled from a couple of hundred members to 53. That congregation is going to split and worship at different churches still standing, Elm Street Presbyterian Church Elder Mary Cordes said.

The decline in congregation is not an Alton, problem. It's indicative of a national trend of people distancing themselves from Protestant Christianity. In fact, a study done by a Christian survey group stated more people are practicing witchcraft now than being Presbyterian. The data collection and analysis of that study was admittedly biased, but the drive away from Protestant Christianity towards non-denominational Christianity is real – and this church closure is among its symptoms.

With only 53 members and mounting maintenance issues, Elm Street Presbyterian cannot afford to keep its doors open to 2019, which would have been its centennial.

“It's very, very tough,” Cordes said. “Almost all of those left have been there our entire lives. My entire family has attended church there, and we are a big family. It's difficult for us, but we have to understand God is moving us in a different direction.”

One final service will be conducted at the church on Dec. 30, 2018, at 1 p.m. A small reception with refreshments will follow that service.

“As the news is coming out, we've heard from a lot of people who used to come to church or involved in groups,” Cordes said. “It's sad to see it close. It has been a vital part of the North Alton community for nearly 100 years. We're hoping God leads us in a new direction, so we can help whatever churches we do go to next.”

## **A History of Elm Street Presbyterian**

The church was founded in 1919 by a mission organized in areas without churches. Its creation was sponsored by the First Presbyterian Church by Rev. Edward L. Gibson. Prior to that, Sunday faith instruction was given each Sunday afternoon from 1884 to 1919 under the named of Community Church of the Northside. When it was founded, there were 33 charter members.

In March 1921, the current lot on which the church stands was given to the congregation by Andrew Hawley and his sister. It once housed a two-room schoolhouse before being used as a park. A basement was dug and hosted services in September 1923, and the rest

of the church was completed three years later. When it was completed, it was under the direction of Rev. John Reynolds who served from 1925-1934.

A pipe organ was dedicated to “all mothers of the church” in 1935 under the direction of Rev. John Morrison, who served from 1934-1940. He was also able to clear the church's previous debt. He was replaced by Rev. Ralph Martin in 1941, but he was called to serve in World War II in 1943.

Rev. Marshall Rice was the pastor from 1944-1954. Under his service, the church purchased a manse – a house occupied by a minister of a Presbyterian Church – on State Street, and it was cleared of debt within three years. He was replaced by Rev. William Kimbrough, who served from 1954-1961. Under his service, a Christian Education Building was purchased and dedicated on Nov. 15, 1959.

Property to the west of the church was purchased for additional parking in 1969 under the leadership of Rev. Charles Collisson who served as pastor from Sept. 24, 1961, to 1971 when he was replaced by Rev. Kenneth Edelman who served until the last day of 1992.

Since then, the church has been served by Interim Pastor Rev. Henry Gooch in 1993, Pastor Jefferey Jahn who served until 1998, Rev. Kenneth DeWall of the Bethalto Presbyterian Church was a temporary pastor until July 2001, Rev. Nicole Richardson who was ordained and installed in July 2001. She was replaced by Rev. Jay Kanerva who was Stated Supply Pastor from 2005-2006. Rev. Will Mason served as Designated Pastor from 2007-2009. Rev. Janet Riley served from 2011-2012. Rev. William Veith was the last minister of the church, and he left in July 2017.