

ST. MATTHEW'S UNITED CHURCH HISTORICAL SKETCH

The first activities of St. Matthew's took place in Walter Scott Public School during the summer of 1956 when a church vacation school was organized. The response resulted in the formation of a Sunday School which began at Walter Scott School in September, 1956

On the last Sunday of September, 1956, the first church service was held in one of the portable class rooms at Walter Scott School. For several Sundays the services were conducted by the Rev. C.A. Myers. The Rev. Donald Hansford, then a student at the university, provided pulpit supply through the winter of 1956/57. During this period, the services were moved from the portable building into the school building.

In the spring of 1957, a portable building was erected on a five acre site on Crosby Ave., where our church now stands. This site was purchased by the Toronto Home Mission Council of the United Church of Canada. The Rev. E.E. Pugsley was appointed as the supply minister.

The Charter Roll of the congregation was opened in January, 1957, and was closed in October of that year. There were 178 people on the Charter Roll.

A service of Constitution was held by the Presbytery of York on October 29th, 1957 when the congregation was officially recognized as a self governing congregation within the United Church of Canada.

The Toronto Home Mission Council arranged for the settlement of the Rev. William Patterson of Fenelon Falls to be the first minister of our pastoral charge. A temporary home was purchased for the minister at 229 Beechy Drive. Bill (W.W.) and his wife, Cora, and their five children moved into their new home on February 12th, 1958. Rev. W.W. was inducted as minister of St. Matthew's on February 14th, 1958, and continued to serve our congregation until 1963.

The cost of the manse was \$13,599, with a mortgage of \$11,850.

In 1958 the Women's organizations were very active. The major fund raising events were catering, the annual bazaar, and rummage sales. For a number of years, beginning in 1958, they catered dinners for the local Lions' Club. In 1962, the two organizations (Women's Association and Women's Missionary Society) were combined and named the United Church Women (U.C.W.). Although the number of women involved has decreased, the U.C.W. is still very active today. In addition to an annual donation to the general funds of the church, most of the funds raised are donated to a number of charities.

A Church Building Fund was started in 1958, and on the basis of pledges received, the congregation proceeded with construction in 1960. A special service on the "laying of the Date Stone" was held on September 18th, 1960. The "Dedication and Opening Services" were held on December 11th, 1960. The cost of the building was

approximately \$104,000. The cost of the land was approximately \$30,500, which was paid from the original grant of \$35,000 from the Toronto Home Mission Council.

The following is a breakdown of the indebtedness in 1960:

Canada Permanent Mortgage	\$40,000
Royal Bank of Canada	\$24,500
Toronto Home Mission Council	\$35,000 (original grant)*
Toronto Home Mission Council	\$25,000 (special loan)
Toronto Home Mission Council	\$12,000 (mortgage on back 2¼ acres)

(* this grant, which was given to all new churches at that time, was on the basis of dollar for dollar forgiveness to a maximum of \$10,000)

In December of 1958, just prior to Christmas, the choir began a special carol service which was held on a Sunday evening. This "Carols by Candlelight" service has become an annual tradition and, as well as the Senior choir, includes the Junior choir and three English handbell choirs. In 1961 the choir entered the Kiwanis Festival for choirs under 35 members and was awarded first prize.

In 1963 the Rev. W.W. Patterson was called to Smith's Falls. For the first time St. Matthew's formed a pastoral relations committee and a call was issued to the Rev. James Burn of Bancroft. Jim and his wife Jean and their four children moved into the manse in the summer of 1963. Jim and Jean served our congregation for seven years, and in 1970, Jim accepted a call to Port Hope.

During the 60's and early 70's youth groups were very active. As well as the Explorers and CGIT, there were Messengers, Tyros and Sigma-C groups. There was also a Hi-C group. In 1965 the membership of these groups was:

Messengers	45
Tyros	104
Sigma-C	32
Explorers	55
CGIT	33

The Sunday School reached its peak in 1965. There was an enrolment of 450. Teachers and staff numbered 39.

In the fall of 1964, an organ fund was started. Just before Christmas, 1966, sufficient funds had been raised to purchase and install a new Baldwin organ at a cost of \$4,270. There was even enough money left in the fund to provide lessons to three of our members.

In 1965 the back 2¼ acres were sold for \$18,700. The funds were used to pay off the \$12,000 loan to Toronto Home Mission Council.

In 1969 the balance of the mortgage with the Canada Permanent Mortgage was \$20,000. In order to pay off this amount, the Trustees arranged for the issue of debentures. The congregation, along with some other friends, purchased a total of \$27,850 in 5 year debentures. The additional funds were used to pay down the bank loan. The Royal Bank loan was finally retired in full in 1971.

In 1970 a call was issued to the Rev. John McTavish of Loring, Ontario. John and his wife, Marion, and one child moved into the manse and were with us for the next five years. In 1975, John accepted a call to Bracebridge. At that time John and Marion had three children.

In 1974 the five year debentures matured and it was decided to have a new two year issue. The total raised was \$19,700, which by 1976 was reduced to \$17,000. Negotiations with Toronto United Church Council (name changed from Home Mission council) resulted in combining all indebtedness. The loan with T.U.C.C. was now \$60,000.

The Rev. Harold Martin of Brampton was the next minister called to St. Matthew's. Harold and his wife Una moved into the manse and began their ministry in February, 1976. Regretfully, Harold resigned one year later, and left for a non-pastorate assignment in June, 1977.

A call was issued to the Rev. Morar Murray-Hayes of Timothy Eaton Memorial Church, and she and her husband Alan Hayes began their ministry with us in August, 1977. Morar served our congregation until 1980 when she accepted a call to the Vancouver School of Theology.

In 1977, a Long Range Planning Committee was formed to undertake a fresh analysis of the purpose of our church in the light of scripture, and to discuss proposals to help our community minister more effectively. A list of recommendations was included with the annual report of 1979. These included a number of administrative functions, the formation of a Ministry & Personnel committee (duties to be covered by a new constitution), the formation of a Building Committee to consider such things as: manse on church property, improvement of driveway, addition to west wing, etc.

In 1979, in response to the desperate plight of the refugees forced to flee from Vietnam, a Refugee Sponsorship Fund was established. The first family arrived in November. This family of three made rapid strides in adjusting to Canada and becoming independent. In May, 1980, an additional seven persons were sponsored. In July, we undertook a co-operative sponsorship with St. Mary's Anglican Church. They provided financial assistance for their 12 year old "sponsee" as part of our family.

During the 1960's there were changes made to the Official Board. The Board was made up of a number of small committees, rather than the traditional organization as outlined in the manual of the United Church. A new Constitution was written and received the approval of York Presbytery in March, 1980. The Constitution was completely re-written in April, 1984. There have been two revisions made and approved: the first in February, 1989 and the second in May, 1993.

In 1980 a call was issued to the Rev. Jan Rhijnsburger of London. Jan and his wife Corry moved into the temporary manse in July. In November, Jan advised the Official Board that they wished to purchase their own home in Richmond Hill. As decision was made to sell the manse in February, 1981, York Presbytery granted permission to sell the manse for an amount no less than \$55,000, the proceeds to be invested and the

income to be used to pay a housing allowance. The manse actually sold for \$60,000. In the fall of 1982, Jan resigned and accepted a position in the Niagara area in social services.

At the annual Congregation Meeting in January, 1982, a challenge was made to the congregation to make a special effort to raise \$25,000 in our 25th Anniversary year for debt retirement. At that time the loan to T.U.C.C. was \$54,000. A "No Name" Committee was formed to develop fund raising events. Although the goal was not reached, the year long campaign was very successful. A total of \$20,100 was raised and applied against our debt with T.U.C.C. By the end of 1984, a further \$20,875 had been raised by this committee. In 1985, the mortgage debt with T.U.C.C. was finally paid and on Sunday, November 3rd, 1985, we celebrated with a 'mortgage burning service'. Cora Patterson, widow of our first minister, performed the actual burning of the mortgage.

An Anniversary Committee was formed in 1982 to arrange special events to mark our 25th anniversary. Most of our former ministers returned throughout the year: John McTavish in March, Harold Martin in April, Bill Patterson in June (Bill was confined to a wheelchair and he spoke at the end of the service. His son John, our first candidate for ministry, delivered the sermon), Jim Burn in September, and Morar Murray-Hayes in October.

In November, 1982, a call was issued to the Rev. Bruce Roffey of Woodville. Bruce and his wife Gaylia began their ministry in May, 1983. Bruce served our congregation until 1988 when he accepted a call to a position in Toronto Conference. At that time Bruce and Gaylia had one daughter.

In 1986, a new roof was required on the main church building at a cost of \$29,000. As a result of special fund raising during the next two years, this amount was completely covered by the end of 1987.

Early in 1986, a Planning and Development Task Force was formed. The Mission Strategist from York Presbytery assisted this committee's long range planning process. In November, 1987, a special congregational meeting was held to receive their recommendations. As a result, the congregation supported the use of the property along the west and the north for the building of affordable housing. The funds received from the Provincial Government for leasing the property would be used for church extension.

In April, 1989, the congregation met to approve the call of the Rev. James Cullen of Hope United Church in Toronto. Jim and his wife Karen began their ministry in September of that year. Jim served our congregation until 1992 when he was called by Toronto United Church Council (T.U.C.C.) as a mission strategist serving York Presbytery.

The affordable housing project was approved with a majority of one by the local council and then had to be approved by the Ontario Municipal Board (O.M.B.). Construction began in the spring of 1990 and the 23 units were completed by fall. Many of the tenants began moving into their new homes in early December. The church extension

project was completed and the rededication service was held on Sunday, April 28th, 1991. The renovations included a 50% increase in space in the church hall, a new fully equipped kitchen, and a music room on the west side; the addition of a minister's study, a secretary's office and a nursery on the north side; an enlarged narthex with the main entrance moved from the west side to the east side with a ramp to provide wheel chair access; two new re-located washrooms and a washroom for those with a handicap; the conversion of the upstairs room to two rooms and a washroom, one of the rooms having some kitchen facilities.

At a congregational meeting in February, 1993, a call was issued to the Rev. James Clarke of Chalmers United Church in Windsor. James, his wife Heather, and their two children moved to Richmond Hill in July. In the spring of 1996, James and Heather purchased a home in Unionville.

In the spring of 1987 a concert was performed at St. Matthew's by a choir playing English handbells. A great deal of interest was generated within the congregation, and early in 1988 a fund raising campaign was started and by June enough money had been donated to purchase a two octave set of handbells, along with the necessary equipment. In 1989 the third octave was donated, enhancing the music of our two handbell choirs. In 1997 a two octave set of chimes was donated and in 1998 a third octave was purchased. In 1996, a third choir was formed for young people known as the 'Klapper Kids'.

Early in 1993 an Organ Fund Committee was formed and before year-end, a new Rogers electronic organ was installed. The cost of the organ was \$47,610. The necessary renovations added another \$3,448 and it was decided to install a hearing system at the same time at a cost of \$1,775. This was financed by using \$25,000 from an estate bequest and borrowing \$25,000 from T.U.C.C. The loan was paid off in 1997. The old Balwin organ was donated to the native congregation on Georgina Island.

In 1997, a new roof was required on the main building at a cost of \$35,000. This was paid for out of our investment funds.

In the mid 1960's, the Sunday School adopted a Korean child through the 'Save the Children' organization. This support has continued through the years and in 1998 the Sunday School began support of a new foster child in Kenya.

In 1986 a community food bank was opened to be used by ministers in Richmond Hill. It was housed in the basement of Richmond Hill United Church, and any interested minister could obtain a key which would give 24 hour access to the food supplies. Ministers were able to provide families in need with food and a small gift of money to purchase perishables. A box was provided in the narthex of St. Matthew's, and the people in the congregation were generous in donating food as well as money for the food bank. Although this started out as a temporary outreach ministry, the continuing need resulted in the formation of a broader community organization. The ministers are no longer directly involved. The food bank, located on the main floor at Richmond Hill U.C., is now open during the day and is operated by a part time supervisor as well as a large number of volunteers. St. Matthew's now has a shopping cart in which people place their donation of food each Sunday. Donations of money are forwarded regularly

by the Treasurer. We look forward to the time when an ecumenical food bank will no longer be necessary.

In the spring of 1994 the congregation began support of "Treasures" (a non-profit second hand store) as an outreach project. Treasures makes its contribution to mental health in the community by providing a workplace for people who are well on the way toward a recovery from mental illness.

In 1993, members of St. Matthew's, together with members of King City U.C. and York Pines U.C., began to plan for the sponsorship of a refugee family. In December, a refugee family from Iraq arrived. They had been living in a United Nations refugee camp in Greece. The sponsorship period ended at the end of December, 1994, by which time our congregation had contributed \$11,000 of the \$36,000 raised.

Early in 1995, a small committee began planning for a J.O.B. ("Just Our Best") works program as an outreach project to assist the unemployed and under employed in our community. The old office, off the church hall, was equipped with a computer, printer, fax machine, telephone, along with sundry equipment and reference books. A part-time counselor was hired (5 hours per week) who gave generously of his time, and some volunteered to cover the office from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., five days a week. As well as providing counseling services, assistance was also provided in preparing resumes and using computers. The name was changed to Job Prep in 1997. The Job Prep resource center was closed down at the end of 1997 when a similar government program was started in the region.

Our congregation continues to be strong supporters of the Mission & Service Fund. Since 1985, our per capita givings are in the top five in York Presbytery (calculated by dividing the amount given by the number of identifiable givers to local funds). The actual number of givers to M&S is just over 50% of the total number of givers to local funds.

In 1998, the York Chinese United Church Mission congregation approached St. Matthew's for the use of the building for their worship services. This congregation was approved as a mission of York Presbytery and they had received a grant from the Toronto United Church Council. A special congregational meeting was held on March 8th, 1998, at which time their minister, the Rev. Wilson Chan, covered their requirements for the use of the building for their services on Sundays beginning at 1:30 p.m. The terms and conditions for the rental of space were passed unanimously.

The York Chinese Mission congregation stayed with us until approx. 2004. Since then we have had other small congregations renting our sanctuary for their weekly services.

In 2001, a call was issued to the Rev. Wayne Reed of Linden Park Community Church in Hamilton. Wayne and his wife, Marie, began their ministry with us in October, 2001. Wayne served our congregation until 2009, when he accepted a call to Queen Street United in Lindsay.