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Dedicated to Preserving Our Religious Heritage

Journal

United Church of Canada Historical Society

In This Edition:

Celebrating our 100 year anniversary

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The ANWC Journal is intended to provide a forum by which the history of the United Church and its antecedents can be told. It is designed to make readers aware of the contributions our church has made to the spiritual life and to the social development of the area encompassed by the Alberta and Northwest Conference. The Journal seeks to encourage individuals, congregations and presbyteries to bring together human and material resources in the preservation of our religious heritage.

The ANWC Journal is published yearly by the Alberta and Northwest Conference Historical Society of the United Church of Canada. The members of the board are:

Chair: Willie Korendyk

Secretary: Robert MacDonald

Treasurer: Alex Cooper

Director: Neville Smith

Director: Ian Fitzgerald

Editor: Katy Jones

In our last addition, there was a small error.
On page six, the obituary of Joyce Sasse, fourth paragraph, line two, the word "theologians" was substituted for the original "theologs". The latter is the term used for theology or seminary students, rather than for full-fledged theologians. We apologize for this error.

Letter From The Editor

Dear Readers,

I hope you are all well. Happy 100 years!

2025 has shaped up to be a year of changes and that is also true with this Journal.

First, it is with regret that one of the Board Members, Heather Miller, has stepped down from the Board. Heather was an invaluable resource and she will be missed.

Also leaving is our treasurer, Alex Cooper. Alex has decided to 'retire' from the treasurer position after many years of dedicated service with the Board after this edition.

Please join us in wishing Alex and Heather (and her dog Buddy) all the best.

In the next edition of the Journal. you will notice a change with our official title. We have elected to change our designation with the United Church. We found we were not able to meet the technical expectations for a Society so we will now become the Historical Committee.

So what does this mean for the Journal? The name change will not affect the work of the Board and nothing really will be changing with the Journal's content. The Journal will still be published yearly, exploring and sharing the history of the United Church from all angles. This is our purpose and we will continue to do that.

You will also notice a difference in the wording of our request for your support. We are no longer offering a membership but rather a subscription to the journal. You will still get the benefits that come from that.

We are looking for new Board Members to be involved with the committee. Are you interested in history? Would you like to have input in what stories are told? Then please consider coming to join us! We meet in person in Edmonton but welcome you from anywhere in the province as we do offer the option to call in. We would be happy to have you join us! And if you have a story to share please send it to us and we will review it for the 2026 Journal!

Thank you very much for your continued support. Here's to 100 more years!

Katy Jones

Era of Optimism

By Robert MacDonald

World War Two helped lay the groundwork for a remarkable two decades after 1945. Pent-up demand for goods, emanating from the Depression and the war, led to the growth of consumer spending for large trucks and automobiles, houses and their furnishings. Industries expanded from the wartime economy. Farms became more mechanised and rural areas became electrified. And as Europe struggled to rebuild, there was a significant immigration.

The Canadian population grew from 11,500,000 in 1941, to 16,100,000 in 1951 and 18,200,000 in 1961. Alberta's population increased from under a million at the end of the war to 1,123,000 by 1951. In 1961, it was 1,333,000. Just before Centennial year, 1,467,000 called Alberta home. Much of the growth was in its two largest cities. Towards the end of the war, Calgary's population was around 100,000. By 1950, it was about 132,000 and five years later 186,000. It reached over 200,000 by 1957, and over 300,000 by 1963. At the end of the war, Edmonton was home to 110,000, rising to 140,000 by 1950 and 200,000 by mid-decade, and going over 300,000 by 1963.

Rural areas which suffered drought in the 1940s and 1960s and early frosts in the Peace River region changed. In the 1950s, rural areas experienced limited markets affecting incomes. New transportation systems emerged for marketing. And as farms increased in size, in part due to more efficient machinery, small communities lost businesses. There was rural depopulation. On the other hand, with the growth of the petroleum industry after the discoveries near Leduc in 1947, jobs became available in communities near the discoveries. Calgary flourished as a headquarter location while Edmonton saw refining and manufacturing.

The United Church Alberta Conference also experienced growth and optimism. In addition to growth itself, it has been suggested that there was a new interest in organised religion. This stemmed from the challenges of the Depression and the war. Both Calgary and Edmonton Presbyteries, which included rural congregations around the urban core, showed increases in people under pastoral oversight and memberships. In 1946, Calgary Presbytery had 19,650 under oversight, and 9372 members. By 1952, that had jumped to over 27,000 and 11,000 respectively. In 1955, it was 33,000 and 12,000, while in 1966, statistics indicated 57,000 under pastoral oversight and almost 18,000 members. For Edmonton, a larger presbytery with more rural congregations including new areas from the petroleum developments, in 1946 there were over 20,000 under oversight and 9800 members. By 1952 the figures were 43,000 and 12,000 respectively. 1955 recorded 59,000 and 14,800 in those two categories, and eleven years later 86,000 and 23,000.

Several factors led to the growth of church membership and attendance. As indicated, in the first ten to fifteen years after the end of the war, Europe was recovering and rebuilding. Canada seemed the land of opportunity. Many who came had Protestant heritage. There was a shift in immigration patterns in the 1960s with a new immigration policy and arrivals from other areas such as Asia. In Canada, there were two specific factors: migration from rural areas and the so-called baby boom.

It should be noted that there was an effort at evangelism, including by the United Church. On June 10, 1945, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Church Union, "The Crusade for Christ and His Kingdom" was launched, to encourage people to make a Profession Faith. Visitation evangelism by pairs of laities visited people with little or no connection to the church. In subsequent years, the Department of Evangelism and Social Service was given money to continue the work. Perhaps the most prominent of such evangelism were the Crusades of Charles Templeton, a former colleague of Billy Graham and a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary. He was hired by the United Church to conduct a series of week-long crusades in various communities across Canada. In Alberta, he was in Calgary in 1952. In the fall of 1953, he was in Edmonton, promoted as "Chuck" Templeton. He spoke to an overflow crowd at McDougall United Church the opening night and subsequent ones at the Edmonton Gardens. Unlike Graham, he did not have public professions of faith.

The period has been described as an era of building. There were several aspects to this. Even though the rural areas suffered from the vagaries of the weather, crop prices and markets, generally congregations took advantage of the savings and increased financial stability and proceeded to make necessary repairs and improvements. Ralph Connor Memorial in Canmore had suffered with the closure of the coal mines during the Depression. It was not until well after the war that the congregation, which had been receiving Home Mission grants, was able to make the repairs and improvements. Even urban congregations made improvements. Wesley Edmonton spent $1000 in 1948. McDougall installed a new organ, improved the stonework in 1951, and later added a carillon, a gift from a congregant. North Hill Calgary bought new kitchen equipment. Trinity in Calgary restored the choir area, damaged earlier in a fire.

A second factor was additional facilities, with auditorium/gymnasium and classrooms. It was to accommodate the rising number of Sunday School and mid-week groups, as well as the sports and drama groups which were prominent for churches at this time. Medicine Hat Fifth Avenue had the largest Sunday School in southern Alberta. In 1951, North Hill Calgary, before the creation of several new congregations, had 1100 registered in four locations. Many raised funds through professional fundraisers.

In Lacombe's St. Andrew's, while the old Methodist Hall had served as a Sunday School, it was showing its age. By 1951, a request was made for a Christian Education wing, and pledges were made. This culminated in a campaign that began in 1954, using the Wells organisation. Construction of a $100,000 building began in the fall of 1956 and was ready for occupancy the following year. Further north, in Camrose, pressure for additional facilities emerged. A building committee was established, with a starting fund of about $1000. By 1955, additional fundraising had increased this to $18,000. A new manse was built. However, the need continued. Under a new minster, there was a renewed attempt. In 1957, with a loan from a bank, plans were developed, and work began on a $175,000 structure. In High River, where a new sanctuary had been recently built, an addition was made to the sanctuary building to accommodate the Sunday School.

In 1948, Knox Edmonton began planning for a new addition, costing about $6,000. Robertson erected a Memorial Hall. It opened in May 1951, with auditorium/gymnasium, classrooms, club rooms, ladies' parlour, kitchen, offices, and a custodial apartment. McDougall's addition cost $150,000, while Highlands, which had over 900 in Sunday School, opened a $93,000 addition, though about a third of the cost was through debt. In Calgary, North Hill, 'bursting at the seams' as already by 1949 there was concern about space. Every space available was being used. Accordingly, a fund-raising campaign ensued, using an external fundraiser. In 1957, the addition opened, with a large auditorium/gymnasium with a stage, kitchen and office, above the latter two a large room and washrooms, while the lower part had classrooms, an AV projection and office, and washrooms with showers.

One unique project occurred with Crescent Heights Calgary. The church, erected in 1910 and subsequently enlarged, sat at the corner of First Street and Sixteenth Avenue N.W. It sat on a larger parcel of land which in 1913 became Balmoral School. The original land survey suggested a lane through the property, north of the church, though the lane never materialised. However, the church property north of the existing building was too narrow for any suitable addition: accordingly, it was necessary to purchase the property from the city. As a result, the congregation had erected a CE wing, with large kitchen, storage and hall above, and classrooms, washrooms, storage and a furnace room in the lower portion or basement in 1958.

New church buildings were constructed. Of course, a number of these were in new communities and congregations. For example, Devon grew because of the nearby petroleum developments. The new congregation needed its own space, after meeting in the community hall. Through volunteer labour, a wooden frame building was erected and dedicated by the President of Conference in 1951. Redberry was another of these new congregations as were northern ones such as Manning. The Church was active along the Alaska Highway from Dawson Creek to Whitehorse which

which saw a dramatic increase in population.

Demand for new congregations was considerable as cities grew rapidly. Through their Home Mission Council (later Church Extension Council), planning for new places of worship proceeded. Usually, this process involved some sort of idea of United Church people in a new district, a survey including by a retired clergy or layperson, a meeting of local people and a request that Presbytery authorise a new congregation. Some of these new entities already had a Ladies' Aid before the actual congregation was established. Land might be provided through the Home Missions, as well as loans, such as with Renfrew.

Others replaced existing structures. In Edmonton, Garneau planned a new building, completed in 1948. In June 1953, Eastwood turned the sod for a new $50,000 wood-brick edifice to replace one in use since before Church Union. Forest Heights in Edmonton moved to a new location in 1961. Even Fort Saskatchewan felt that existing facilities were inadequate, and in October 1957, dedicated a new facility. In High River, a new building was constructed, largely with volunteer labour. Perhaps the most striking example of replacement happened in Red Deer. In January 1955, the existing Leonard Gaetz Memorial Church burned down. Quickly there was a plan to build anew, and fundraising began for a $500,000 building. At the dedication by the President of Conference, 1500 people attended.

In addition to these endeavours, it should be noted that money was raised for other buildings. These included additions to Mount Royal College in Calgary, a new St. Stephen's College in Edmonton, and a nurses' residence at Archer Memorial Hospital in Lamont.

In addition to funding these new churches and CE wings, finances enabled the denomination members to contribute to the Maintenance and Missionary Fund. After the war, $85,000 was collected, and by 1949 some $92,000, $2,000 above the allocation. A year later there was an increase of $5,000. By 1955, the objective was $180,000 but $213,000 was gathered. The Women's Missionary Society also had allocations to reach.

Throughout, there were attempts to make the message more relevant to contemporary society. Of course, some of that was through the Evangelism and Social Services Committee. Gambling and alcohol remained concerns, and the first facilities for addiction were developed in the two cities. Some were the various social programmes initiated, supported by congregations. Radio was used by some. And the youth groups were changed, with Sigma C for children aged 12 to 14, while Hi C was for senior high school students.

A more ambitious proposal was the introduction of the New Curriculum. As early as 1951, commissioners were advocating for a new Christian Education curriculum. It was not only to be directed to Sunday School students but also to adults and parents. The belief was that not only were the parents the first teachers but also the view that adult education had been neglected as part of the church's mission. A series of commissions were held, with the assistance of academics, theologians, clergy, and educational experts. The result was a series of readers (and resource material for teachers) with three themes: God and His Purpose, Jesus Christ and the Christian Way, and The Church and the World. There were age-related books (Kindergarten, Primary to age 8. Junior (9-11) and Intermediate (12-14). There were adult study guides, as the hope was that the children and parents would learn together at home.

There were some structural changes during this period. At the Conference level, changes occurred as from time-to-time charges may have moved to a neighbouring presbytery if boundaries changed. The number of presbyteries changed. Coming out of Church Union, there were thirteen presbyteries, some rural ones quite small in the number of charges. In the 1960s, a few of the smaller ones were split and amalgamated (such as the emergence of South Alberta in Lethbridge and Medicine Hat), so that there were only nine. However, Calgary and Edmonton still contained rural congregations. Finally, they too were changed, with Calgary confined to the urban area and the surrounding rural churches into Foothills, the so-called doughnut. For Edmonton, it was a unique solution, at first, with the Presbytery divided into Edmonton North, Edmonton Centre, and Edmonton South, each with rural congregations.

The second major shakeup involved the various women's groups. Women played important roles in congregational life and mission. The Women's Missionary Society was also involved at Presbytery and Conference levels. They looked after foreign and local missions such as hospital and the girls' schools, and even staffed some of the small more remote charges. The Ladies' Aid or the Women's Association was concerned with the local congregation, helping to furnish the manse and the kitchen, as well as contributing to the congregational budget. Many women belonged to both. People asked why the two organisations. As a result, a commission was formed to seek amalgamation and structure. On January 1, 1962, the United Church Women was created.

The growth in number of members, congregations, new facilities, new religious enthusiasm and material, and social concerns illustrated a sense of optimism. But already there were signs that it might not last, especially as churches were competing with other non-church-related organisations. As well, some congregations were already amalgamating, such as Belfast and the German-speaking Ebenezer with Renfrew. Buchanan Memorial also became part of a larger congregation. In Medicine Hat, from the late 1930s, Salem, a German-speaking congregation, was in a relationship with Memorial United, and after the war this relationship strengthened to the point of amalgamation. Nonetheless, in Conference there was a sense of confidence.

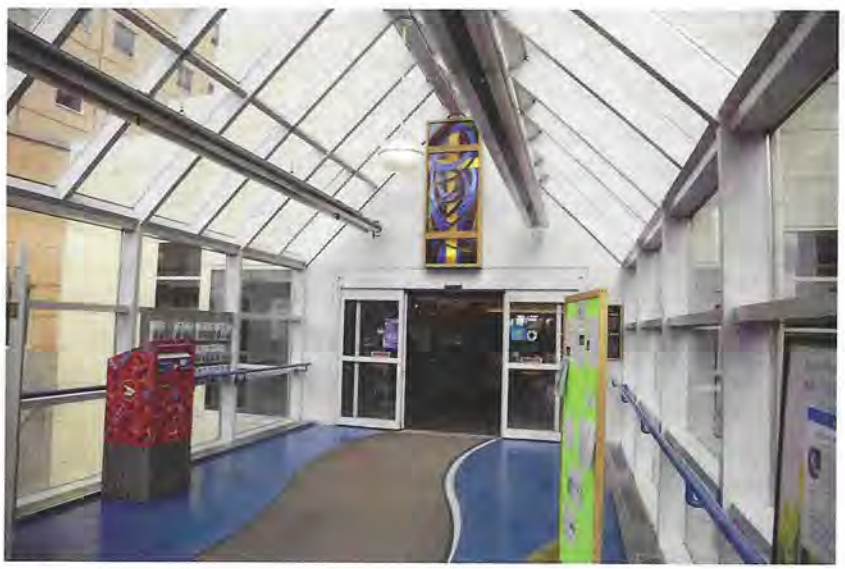

Photo of the stained glass art installation "Mother and Child" formally housed at Knox Metropolitan. It is now at Grey Nuns Hospital

Photo credit Rick Bramm

The Historical Society—A Sketch

By Robert MacDonald

Rev. Ernest Nix and Rev, Stephen Wilk inspired the origin of the society. Rev. Nix, who had served in Alberta, wrote on church history and was then with the United Church central Archives in Toronto. Rev. Wilk, who wrote his BD thesis on the church in Airdrie, DMIN on Calgary at Renfrew United Church in Calgary. Rev. Nix noted that the United Methodist Church in the USA had not only a Historical Society, but the Society had a presence at the Annual Meetings. With the encouragement of the Historic Sites and Archives Committee of Alberta and Northwest Conference, plans were set in motion to develop an independent society. The society would be able to access funds which the United Church could not. It was reported that in the first ten years, the Society raised $100,000 from all sources.

During the spring of 1988, a group was established, consisting of Rev. Wilk, Rev. Herman Miller (Retired), Rev. Gerald Hutchinson of Rundle Mission, Bruce Peel, editor of a bibliography of prairie history and librarian at the University of Alberta as well as the then chair of the Historic Sites and Archives Committee, and Robert MacDonald, an historian residing in Calgary. The meetings at Renfrew United Church led to the decision to set up the society, develop bylaws, apply for charitable status, plan an organising annual meeting, and establish a publication, later named The Journal.

The initial AGM was held at Renfrew on October 22, 1988. It set the pattern of business in the morning and speaker (or speakers) in the afternoon. The guest speakers that day were Merrily Aubry who indicated the resources and records of Conference held under agreement at the Provincial Archives, as well as Ann Looye and Judy Bedford who indicated the process and criteria for places to be designated as Historic Resource or Site. One of the attendees was the holder of the Chair of Christian Thought at the University of Calgary. Other locations for the AGMs included the Provincial Museum, Red Deer and District Museum and Archives, Rundle Mission, McDougall Memorial Church at Morley, Chapelhow Branch of the Legion in Calgary, Riverbend, Kirk, Grace, Southminster-Steinhauer and Sprit of Hope United Churches. The Board also had tours of Victoria Mission and places of worship in the Lethbridge area. The major expenses have been the Journal and travel to Board meetings. Many were held at Gaetz Memorial in Red Deer, a central location for those from Edmonton or from the south.

Some of the topics presented were The Church During the World Wars, The background of H.B. Steinhauer, Elizabeth Barrett, Edmonton as an Indigenous Meeting Place, Residential Schools—a Memoir by a Teacher, Rev. David McQueen (a Presbyterian minister at the time of negotiations on Church Union), and more. There were tours of Rundle Mission and the McDougall Memorial Church site.

Members of the Board of Directors changed over time. Some of the long-standing members were Rev. Wilk, Rev. Austin Fennell, Alex Cooper, Rev. Paul Duval, Rev. Don Koots, and Robert MacDonald. It was a policy to seek representation from historic sites of the church. For many years, this was Rev. Gerald Hutchinson from Rundle Mission, Len McDougall from the McDougall Stoney Mission Society, and Pauline Feniak from the Victoria Mission.

It was hoped that there would be a great deal of support from church organisations and members, so many more copies of the Journal were printed at first. Copies were given to Conference delegates in the earlier years (and displays of the history and material were presented). The early issues of the Journal had Number 1, as the hope had been to publish more than one issue per year. Initially the editor was Rev. Wilk, with the Board serving as an editorial committee. Later Rev. Neville Smith and then Mark Wiencki edited the

Journal, followed by Debbie Marshall and then Katy Jones. Rev. Wilk later set up a separate editorial committee, after which Rev. Fennell took over. The latter was responsible for interviews with or material from or about past moderators as well as staring a series on Home Mission Superintendents.

In addition to the publication of the Journal and the AGM speakers, the Society sought to engage congregations and individuals to write church histories. There was support for groups looking to become Historic Resources or Sites. Such an example was, Carmangay where Rev. Wilk and Robert MacDonald visited as the community sought to have the church, at which a former Speaker of the legislature, Peter Dawson, served. It was so designated. Other initiatives included in 1990-91 engaging the part-time church archivist at the Provincial Archives to edit a guide to the United Church records at the Provincial Archives, which was published as a book. At a meeting held at the Provincial Museum, the programme included a tour of an exhibit of Alberta's religious traditions. During the tour, Rev. Wilk noted there was no United Church display. This led to the development of the United Church Collection at the Museum. The Society was also able to support a researcher to develop an annotated guide to the Collection. In 1995, a booklet "Preserving the Sacred, Sanctifying the Past" was printed. It included a description of the artefacts, photographs and recordings, as well as essays on history with Rev. Gerald Hutchinson on the missions, Rev. Nix on the road to Church Union, a summary of church history since 1925, women in the church, worship styles and interfaith. Other endeavours involved a history of Mount Royal College, and possible completion of a study of the early Methodist church by John Brown.

The Society has reached out to other groups. Rev. Wilk contacted the Canadian Methodist Historical Society and the Canadian Society of Presbyterian History. The Journal included notices of meetings of these groups. For many years, Rev. Wilk travelled to Toronto for the annual meeting of the Archives Committee and distributed copies of the Journal, while encouraging other Conferences to establish similar societies. The contacts led to hosting the Canadian Methodist Historical Society in Calgary. The first was held in June 1994 at Wesley and Trinity Churches, two pioneer Methodist churches in Calgary. The theme was "Methodism in the West", with some articles published in that organisation's journal. A later one was held at Renfrew, with one of the talks on the early years of Mount Royal College. The Society assisted the guests to come and supplied lunches. In 1997, the Society met at Rundle Mission, with a theme of the Indigenous experience, and a presentation of the provincial museum project, "Land Under Foot". And in 1997, the centre pages of the Journal reproduced a guide to historic sites and places in Alberta.

One project envisaged from the start was a history of the United Church and its antecedents in Alberta and Northwest Conference. An initial study of some sources was done and some people suggested for some chapters. Unfortunately, in the end it was left to an individual. However the project continues, and an outline of the projected history can be seen in various articles in the Journal.

Over the years, the Society has been supported by members including some congregations and UCWs. and generous donations from contacts and members, and a bequest. The future of the Society depends on this generosity.

What Makes a Church Stand 100 Years and More

A Poem by Suzanne Smith and Nichole Smith

(Daughters of Rev. Dr. Neville Smith and Rev. Joan Smith)

What makes a Church stand 100 years and more?
In our Church it is an open door
Welcoming people from different walks of life
An embracing family amidst the world's woes and strife
In our Church it is the dedication
Of members, of pastors, of everyone's participation
Despite a tiresome week, cold day, or a scarce hour
The gathering in faith is given greater power

In our Church it is the hopeful throng
Heard in sermons, casual conversations, and in sweet melodic song
Resounding in the bulletin and taught in Sunday classes
It is the spirit and fortitude given to one as well as masses

In our Church it is the special care
For each and every creature, all which God holds dear
Generosity for noble causes, nurturing peace and goodwill
Anchoring justice where it may stray and vanish so still

In our Church it is the vision for achievement
Imagining what the Church can be and working despite disagreement
Not forgetting the future without remembering the past
It is the wisdom of seeking how to grow strong enough to last

So what makes a Church stand 100 years and more?
In our Church God's inspiration is the core
Where an open door, dedication, hope, care, and vision
Form the cornerstones of God's precious mission.

The ANWC Historical Society Journal is the only journal of its kind in Canada. Each year, we explore the stories and experiences that have been part of the rich history of the United Church in Alberta. Would you like to contribute to this important work? Then please consider buying a subscription to our journal. Simply fill out the handy form on the other page and send it with a cheque to the address. Thank you very much.

Subscription Form

Alberta and Northwest Conference Historical Society

Name_____

Address_____

City_____Prov_____Postal code_____

Enclosed is $30 individual subscription fee___

Enclosed is $60 corporate subscription___

Enclosed is a donation of $_____(Receipts will be mailed)

Please make your cheque payable to Alberta & Northwest Conference Historical Society. Mail your completed subscription and payment to:

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One Hundred Years Milestone

By Rev. Dr. Neville L. Smith

On Tuesday, June 10, 2025, The United Church of Canada will mark 100 years as a constituted denomination. It may seem that the United Church is a relatively young institution. However, her roots go back a very long time with the amalgamation of the antecedent Churches - Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Local Union Churches, that became part of the United Church in 1925 and the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1968. Over the years, many peoples of various ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, have joined the United Church. It is a time to reflect and acknowledge the contributions made and the service rendered of those in the past and in the present. And to draw "the circle wide" as we move forward into the future.

In some ways, Our Crest has sought to symbolize this "Unity in Diversity" that include the phrase "Ut omnes unum sint …That all may be one." Our Creeds have acknowledged our links with the earliest expressions of Christianity and with our intention to continue to serve the present age, our calling to fulfill. This is evident, for example, in a New Creed when we mention that "God works in us and others by the Spirit" and "to live with respect in Creation." We sing in "God is Holy Mystery" who is - beyond complete knowledge, above perfect description and we continue to sing of God, the Creator, and God's wonderful creation. We perceive opportunities and challenges as we move forward in witness, mission and service. We acknowledge broken lives and a broken world.

At the end of our song, we sing not in despair but in hope to the God, who is gracious and merciful – the God, who is Love.

In our Liturgies, we seek to honour our past and innovative ways in worship; in the use of traditional hymns and in publishing new hymnbooks from time to time - one in time for our Centenary celebrations. We use some hymns and choruses from all over the world. It is important to take everyone into consideration. Diversity is not a liability. In fact, it is an asset. One where we understand and accept that each and all can make a difference - that all can love, unite and serve. The world needs healing from the false "idols" that disrupt human solidarity and the common good.

We lament failures and wrongs of the past, including that of our own. We perceive and celebrate what is life-giving. We hope and work for a better and more humane world tomorrow, not only for some, but for all humankind and the world and all her creatures in general. We can co-operate with all peoples, who seek to do good in the world. We can seek healthy, wholesome and respectful relationships with all – regardless of colour, class, country, creed or any other difference.

Let me close this brief reflection with a happy and blessed birthday, United Church of Canada! Let us continue to thank God, as followers of the Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us trust God for all that is past and trust God for all that is to come. To God be the Glory for ever and ever. Hallelujah!

Neville Smith is the first and only minister, born in Dutch St. Maarten (And Dutch Antilles), thus far, to serve as an Ordained Supply (1988 - 1992) and as a United Church of Canada minister from 1992. He retired in December 2016. His ministry encompassed the English and Dutch Caribbean, the Netherlands, Alberta and Ontario, Canada. Neville's late spouse Joan served with him, in various areas of the world, in "Team Ministry."

100th Anniversary

By Gayle Simonson

Many churches have long spoken out on the social, industrial, political and economic problems facing society. The rapid increase in divorce, the decline of parental authority, the detrimental effects of smoking and drink, and the alarming increase in drug addictions were all of great concern - in 1924! These and other issues are described in the 1924 yearbook of the Congregational Union of Canada.

In western Canada, populations in the early 20th century were sparse, so many churches of different denominations came together to form union churches. As the idea spread, denominations across the country were encouraged to look at amalgamation. By 1925, Methodist, Congregationalist, Union churches and most Presbyterian congregations across the country had voted and agreed. The United Church of Canada was then formed by an act of parliament. Even then, it reached beyond Canada's borders. Newfoundland and Labrador didn't become a part of Canada for another 24 years but were part of the United Church of Canada from the beginning.

Union did not end in 1925. In 1930, the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Bermuda became a part of the United Church of Canada. Since the UCC restructured a few years ago, they are part of the Bermuda Nova Scotia Regional Council. In 1968, the Evangelical United Brethren joined and the UCC is also in full communion with the United Church of Christ U.S.A.

The founding denominations each brought their own unique character to this new experiment. They were all, in their early years in England, considered non-conformist. Around 1592, in London, two Congregational leaders were hanged for denying the Queen's "ecclesiastical supremacy." The United Church, true to these roots, has a liberal (sometimes controversial!) approach to theology and social activism.

At Union, Methodist Rev. Dr. Samuel Rose wrote, "one is impressed with the significant place of laymen" and believed Methodists "led the fighting forces" working for social reform. Presbyterian Dr. John T. McNeill noted, "Our colleges have been nurseries both of religion and learning" with "a knack for conserving the values of the past while moving on in obedience to a new and true vision." Congregationalist Dr. W.H. Warriner stressed an acceptance of all forms of worship as new revelations continue to expand our faith. That search for new meaning and vision remains today 100 years later.

The first moderator elected by the General Council was Rev. George Pidgeon who had been moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. A strong believer in ecumenism, he helped to found both the Canadian Council of Churches (1945) and the World Council of Churches (1946.) UCC is one of 24 members and several affiliates of the Canadian Council which "seeks unity amid its own unparalleled diversity." UCC is one of 352 members of the World Council of Churches who work together globally for unity, justice and peace.

Though perhaps the mission of the church "to seek justice" has not changed much over the years the work involved has certainly changed. This outline can only be an introduction to some of the changes and the characters who have helped form the United Church as we know it.

Church women were at the forefront of the suffragette movement in Canada. Louise McKinney was the first woman in the British empire to sit in a legislature. She and Nellie McClung, two of the Famous Five, were very active in the Methodist, then the United Church. McKinney was one of only four women from western Canada to sign the United Church Basis of Union.

Although the Woman's Missionary Society had many trained workers, at union, ordination was still limited to men. Many of the women of the church had been advocating for equality, both within the church and in society in general. A motion in 1906 in WMS minutes states that, "we believe that the enfranchisement of women by Church courts will be the entering wedge to a national and civic enfranchisement." Inclusive language concerns aren't recent – the same 1906 minutes went on to ask that, "at its next sitting, the General Conference will amend its constitution re the constitution of all church councils, by substituting the words "lay member" for the word "laymen," believing that the highest interest of our

church will be best served by an equal recognition of united membership."

At Union in 1925, "Miss Jamieson advanced the ideal of the women's work being an equal part of the church's work…(However) it was felt by all that it would not be wise *at the present time* to make any radical change in organization but to work up gradually to the ideal" Lydia Gruchy of Saskatchewan had graduated top of her class at the Presbyterian St. Andrew's College in Saskatoon in 1923 but was not ordained until 1936. It was not until 1960 that women were encouraged to be a part of all church boards and councils! Rev. Lois Wilson served as the first female president of the Canadian Council of Churches, 1976-1979 the first female moderator, 1980-83, and first president of the World Council of Churches 1983-91. She also served as a senator in the Canadian government 1998-2002.

Emily Spencer Kerby, whose husband George was minister at Calgary's Central Methodist, was an outspoken advocate for women's rights and a prolific writer and shortly after union wrote that, "The church today is not dealing with the woman of ten centuries ago, but with the modern twentieth-century woman – an educated, reading, thinking woman, and a 'not-afraid-to-express-her-opinion woman' of the year 1928 … (Doctrine) has gone the way of the tallow candle, the idea of a flat earth, as well as the fable that man (the male) was 'lord of creation.'…It is not *feminism* or any other *ism* we are seeking, but liberty."

The 50th anniversary of the formation of the United Church Women, a union of the Woman's Association who worked to sustain local churches, and the WMS, was celebrated in 2012 with a large public display at the Provincial Archives of Alberta.

At one time, the churches actively preached prohibition and many were active in the Women's Christian Temperance Union. How did prohibition affect little girls? According to Kerby in a 1922 *Calgary Herald* article, "The preachers were always ringing the changes on the awful peril of "women and wine," so I had a sort of feeling that some day we might be legislated out of existence, like the whiskey, and it behooved us to mind our Ps and Qs." The church has since relaxed its stance and in 1960, General Council determined that while it was "the wisest and safest course," abstinence was not a condition of church membership.

Many early missions included medical help. In fact, student ministers were advised to always carry medical and dental supplies! Many early medical stations were church sponsored. The Lamont Hospital north of Edmonton is an excellent example. Established by the Methodists in 1912 to serve the Ukrainian immigrants in the area, it remained affiliated with the United Church for many years. Not only did its staff offer medical care but it also offered nursing training and had a residence for the nursing staff.

For nearly 125 years, the United Church and its predecessor denominations have offered health care in remote areas of Canada's west coast. For many years, mission boats traveled the wet coast, visiting remote settlements, camps, lighthouses and factories. Hospitals in Bella Bella and Bella Coola B.C. have operated with support from the Mission and Service fund. The most serious cases could be transferred by air to Vancouver or Victoria, accompanied by a medical professional. These hospitals most recently have worked in conjunction with the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (VCHA) and United Church involvement in these hospitals is coming to an end.

The church also sponsored medical missions abroad. Dr. Helen Huston, the daughter of United Church minister William Huston, left Canada in 1953 to serve with the United Church in India. While there, she also worked briefly in Nepal. When the United Church became a partner in the international Christian organization United Mission to Nepal (UMN), she had the opportunity to work with that organization. In 1960, she began work in the Himalayas of Nepal, in Amp Pipal, which at that time was 140 km but a week's walk from Kathmandu. In 1991, Sir Edmund Hillary presented to her the first Sir Edmund Hillary Foundation Award for Humanitarian Services for her years of medical work in Nepal.

Dr. Robert McClure, the son of a medical missionary to China, was also a medical missionary and worked first in China. From 1950-1954, McClure worked with Palestinian refugees in Gaza,

then from 1954 to1967 in India. On his return to Canada, he was elected as the first lay moderator of the United Church.

While the three denominations came with different priorities, all were very focused on education. Most early missions included schooling for basic learning. The Woman's Missionary Society was a significant contributor to this work, as it was to so much other mission work at home and abroad. As immigration grew, much early learning depended on female teachers sponsored by the Woman's Missionary Society. The WMS established school homes, primarily for immigrant children to learn ESL but also in larger areas to keep girls safe.

The colleges certainly offered opportunities that would not otherwise be available. They had been established coast to coast. In Calgary, George and Emily Spencer Kerby were instrumental in the founding of Mount Royal College, now a university. Early in its history, Central Church provided lessons and language instruction for Chinese children.

In Edmonton, Alberta College, founded by members of McDougall Methodist Church, offered the first high school classes in the city, then expanded to university level. Alberta College South (ACS) was the first building to be completed on what became the University of Alberta campus. ACS united with the Presbyterian Roberson College at union and they were renamed St. Stephen's College. While it no longer offers a path to ordination, it continues to provide courses related to psychology and theology.

Of course, not all went smoothly. Of 139 Canadian residential schools for Indigenous students, fifteen were managed by the United Church. While funded by the government, that funding was inadequate, and conditions were poor. As well, the schools failed to acknowledge the importance of cultural identities. The United Church began a national consultation with Indigenous people in 1980. In 1986, the United Church General Council issued an apology for its earlier denial of their spirituality. A Healing Fund was established in 1994. In 1998, an apology was issued to former students of United Church-run residential schools. The United Church crest was modified in 2012 to include the four colours of the medicine wheel and a Mohawk phrase meaning "All my relations."

In 1992, the United Church elected Reverend Stan McKay from the Fisher River Cree Nation in Manitoba as its first aboriginal moderator. After his schooling at the Fisher River, then Birtle Indian Residential Schools, he studied at the University of Winnipeg and was ordained following graduation from the Faculty of Theology. Throughout his career, he has sought opportunities for reconciliation. As a co-director of the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Centre (now the Sandy-Saulteaux Centre) in Manitoba, he created opportunities for non-Indigenous people to learn about Indigenous cultures. There, both Indigenous and Christian beliefs are respected and shared. In 1992, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate degree from the University of Winnipeg and in1997, received a National Aboriginal Achievement Award.

The reach of the United Church of Canada still goes far beyond Canada's borders. At the time of union, the church's three denominations brought together foreign missions including schools in China, Formosa, Japan, Korea, Trinidad, Central and East India, British Guiana, and Angola. Globally through Mission and Service, the United Church continues to provide assistance and schooling in needy areas such as refugee camps. The church still works with local partners in areas such as the drought-stricken countries of Zambia and Zimbabwe, where wells are drying up and farming practices such as irrigation are required. Today, much work is carried out through refugee sponsorships. Many congregations offer sponsorship and support directly to refugees. This includes aiding refugees both from war-torn areas and from countries where gender-diversity is illegal

Early in the 20th century, racial prejudice was pronounced in Canada. In 1907, Union Congregational Church in Montreal was known as Porters' Church because men in its Black congregation were often away, working primarily as train porters. Women took on leadership roles. In 1925, Union became part of the United Church of Canada. It still encourages lay leadership and now offers a prison ministry as part of its outreach program.

Always activists, members pressured the federal government before World War II to change military policy and allow Black people to enlist. Guests over the years have included Nelson Mandela, Bishop Desmond Tutu and others from South Africa and the USA. Famed jazz pianists Oscar Peterson and Oliver Jones played piano there as youngsters as, early on, it became a centre for performing arts.

While his father and brother worked as train porters, in 1941, Wilbur Howard became the first black to be ordained by the United Church. While others during college received student mission placements, Howard worked at the Fred Victor Mission in Toronto and in summer camps. He was also not settled in a congregation upon graduation as others were, instead working in other church positions. As associate editor of Sunday School publications, he helped shape the New Curriculum of the 1960s.

In the 1930s, Japanese immigrants became a focus that was particularly important in the 1940s during World War II when many had been displaced from coastal homes by the Canadian government. Lethbridge presbytery was very active in trying to help. A Japanese minister, Jun Kubayama, who had been moved inland by the government was welcomed into the presbytery and a worker from the Woman's Missionary Society, Hedwig Bartlng, was also appointed to work among the Japanese people. The presbytery itself encouraged members not to show racism but to assist whenever possible. In Edmonton's Bissell United Church, Japanese Sunday services were added to the English and Ukrainian services. Bissell was described at the time as a genuine mosaic of Canadian life. It no longer functions as a church but is now the Bissell Centre.

The United Church has long been known for support of social justice issues, sometimes quite controversially, a position not unknown to its predecessors. According to Rev. Dr. Samuel Rose in 1925, the Methodists led the "fighting forces working for social reform." The social gospel movement of the early twentieth century played a major role in some changes in social structures. A force from the 1890s to the 1930s, the social gospel movement was a response to increased industrialization and urbanization and called for the need to address social issues like poverty, inequality and injustice. That response included biblical criticism and philosophical idealism.

According to some reports, Dr. Salem Bland, a strong proponent of the social gospel, was forced from his position at the Methodist Wesley College Winnipeg because of his extreme activism. He returned to congregational ministry in Toronto and became a founding member of the Ontario CCF party. In 1936 he helped lead the campaign to allow ordination of women. He was strongly anti-war but during the Spanish Civil War, he helped raise humanitarian aid. A refuge for 100 war orphans in Barcelona was named for him. A portrait by Lawren Harris is in the Art Gallery of Ontario.

There are of course many other church issues which have been controversial and have received much public notice. The United Church continues to address social issues. In 1952, years before Medicare was implemented, the General Council supported the concept of universal access to healthcare. The issue of gender equality and acceptance was also a serious concern. The 1988 General Council decision that "all people regardless of sexual orientation are welcome as full members of the United Church" and that "all members of the United Church are eligible to be considered for ministry" made national headlines. It was still a very hot topic at the 1990 General Council meeting.

Of course, there are many more topics in church history – Sunday Schools, youth groups such as CGIT, men's groups, camps – and many many interesting people. There have certainly been changes in theological interpretation. Ministry itself has changed over the years, including chaplaincies. In addition to the military, universities and hospitals, United Church chaplains play a key role in the Correctional Service of Canada, responding to the religious and spiritual needs of offenders of all faiths or no faith.

We must not be bound by the past, but we do well to remember our history and to celebrate those who have brought us to this place, even as we share in the ongoing exploration of the frontiers of faith.

McDougall Update

By Robert MacDonald

After the spring clean-up in early May, throughout the summer of 2024, the site was declared open. Several weddings took place, as well as tours during Historic Calgary Week, and from schools as well as a Tour Group. Two commemorative gatherings were held. Each began with a smudge.

In June, there was a blessing of the next stage of the Interpretive Walk and a Sacred Buffalo Presentation, with the film on the reintroduction of buffalo to Banff. Other gatherings celebrated National Indigenous Peoples Day in June and National Truth and Reconciliation Day in September.

In November, it was Indigenous Veterans Day. Assistance to the Stoney Nakoda people included providing refreshments and support for the walkers during the annual Bring Them Home Walk from Morley to Calgary. This is to draw attention to issues of addiction and drugs, and to bring back spirits of those who had passed on. Calgary churches also helped during the stay in Calgary. With others, members of the Society remembered and honoured the late Senator and leader Murray Sinclair.

In December the members experienced the loss of Elder Phillomene Stevens, who was a strong friend and mentor (advisor) to the Society. A Christmas gathering was held in December. The Society helped serve lunch after her memorial service. The 2025 AGM will be held in May.

The monthly newsletter from the Society includes explanations of Stoney Nakoda names for the months, small biographies of important people, photographs of the terrain, and historical photographs. There are also some of the seventeen panels which make up the Interpretive Walk (in two languages).

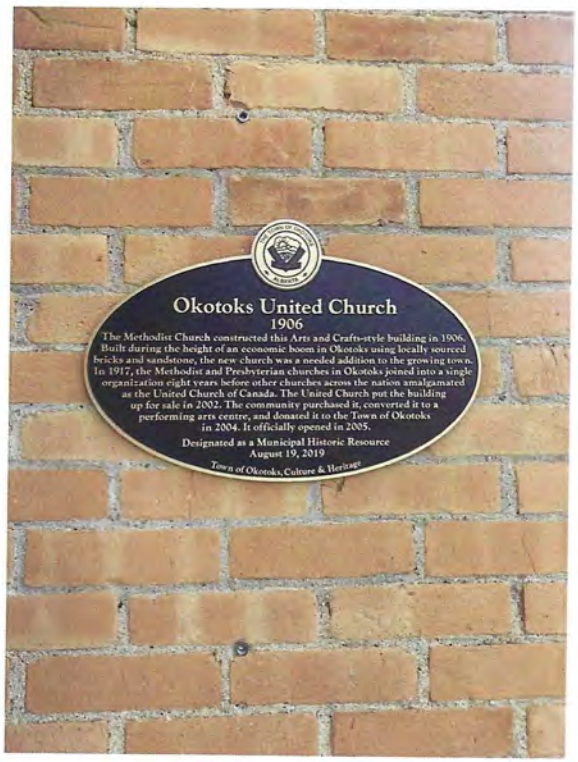
This is the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the site. The early missionaries Revs. Robert Rundle and Thomas Woolsey had visited the Bow Valley earlier and George McDougall had made contact and promised to establish a mission in the area. In 1873, George, John and their families, along with some Metis families and livestock journeyed to the area in a train of over twenty wagons. The initial location, in hills north of the present site, was protected from danger, in part by the Stoney. Two years later, the present site by Jacob's Creek near the Bow was chosen, and the mission church of square log timbers and modified Gothic windows was built, along with a mission house and school. Other houses followed, all assisted by people such as Andrew Sibbald, a carpenter and teacher. George died of a heart attack while hunting buffalo in January 1876.

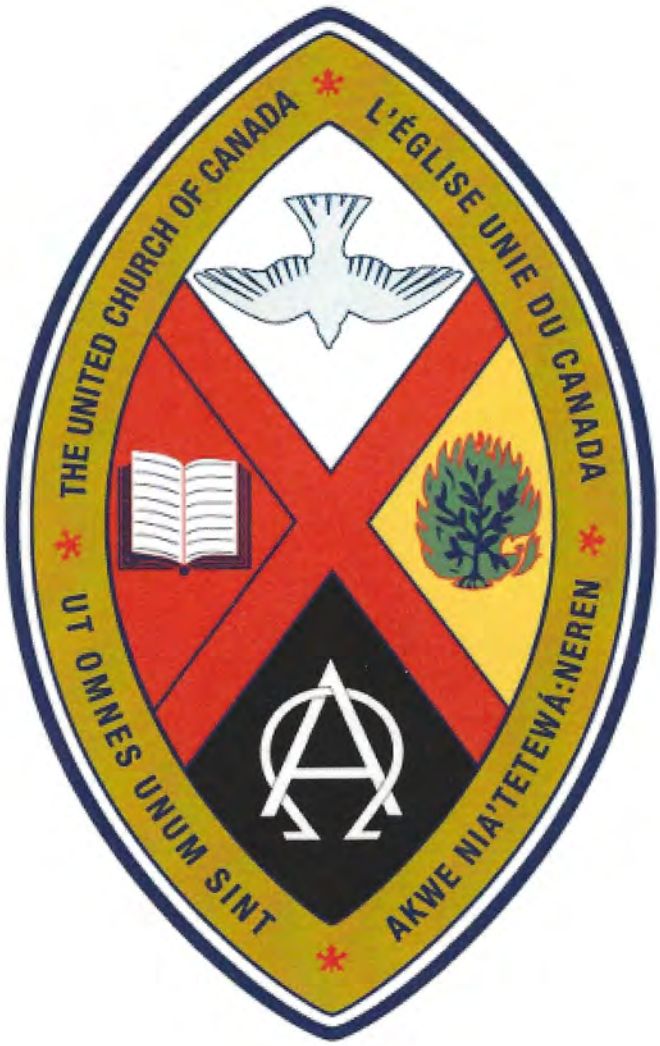
These lovely photos were submitted to us by Shelley Den Haan. She sent the following message:

Here are photos related to Union Churches. The brick one is the former United Church in Okotoks. It was the Union Church that the Methodists and Presbyterians decided to worship together in when they came together in 1917. They called themselves the United Church of Okotoks.

Early this century, the Okotoks Church moved out of that building. The yellow one is the current building with a new sanctuary at the back.

The photos were taken by my daughter, Joy Dem Haan.





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