

Wall Street United Church**June 15 2025 - Special Centennial Service by UCW**

From its inception in the early 1900's, The United Church of Canada set out to be the national church of Canada. It was formed in 1925, through the union of several existing denominations. They included the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Methodist Church (located in Canada, Newfoundland and Bermuda), the Congregational Churches of Canada and the General Council of Local Union Churches.

In the early 1900's, there was a delay in forming the United Church of Canada. Because the Presbyterians were not 100% in favour of joining the "Union", many split from the church. After many meetings, it was put to a vote, and it was decided that some Presbyterians would join, and some would not. The Presbyterian Church is still in existence today.

This Union, which took place on June 10, 1925, was the first of its kind in the world to cross historical denominational lines and to receive international acclaim. The United Church is a story of seeking reconciliation and embracing diversity, recognizing the need for a more united expression of faith; coming together to forge a new denomination, and cooperation among diverse Christian traditions and symbolizing the potential for reconciliation.

Over the years, several major events occurred in the United Church.

1925 — The United Church of Canada was officially established on June 10, 1925, in Toronto, Ontario. ***Edith M, one of our UC Members, was the first baby to be baptized in the newly formed United Church in Valley Field, ON.!***

1930's — The church grappled with the challenges of The Great Depression. By this time, there was a growing sense that the United Church needed to reinstate its faith.

1936 — The General Council authorized the preparation and approval of what was renamed in 1940 the **Statement of Faith**. It reflected the theological emphasis of the era.

World War II: The United Church played a role during the war, both in terms of providing support to those affected and advocating for peace.

1946-1960 — This period is sometimes referred to as a “golden age” for the church, with a focus on social activism and community outreach.

1960’s —The church experienced a period of social and theological changes, grappling with issues of race, gender and sexuality.

1970’s-1990’s —The church continued to navigate complex issues, including its relationship with indigenous peoples and its stance on social justice.

2000’s – today — The United Church continues to engage in Ministry and Advocacy, while also grappling with declining Membership.

The journey of the United Church has not been without its challenges. Over the decades, the UCC has fought with shifting theological landscapes, the rise of social issues and the constant need to adapt to the evolving needs of its members. From the Statement of Faith of 1940, to the *Catachem* of 1944, the church has navigated the tension between upholding the traditional doctrines and embracing contemporary spirit.

Historically, the UCC has a history rooted in Trinitarian theology, with core statements in faith outlining the belief in God as Father, Son (Jesus Christ) and Holy Spirit. We believe that God is at work, reconciling the whole of creation to Christ, and that we are called to be co-workers of that vision. How we live this belief is based partly on our understanding of ancient creeds, partly on a Christian response to seek justice and peace in our world, and partly as our expression of God’s love for the world in service and care for all people and all creation.

Jesus Christ:

In John 1:14, it says “*The Word became flesh and lived among us.*” Humans have been part of Jesus’s testimony for more than 2000 years ... and we are still proclaiming that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Savior of the world. The United Church tells of our witness within our changing world, and is constantly asking itself the question, “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?”

In Mark 1:1, Jesus comes to earth as a human and identifies himself with ordinary people, fishermen, tax collectors, and is born to human parents. He was baptized by John the Baptist as an ordinary person, and then received the Holy Spirit, He

ministered among the poor and marginalized and he spent a large amount of his time performing miracles, healing the sick and restoring lives.

And in Col 1:15, Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

Jesus gave us two great commandments — love God, and love your neighbour. He preached the coming Kingdom of God. Jesus spoke of hope, of liberty from oppression, and called people to receive God's Grace through faith. In the end, God suffered humiliation, was betrayed by one of his Disciples and was crucified on the Cross. But that was not the end, because God raised Him from the grave.

Why does God allow the suffering of His Son? Our proclamation of Christ's resurrection is the foundation of Christian hope. Suffering is not the end ... it marks a new beginning in our relationship with God. Without Jesus's death, God's promise of salvation is incomplete.

The United Church preaches Christ the risen, crucified one, and confesses Him as Lord. In love for the world, God gave the Son to take away the sin of the world. The United Church proclaims the vision of reconciliation. It's this vision that once called the United Church into existence in 1977, and still sets that scope of the church's mission today.

Our Bible scripture, in Psalm 119:105, tells us *"Your word is a lamp to my feet, and light to my path"*. The Bible is a living document. The United Church acknowledges the books of the Hebrew Scriptures known to Christians as the Old and New Testaments. Through the Bible, we hear the word of God and our faith in Christ is nourished.

The Church's belief is expressed through the ancient creeds, liturgies and reformation witness of the Christian church. From generation to generation, we continue to witness and discern God's will and purpose by studying God's word and sharing it with every generation.

According to **'UCC in Focus'**, June 2023, *Canada's largest Protestant denomination is shrinking the fastest*. The latest census paints a grim picture of The United Church of Canada, which lost a whopping 40% of affiliates between 2011– 2021, falling to 1.2 million people from roughly 2 million.

'Affiliates' are people who self-describe in the census as having a United Church identity, but they may never go to church.

Rev. Michael Blair, the general secretary of the United Church, states that he isn't surprised by the numbers. He wonders if the revelations of unmarked graves at former church-run residential schools in 2021 affected the responses. He speculates, "People may have distanced themselves from the church" because of this.

Kevin Flatt, an author, agrees with Rev Blair that unmarked graves and COVID-19 might have affected attendance, but overall believes that United Church theology is the main cause of decline.

In conclusion, Winston Churchill once said, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts." As throughout the last Century, sometimes the key is to take one small step at a time, rather than waiting for the perfect moment.

Throughout the years, many men and women have contributed to the development of our church. May we forge ahead as the disciples that Jesus wants us to be, overcoming our difficulties and celebrating our achievements, from one generation to the next, all in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

Thanks be to God! Amen.