

## Hamilton Mountain News

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### 'New energy' as Barton Stone-Mount Hope churches unite

By Gord Bowes



Rev. Peg Turner (left) and Rev. Ann Stafford share ministerial duties at the amalgamated Barton Stone-Mount Hope United Church.

After an extended courtship, Barton Stone and Mount Hope churches are settling in for a successful marriage, say the new parish's two reverends.

"There's a new energy," Rev. Peg Turner says of the amalgamated Barton Stone-Mount Hope United Church ([bartonstoneunitedchurch.ca](http://bartonstoneunitedchurch.ca)).

"There's a real concerted effort to make this work."

The merger of the two churches came about after more than 18 months of talks. It became official on July 1.

Rev. Ann Stafford, who oversaw the Case and Mount Hope churches, said the two institutions had been struggling in recent years, their buildings needed repairs and they were looking for ways to strengthen their parishes.

"There was a point that they reached where so much of their time was being put into fundraising to keep the building there as a place where we could worship and hold activities," says Stafford. "There wasn't a lot of time left over to do ministry in the community. They thought it would be faithful to combine resources with another congregation so we could have a bigger impact."

At one point in time, merging Case and Mount Hope would seem the obvious choice, she says. But over the years the makeup of the church changed, with a large part of the congregation coming from the nearby retirement communities. Those parishioners came from all over and didn't feel any historic tie to Case, located on White Church Road.

"When they were asked, it became quite clear that if the Mount Hope congregation moved to Case, they would probably not go," she says.

Barton Stone was also closer for many of them.

Turner says when she arrived at Barton Stone several years ago, part of her mandate was to find ways to connect with other churches

"They had been looking down the road and thinking they want to continue and how best to continue would be to find a partner," she recalls.

A merger with Olivet United, which closed earlier this year, was considered at one point — and some former Olivet parishioners are now worshipping at Barton Stone-Mount Hope — but Olivet eventually decided to disband rather than merge.

Stafford says with former "Oliveters" mixing in with "Mount Hopians" and "Barton Stoners" at the start of the amalgamation, there isn't the divide there might normally be in such a situation.

"I think it makes it easier to become 'us,' " she says.

"For myself, I look out (at the pews) and I'm not sure where everyone has come from," says Turner. "Nor does it matter where they've come from — they're here now."

Barton Stone turned 200 in 2011. Mount Hope United opened in 1876.

Mount Hope was originally a Methodist church; Barton Stone was Presbyterian when the current building on the southwest corner of Stone Church and Upper James was dedicated in 1846.

The future looks bright, say the two ministers.

"People have been predicting the demise of the church for a long time," says Stafford.

It's easy to think that, she says, especially with closures and mergers, but if you look closely you'll still see many viable churches in operation.

"I see the closing of some of these churches and the building up of some of the ones that remain as a pruning to make the plant stronger," says Stafford.