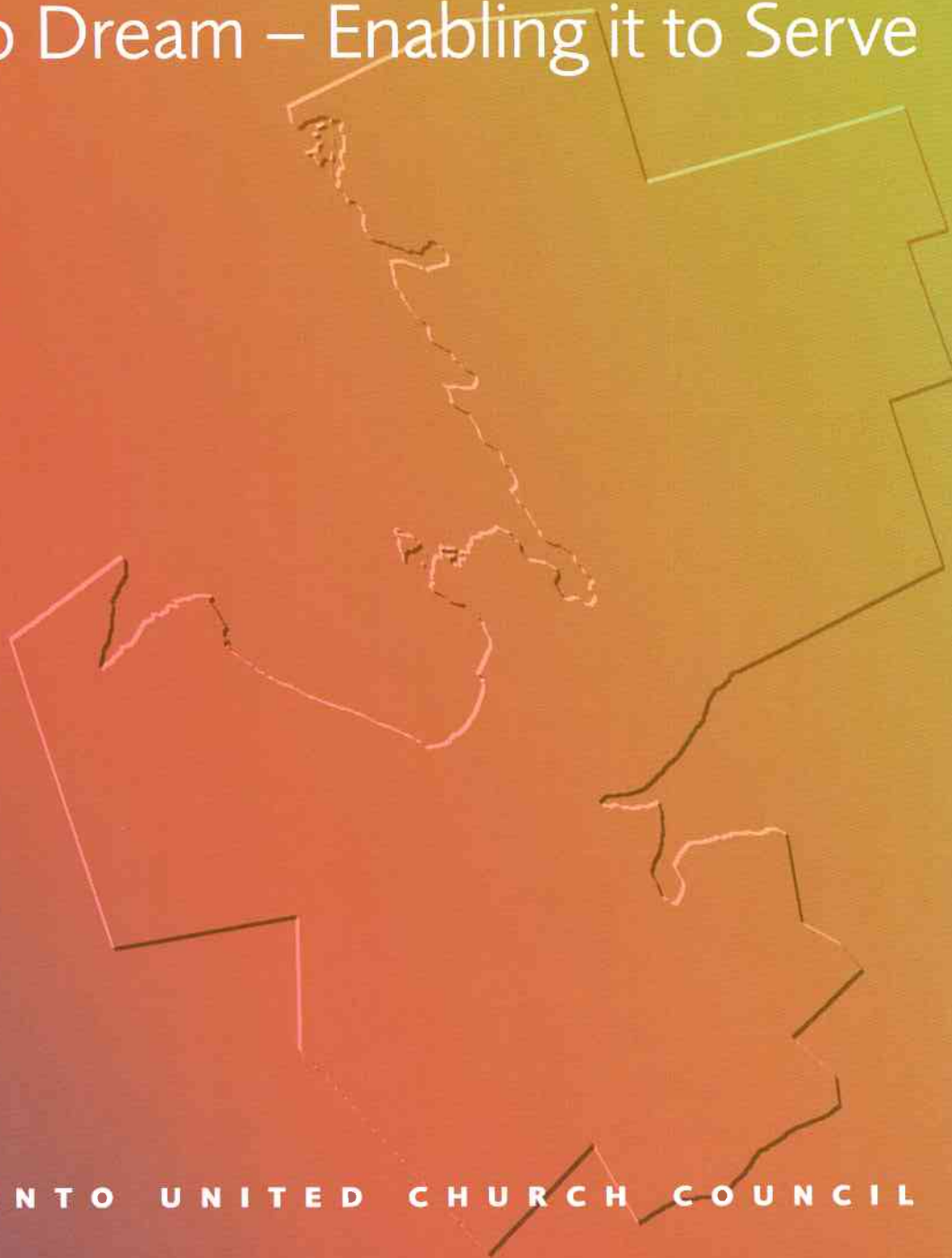
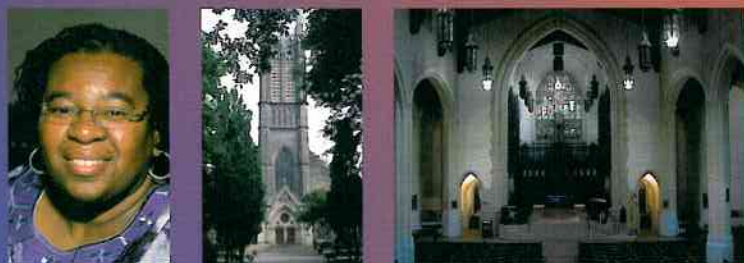


Empowering our Church to Dream – Enabling it to Serve



THE HISTORY OF THE TORONTO UNITED CHURCH COUNCIL

Empowering our Church to Dream – Enabling it to Serve

THE HISTORY OF THE TORONTO UNITED CHURCH COUNCIL

by Alanna Mitchell



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Charitable
Registration Number
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Our congregation has embarked on a significant process to develop a vision for ministry into the next century. The options before us are formidable and include the possibilities of a major redevelopment or relocation for our facilities. We are grateful to Toronto United Church Council for its willingness to share in our journey and to respond to our requests for expertise and guidance as we moved forward with the initiative.

Clinton Nesbitt
Steering Committee
St. John's United Church,
Elmvale

Our interest is to establish a community effort to build affordable housing in Muskoka. This is our spiritual investment in our home community.

Toronto United Church Council's cooperative partnership in establishing The Muskoka Housing Fund saved us time and a great deal of money. It also saved us the anxiety associated with managing the new fund. It allowed us to continue to focus on the local effort to make the project work. The people at the Council understood our intentions and worked with us until our needs were met. Council's support, creativity and financial experience was instrumental to the successful launch of the Gateway Homes Muskoka initiative.

Anonymous donor
Muskoka Housing Fund

Soon after the water crisis in Walkerton, new government regulations made life difficult for all of our United Church Camps in Toronto Conference. Property manager Ken Pennock's know-how and leadership, and the fundraising help provided by Council ensured that all of our camps incorporated the changes without missing a beat. Without their help, we'd have been in non-compliance throughout that camp season and longer.

Ted Meyers
Chair, Toronto Conference
Camping Committee

Foreword

The congregation of Elmvale, north of Barrie, is bravely tackling issues familiar to many small community and rural congregations. Changed times require new approaches to mission and ministry. Discerning what God is calling the congregation to be and do within a changing community also involves asking what should be done with buildings inherited from an earlier era of church development. Can existing buildings be adapted for ministry appropriate to the twenty-first century? Is relocation a possibility? What criteria should be used to evaluate potential sites? How can such work be financed? At an early stage in the process, Toronto United Church Council was invited to be a partner in the Elmvale journey, bringing its breadth of experience and practical expertise to the visioning and re-missioning process.

In Gravenhurst, one United Church couple recently decided

to take action on the question of substandard housing. With a small group of concerned individuals, they established a \$1 million dollar donor-advised fund, the Muskoka Housing Fund, within Council's funds designated for social ministry. This spiritually motivated project was initiated through the church and extended to include other members of the community. Such passionate commitment evokes the commitment of others and now an active team works to realize the dream. Recently, the town committed more than 26 acres of public land to the project, bringing the dream of affordable homes even closer to reality.

The consequences of the Walkerton tragedy of 2000 reached far beyond that community. A heightened awareness of the importance of water quality issues quickly led to the creation of more stringent government regulations for all of Ontario. In the frontline of these changes were four United Church camps of Toronto Conference, which faced major challenges in updating their water systems to comply with new regulations. They turned to their longtime partner, Toronto United

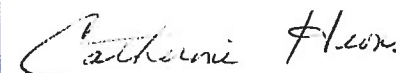
Church Council for advice on those new systems and for support in raising the funds to install them.

With responsibility for Church Development within Toronto Conference, Council ensures wide access to its knowledge and financial resources through its partnerships with Presbyteries. Between 1993 and 2005, Council's Mission Strategy Program made \$1.16 million available to Presbyteries for mission strategy development over and above Council's investments in particular congregational initiatives.

Council's history is filled with such partnership stories. Its early work was taken up under the auspices of the Massey family and helped define our church's commitment to strong local congregations and to practical social engagement. Local congregations across Toronto, Sparrow Lake Camp, the Fred Victor Centre and the Massey Centre were all founded as a result of those initiatives. For 115 years our church has depended upon Council's unique capabilities to transform dreams into action; to build and rebuild a church that is real, relevant and reachable.

Founded in 1892 within the Methodist Church, The Toronto United Church Council has served the church and society within the City of Toronto and York Region since its inception. In 1992 Council's mandate was expanded to include all of the Presbyteries within Toronto Conference.

In these pages, we introduce readers to Council and to some of the personalities and projects that make it an integral part of a vital institution. As our United Church responds to the ministry and mission challenges of the 21st Century, we look forward to continued strong partnerships with Toronto Conference, its presbyteries and with revitalizing congregations from Owen Sound to Scarborough and from Brampton to Huntsville.

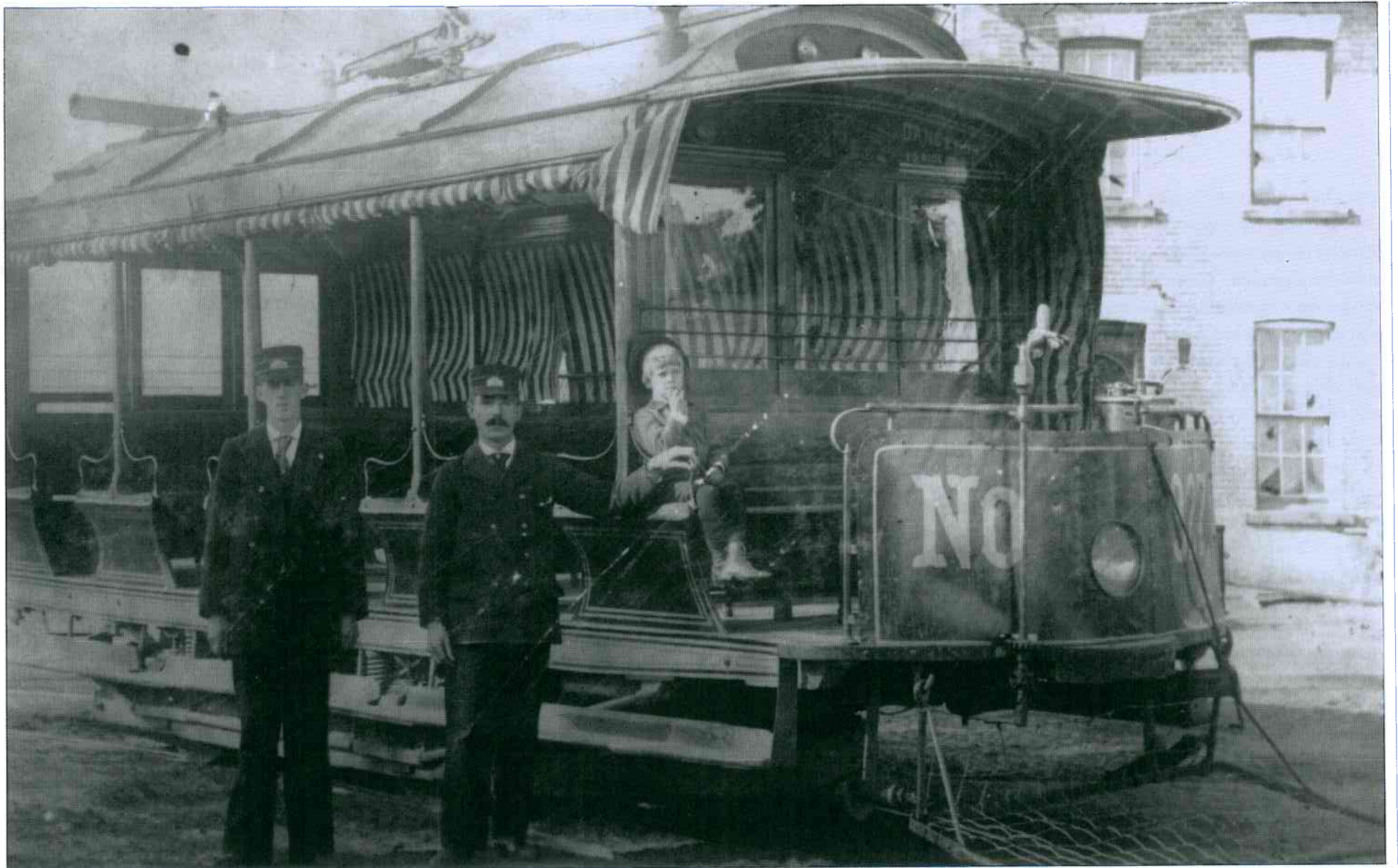


Catherine Hions
President



Vincent Alfano
Executive Director

October, 2007



Toronto's first electric street car - 1892

Social Grace at the Birth of the Toronto United Church Council

It was a year of hope, prosperity and rapid change. Canada was already 25 years old and technology was bringing innovations that had been unimaginable just a few years earlier. Everything, it seemed, was getting more and more modern.

That year, 1892, the first electric streetcar had appeared on the streets of Toronto. People began to whisper that the horse-drawn streetcars might eventually be replaced altogether.

That year, Lord Stanley of Preston, the Governor-General, was so impressed with the new game of hockey, that he bought a silver bowl lined with gold, dubbed it the Stanley Cup, and decreed that it be given each year to the best amateur hockey team in Canada.

The Toronto Star put out its first edition that year, settling into a format of four pages at one cent a copy.

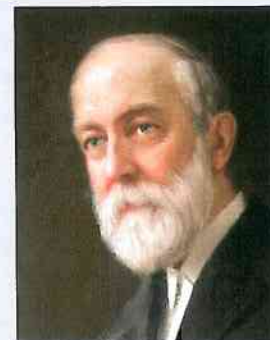
Political advances were happening bewilderingly fast. The splendid Ontario Legislative Assembly building at Queen's Park opened its doors that year; the first women in Toronto were elected to represent voters (on the Toronto Board of Education); the

country's top legislators put the final touches on the first version of Canada's Criminal Code.

Electric lights, flush toilets, telephones and even asphalted streets – in place of cedar-paved and dirt roads – were becoming more common. The cross-Canada railroad

had been open for seven years, making movement from sea to sea comfortable and easy. And in 1892, the 180,000 citizens of Toronto even had their choice of mail-order goods from the catalogues of two Canadian retail icons: Eaton's and Simpson's.

So it's no wonder that 1892 seemed like a good year to launch the Methodist Social Union of Toronto, the direct forebear of today's Toronto United Church Council. The city's wealthy Methodists, spurred by the Massey family, wanted to celebrate their church by making it stronger and more vibrant. In a nutshell, the Social Union was established "for the general advancement of the interests of our denomination in the city of Toronto," its archival papers say.



CHESTER MASSEY

But the Methodists wanted to have fun while they did it. Begun March 25, 1892, the Social Union was, in effect, a social club with a focus on holding banquets, giving receptions and hosting the famed Easter Monday fundraising concerts.

The "hour of glory"

came on September 9, 1898 when the Social Union threw an elegant feast at Toronto's new Exhibition Grounds for the General Conference of the Methodist Church in Canada, according to the industrialist Chester Massey, who gave a speech at the event.

He and his father Hart Massey, of the internationally successful farm-implements company, were the purse and brains behind the Social Union.

As well as organizing glamorous events, the wealthy founders of the Social Union offered their financial acumen to Methodist congregations that were having trouble paying their bills. As part of that, they helped the church as a whole figure out financially savvy spots to put up new places of worship. They pressed



CITY OF TORONTO ARCHIVES, FONDS 1244, ITEM 10095

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

for financial accountability and freedom from crippling debt.

Informally, the Social Union became the Methodist Church's banker and real estate advisor in Toronto.

The Massey impulse that gave birth to the Social Union was also at work for citizens outside the Methodist denomination throughout these years and in later Canadian eras. The family supported education, music and the arts, in addition to helping the poor.

Massey money founded Victoria University within the University of

Toronto and its residence Burwash Hall, Massey Hall, Hart House for students at the University of Toronto and Massey College for its graduate students.

Later, Chester Massey's son Vincent became the first Canadian-born Governor-General. Vincent Massey's enthusiastic interest in Canada's arts and letters was one factor that led to the founding of the Canada Council, the National Library, the National Arts Centre, the National Gallery and the yearly Massey Lectures.

The Methodist Social Union of Toronto, now the Toronto United Church Council, is linked both philosophically and by direct heritage to all these beloved Canadian institutions.

The Mother of Invention

A Social Club Spawns a Social Agency

By 1910, the focus of the Social Union had changed. Its leaders had become aware of "the down town problem." Immigrants were flocking to the country in numbers unmatched in Canada's history, before or since. In the four years spanning 1910 to 1913, 1.4 million people immigrated to Canada, many to its most populous province, Ontario, and to that province's capital, Toronto.

Canada's social safety net was in its infancy and massively inadequate. Someone needed to take care of the poor.

The leaders of the Social Union took decisive action. They realized "the growing importance of the down town problem and the necessity for grappling with it before it assumes any greater magnitude," according to the Union's minute books of 1911.

The Union could no longer be only about advancing the interests of a single denomination. It was a new day. The social challenges were different and more complex. The Union had to develop new ways of thinking about itself and the Methodist Church. It needed to go beyond the congregation, beyond the denomina-



CITY OF TORONTO ARCHIVES, SERIES 372, SUBSERIES 11, ITEM 94

tion and take responsibility for the entire community.

The Union realized that “the care of the unchurched and churchless people down town calls for a form of organized Christian work entirely different from the ordinary Methodist Church.” It was a prophetic sentiment, and one that has come to represent the modern mission of the church.



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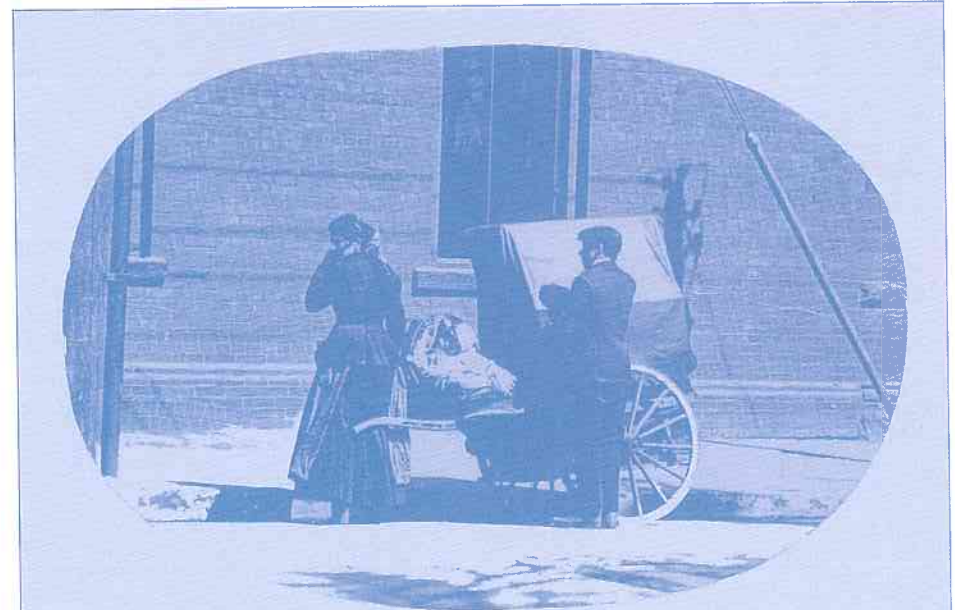
Baby weighing at Fred Victor Mission, circa 1910

By 1912, the Social Union had formally joined with the Fred Victor Mission (another Massey enterprise, named after Chester Massey's son Fred Victor Massey, who had died young) and had taken charge of the social service work for the entire city of Toronto and its suburbs. That year, it made the change official by also changing its name to the Methodist Union.

By then, the banquets and concerts were just a memory. But the Union was still the Methodist Church's real estate advisor and financial whiz. It set up a new fund to provide interest-free loans to build new churches and help old ones. It maintained trust funds. It even embarked on a successful fundraising drive in 1914 to raise \$250,000, the equivalent of about \$4.5 million in today's money.

(It was the second time the Union had turned to the church's congregations to raise money, the first being a small campaign in 1904 to raise \$2,500 a year from the Sunday collection plate.)

The Union was determined, however, not to spend its money on what it called the “weak and dying”



In the early 1900's the plight of immigrants challenged our church to care for the “broader” community.

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA/VICTORIA UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES 93.049P/ 3531 N

churches, but to use its financial muscle where it could make a difference. The times called for it.

It was a prescient move. The following three decades were filled with struggle not only in Toronto, but also across Canada and through much of the world.

The First World War took a terrible toll, and so did the influenza pan-

demic of 1918. Then came the Great Depression of the 1930s, and the Second World War.

In the meantime, in 1925, the Methodist Church, the Congregationalist Church and two-thirds of the Presbyterian churches in Canada joined to form The United Church of Canada, now the biggest Protestant denomination in the country.

The first general council of the United Church took place in what had been the Metropolitan Wesleyan Methodist Church at 56 Queen Street East. It was also the birthplace of the Methodist Union and is known today as Metropolitan United Church.

The Methodist Union was renamed the Toronto Church Extension and Mission Union in 1926 to reflect its role in the new United Church. It retained the financial and social functions of its predecessor.

Then, in 1935, in the teeth of the Great Depression, the organization's name switched once more. This time, it became the Toronto Home Missions Council. Throughout this period and until after the Second World War, the organization's focus was on taking care of Toronto's poor, regardless of denomination. This phase of its existence was about being a leader in social justice and in the development of congregations eager to embrace the age's new social complexity.

There will always be a "downtown"

Paul Dowling, board chair, Christian Resource Centre, Regent Park, Toronto



What do you do when the neighbourhood all around you is being torn down and built up into something brand new? In the case of the Christian Resource Centre and United Church in Regent Park, the solution was to embrace it, welcome it and help lead it.

Regent Park, a community of 7,500 built in downtown Toronto in the late 1940s and one of the oldest publicly funded housing areas in Canada, is in the midst of dramatic change. Housing authorities are demolishing the housing and building again in an attempt to increase the number of homes, create parks and make the area more vibrant.

But the Christian Resource Centre, which provides a worship space for a congregation of 7 or 8, outreach programs for

residents and a food program for people who live on the street or in rooming houses, sits on a key chunk of the 69 acres that make up Regent Park. Toronto United Church Council owns that land.

The Centre and church could have folded up and gone away. The community encompasses people of many faiths and the largest is Islam. Was there still the need for the presence of the United Church?

In consultation with the community, the church decided there was and developed an \$18-million plan to rebuild the church site itself.

"The church's work is not done here," says Paul Dowling, board chair of the Centre. "We provide for people's needs in a way we don't think others do or can."

The plan calls for a new building that contains 87 units of housing for those who now are the most marginalized of the homeless: single street people or those living in rooming houses. This part of the plan takes up two-thirds of the redevelopment budget, or about \$8 million.

In the same building, the church will have a space for worship and for running its community programs.

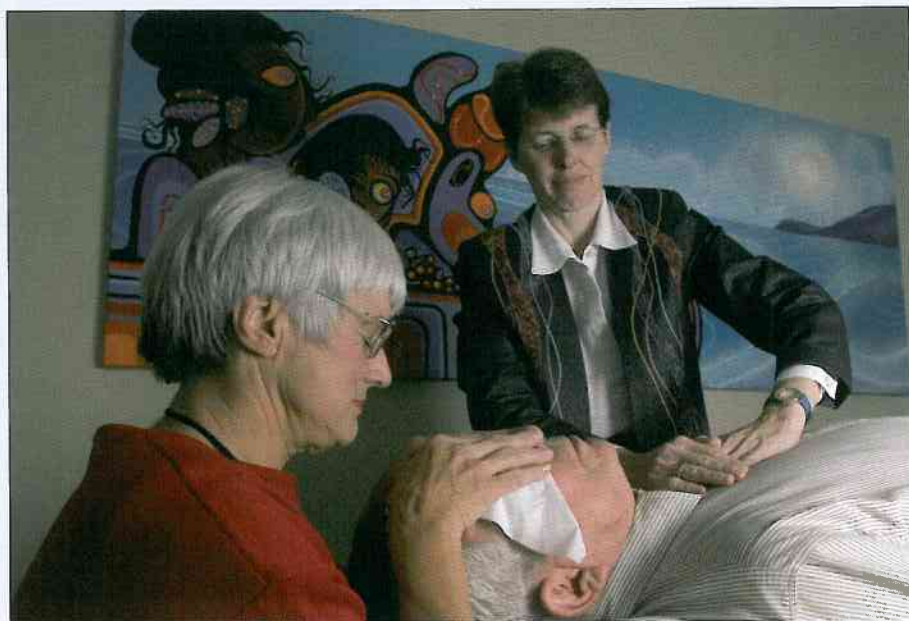
The community is supportive and so are all the levels of government, says Dowling. The only remaining challenge is raising the money.

With the generous partnership of Toronto United Church Council, individual congregations and Toronto South Presbytery, the project is moving ahead, with development funding being patched together from different sources, including the levels of government that support housing.

"Our development now seems to be an integral part of the new plan for Regent Park," says Dowling.

Visionaries create and recreate thriving congregations

Coral Prebble, co-ordinating minister, St. James United Church, Etobicoke



St. James United Church in Etobicoke has a long history of coming up with new ways to help its community. There was the pre-school daycare for children with special needs that later blossomed into a program at Seneca College. There's the decades-long practice of sponsoring refugee families and the impassioned church group that works for social justice, bringing politicians

under the spotlight to answer the tough questions.

Nor does the congregation leave beauty and the arts off its roster of good works. Every Saturday morning, teams of award-winning gardeners gather at the church to work their magic. And several times a year, a coterie of actors puts on sold-out plays that delight community audiences.

But this thriving congregation of 400 doesn't stop there in its efforts to build a strong community. Since 2003, St. James has offered the healing practice of reiki – a natural, spiritually-based, energy method – to people in the surrounding neighbourhoods, performed in a brand-new healing centre the congregation constructed.

"It's just a beautiful way of being the church," says Coral Prebble, St. James's co-ordinating minister.

About half the volunteers who perform reiki are from the congregation and half are from the community at large. They offer treatment three times a week.

By 2005, the centre had performed reiki on 147 people in more than 500 separate treatments, the strong majority of whom were not part of the congregation. As well, Prebble offers training courses in reiki that tend to fill up half a year in advance.

How does this relate to Toronto United Church Council? St. James came to life on May 1, 1952, built with money from the George H. Armstrong bequest left to

Council's forebear organization at the end of the Depression.

Armstrong, a member of Carlton United Church noted for his shyness, had been a school teacher and school inspector. By the time he died at the age of 80 in 1938, he had amassed nearly \$110,000, a spectacular sum at that time. He was unmarried and left the money to the church, specifying that it be used to build new homes for congregations.

Armstrong's bequest has grown to about \$900,000 and is still going strong today, providing money for low-interest loans and mortgages to help set up congregations. Over time, it has contributed to the building of more than 25 new churches in the Toronto area.

St. James's current vision and generosity to the larger community can be traced in a direct line back to the vision and generosity of this humble bachelor who entrusted his life savings to Council.

A Social Agency Gives Birth to a Property Developer

Building Homes for Congregations

After the Second World War, the Toronto Home Missions Council again moved with astonishing resilience, changing with the tenor of the times. It was a period of stunning economic and population growth in Canada. The war was over. People were once again filled with hope.

It meant that Council needed to help build new churches and Christian education buildings, redevelop older churches, and launch congregations in the rapidly expanding suburbs of Toronto.

The Toronto Home Missions Council poured its creative energy into making this happen.

This involved trying to predict where new housing developments were going to end up. Sometimes it meant tromping through muddy fields and seeing the bustling cities to come, or poring over planning documents to see where the roads were going to be built. It was a complex real estate play. Then, as before and since, Council wanted to make sure that old and new congregations were not burdened with too much debt.

The Legacy of George H. Armstrong

Before his death in 1938, George H. Armstrong knew that his church was moving into a period of dramatic change; innumerable new congregations would be needed in his beloved Toronto, and the surrounding area. To the fulfillment of this dream, he left his entire estate. Some of the congregations begun with the support of the Armstrong Fund have completed their ministries, and others continue. The "Armstrong supported" list is impressive:



Forest Hill	Armour Heights	Wilson Heights	St. Andrew's (Markham)
Leaside	Lawrence Park	The Donway	Malvern Emmanuel
Cosburn	Victoria Park	Yorkminster	Heart Lake
Royal York Road	Alderwood	Rexdale	Northwest Barrie
Islington	Northlea	West Ellesmere	North Star (Brampton)
Lakeview	St. James (Etobicoke)	Hillcrest	
Riverside	Tretheway Park	Covenant	
Long Branch		londale Heights	

And that meant raising large amounts of money that the council could turn into mortgages for the new congregations. In 1950, Council launched a drive for \$500,000 (or about \$4.4 million in today's dollars). By 1957, it embarked on a far more ambitious campaign to raise \$2.5 million (or about \$18.5 million in today's terms).

By the time this phase of Council's life had wound down, in the late 1960s, Council had helped build 47 new churches, manses, several Christian Education buildings, church additions and church redevelopments. In all, Council worked on or built one third of the United Church buildings that existed in Metropolitan Toronto in 1967, according to a history of Council published in 1988.

A welcoming and thriving congregation: Emmanuel Howard Park United Church

Reverend Dr. Cheri DiNovo

A few years ago Emmanuel Howard Park United Church was in the familiar late 20th century inner-city slide: a 600-seat church with maybe 50 Sunday worshippers, mainly grey-haired.

It was also burning through its capital reserves at the rate of about \$100,000 a year, a doomed financial strategy.

Today, the church has broken even for the first time in a generation and has quadrupled the number of people who regularly attend Sunday morning services.

What happened? Reverend Dr. Cheri DiNovo, the brains behind the transformation, calls it "quite a miracle." And DiNovo, who has since been elected to represent her local Parkdale and High Park community at Queen's Park, says it happened without reference to any of the modern theory about how to grow a church. She was brought in to change things, but says she refused to focus on numbers or on making money.

Instead, the Emmanuel Howard Park congregation, whose new clergywoman Reverend Linda Saffrey came on board in

October 2006, went back to the basics: 'being Christians' and opening the church's doors to society's outcasts.

"We looked into our community and asked: 'Who is the most hated?'" says DiNovo, author of the acclaimed book *Qu(e)rying Evangelism: Growing a Community from the Outside In*, Pilgrim Press, 2005.

They were the poor, the addicted, the gay, the queer, the transgender population. Emmanuel Howard Park started a Sunday service at 5:30 p.m., followed by a community dinner, and aimed both at society's neediest. In 2002, the congregation registered the first legalized same-sex marriage in Canadian history.

That's when the miracle happened. Serving society's outcasts and listening to them changed Emmanuel Howard Park's congregation. And not just the congregation that had been there for years, but also people in the community who saw what the church was doing and felt the tug of Christ.

People started joining the congregation, bringing their children. The church began to thrive.

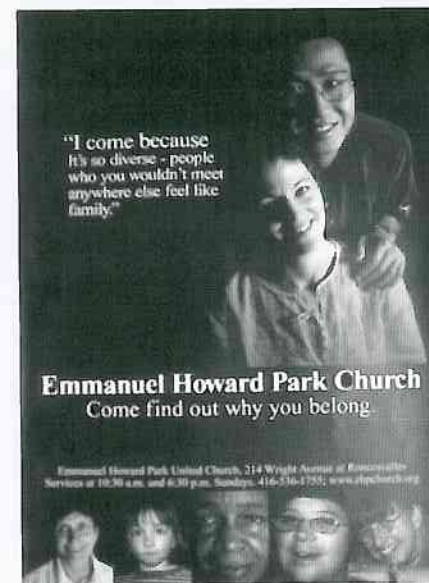
DiNovo is quick to spot the irony. "By being a church of the poor and queer, we began attracting people not so poor or queer," she says. "God was doing for us what we couldn't do for ourselves."

Once the congregation knew it could attract people, it launched an advertising campaign in the lead-up to Christmas in 2004. It got a grant for \$20,000 from Toronto United Church Council to buy ad space in bus shelters in the community near the church, showing images of congregants and letting people know they were welcome to attend services.

"TUCC is an outpost of those who want to see the church grow and survive," says DiNovo.

In turn, the ad campaign led to attention for the church from mainstream news media. DiNovo had a lengthy interview on CBC's radio program *Tapestry*. Vision TV ran a spot on the congregation and so did some Toronto-area newspapers.

"When you welcome people, you can't help but grow and thrive," she says.



A 2004 grant from Council enabled Emmanuel Howard Park Church to build momentum in its unique ministry through neighbourhood bus shelter advertising.

The property developer evolves into a midwife for healthy congregations

Building congregational capacity

As the Baby Boom came to an end, so did the United Church's building boom. By the early 1970s, Council was again in the throes of change. Church membership was in decline among many denominations. Donations on Sunday mornings had declined in lockstep.

The church needed Council to perform a different function and renamed it the Toronto United Church Council in 1973 to reflect this shift.

As in the past, the focus was on resilience, decisiveness, accountability. The larger church was counting on Council to get things done, just as the Methodists had nearly a century earlier.

This time, though, the focus was on lending financial support and strategic planning to the congregations. When a church needed a new roof, it applied to Council for a grant or a loan. If it needed an additional wing, or if it wanted to reinvent its mission, Council was there to help make it happen, with both money and expertise.

The same applied to new congregations that might need a new piece of

Boldness, innovation and thinking outside the box

Jim Cairney, minister and planter, North Star congregation in Brampton

The North Star congregation came to life on Easter Sunday, 2000 in Montana's Cookhouse Saloon in Brampton.

It's been unusual ever since.

Instead of taking the time-honoured route of holding services for the new congregation in a school gymnasium for a decade and then building new on a piece of land, North Star decided to make its permanent home in the sales pavilion of a developer.

The Springdale building has a large atrium on the main floor and commercial office space above. Worship takes place in the atrium on theatre seats.

The whole place is designed to look like a small-town, says Jim Cairney, the minister and planter of the congregation.

"It's like stepping onto a theatre set," he says. "This is a one-of-a-kind situation."

At present, commercial and medical offices and a large daycare rent space in the complex, covering the monthly mortgage payments. The modest church office is in the same building.

"This is outside the box, very clearly," says Cairney. He adds, though, that a handful

of other congregations in North America have a similar blend of commercial and ecclesiastical.

"At one level, it makes a statement that Christ can be found in the midst of the town square," he says.

Toronto United Church Council helped make the site come to life, says Cairney. Vincent Alfano, Council's executive director, was one of the first people Cairney showed the unusual building to.

"He quickly grasped the opportunity," says Cairney, adding that Council offered not only "a pool of wisdom," but also a mortgage.

North Star is a small congregation, a minority in a fast-growing, predominantly Punjabi Sikh community. So far it has about 60 to 100 members, largely young families.

To Cairney's mind, though, the church had a blessed beginning and has a fighting chance to thrive because worshippers don't have to worry about how to meet monthly expenses.

"We haven't saddled the congregation with the message: 'Come help us pay our mortgage,'" he says.



In 2005 Metropolitan United Church in downtown Toronto opened its newly excavated basement. A challenging engineering feat, the retrofit added 11,000 square feet to the church and was financed with a \$1.5 million dollar loan from the Investing in Ministry Fund.

land or a new building. Or to any of the four children's summer camps for which Council owns the property. Council was the rightful heir to the financially savvy leaders who had set up the Methodist Union at the end of the 1800s. Both were established to make decisions swiftly and without long laments if they were the wrong ones.

As in the Massey era, though, the mission of Council goes beyond the interests of the congregation or the advancement of a single denomination. Along with managing assets and loans, the new Council also sets its sights on helping the church serve Canadian society at large.

In that, it takes the lead from the interests of the congregations. As of old, that often means taking care of the poor. But today, that might mean helping a congregation buy freezers to set up a community food bank. Or helping a congregation set up office space to develop social services or workplaces for the mentally challenged.

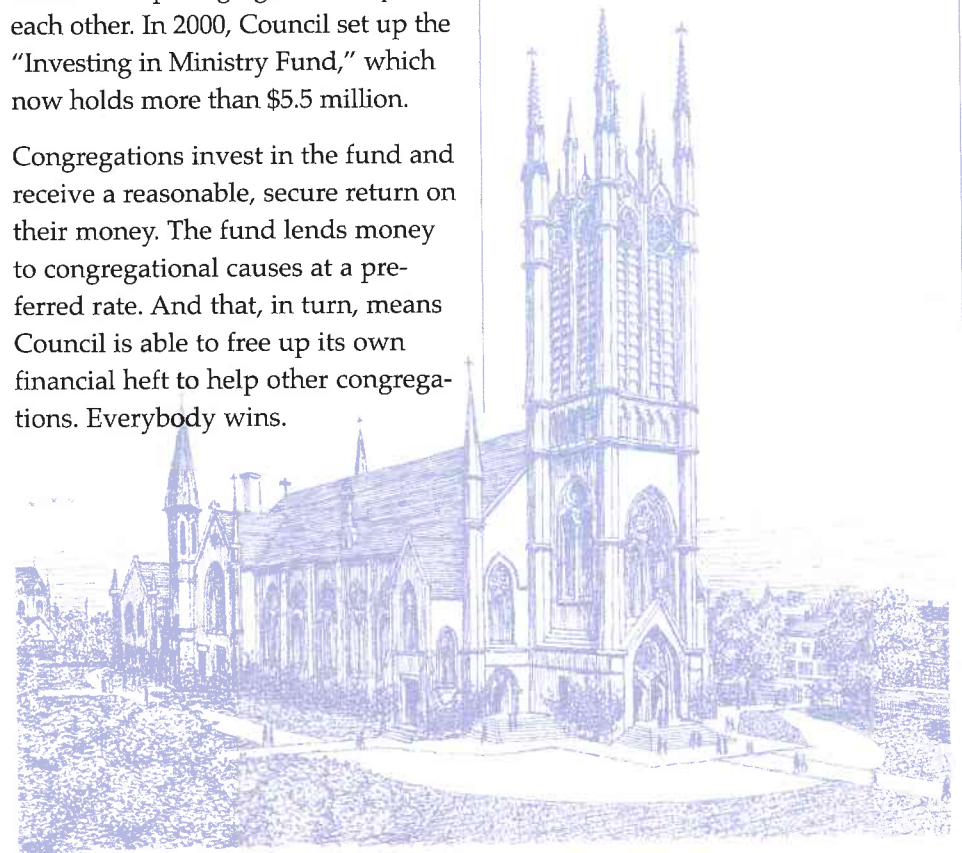
Today, that also means helping a congregation build a community centre for all citizens, or setting up a holistic health centre, or building environmentally-friendly housing for the homeless, or working with the United Church at large to care about the deteriorating life-support system of the planet, or helping the church

understand the AIDS pandemic in Africa.

Council is the child of its Methodist parents in many other ways as well, driven by both innovation and necessity. In recent years, it has begun developing novel financial instruments to help congregations help each other. In 2000, Council set up the "Investing in Ministry Fund," which now holds more than \$5.5 million.

Congregations invest in the fund and receive a reasonable, secure return on their money. The fund lends money to congregational causes at a preferred rate. And that, in turn, means Council is able to free up its own financial heft to help other congregations. Everybody wins.

*...the mission of Council goes beyond
the interests of the congregation
or the advancement
of a single denomination*



Metropolitan Wesleyan Methodist Church, Toronto, 1872 - J.C. Duff '70

Transforming communities in transition

Keith Lockhart, pastor of Wasaga Beach United Church

It was plain a decade ago that something big was up in Wasaga Beach, the picturesque vacation town on the shores of Georgian Bay with the world's largest freshwater beach.

The population looked poised to double to 16,000. The first wave of Baby Boomers was hitting early retirement and yearned to get away from the rat race of the big city, opting instead for the white sand beaches of this area. And not just for vacations, but to make permanent communities.

They arrived from Brampton, Georgetown, Mississauga and Bolton. Many had not been active in any church since they were in their teens. Now, 30 or 40 years later, in a contemplative period of their lives, they were shopping for a church.

Enter Wasaga Beach United Church, the first in the town of 16,000 of this denomination. It opened its doors – figuratively at least – on the afternoon of Easter Sunday in 1998 in an outdoor service.

By 2000, with help from Toronto United Church Council, the congregation had

found a home in a two-room schoolhouse with a flat roof and a cross out front.

Council helped find the site, encouraged the innovation of planting a congregation in a schoolhouse, bought the school and surrounding three acres of property, supplied funds for renovation, and offered a subsidized rental rate.

In a pinch, the schoolhouse can seat 135, but normally seats about 84 on a Sunday, says Keith Lockhart, pastor of Wasaga Beach United.

And it's an active congregation, although new. Along with six other churches, it has helped set up a food bank for the poor of Wasaga Beach. The congregation has also become aware of a problem in the resort area of a lack of affordable housing for the poor and is diving in with research, ideas and energy.

"It's more of the way people do the church these days," says Lockhart. "If there's an issue that grabs their attention, they'll sign on, as long as they can do something about it."

One of the ideas the congregation is battling around is whether to develop some of its

own acreage to build housing for Wasaga Beach's senior citizens.

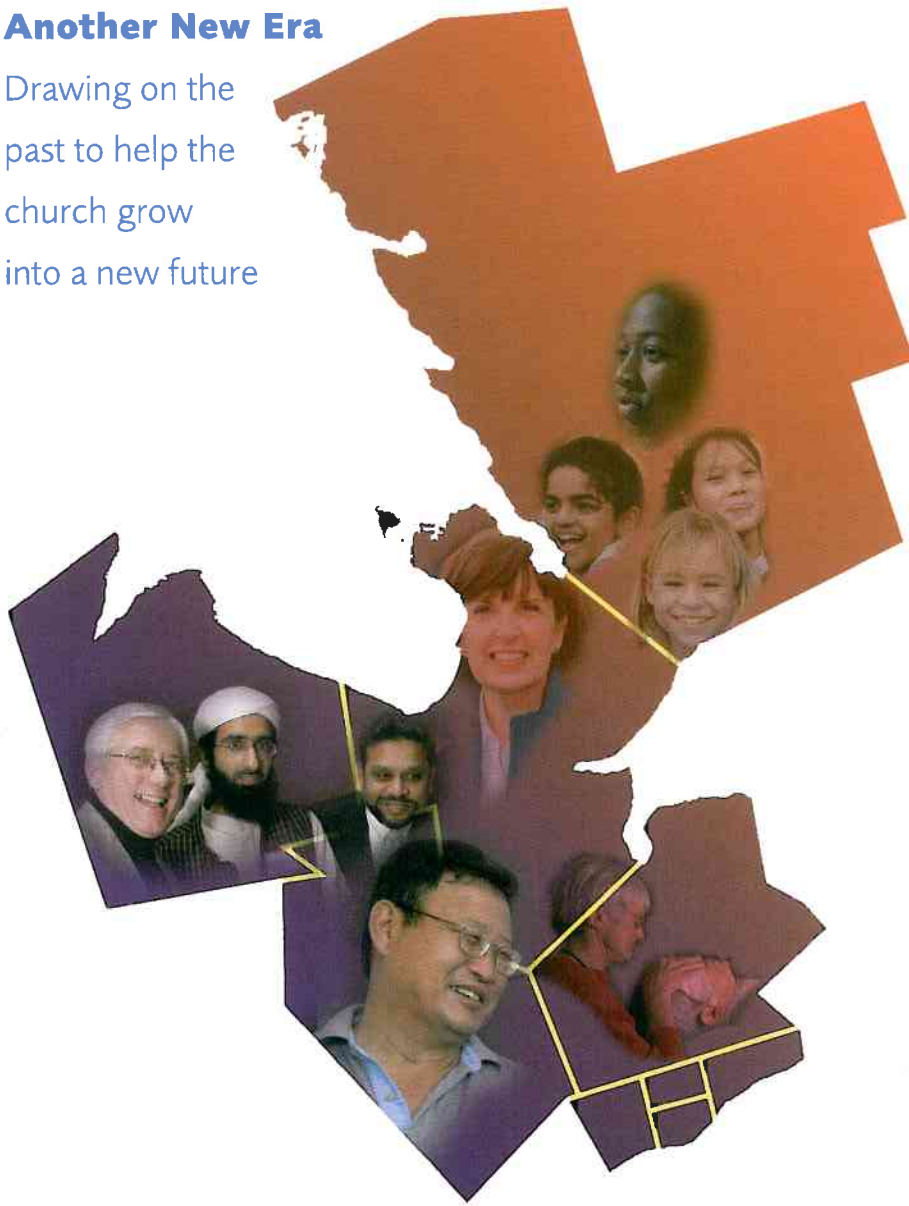
It's also in talks with Council to take over the mortgage on the church property in place of paying rent. And that's not to mention its own church expansion plans.

Already the congregation has outgrown the church. Recently Wasaga Beach United experimented with two Sunday morning services in a bid to keep up. Lockhart jokes that this is a way to "recycle the chairs."

As for Wasaga Beach, it's still growing. The projections are that its population will double again within the decade.

Another New Era

Drawing on the past to help the church grow into a new future



Toronto United Church Council has big plans. With a nod to its ancestor organization's revelation that it needed to care for "the unchurched and churchless people," Council has broadened its perspective again. The church needs permission to dream. It has a duty to recreate itself, to get on with the business of transforming lives.

Council has pledged to help the church do this. How? By nimbly unearthing new ways to help the people of the United Church grow the capacity to minister to society's vulnerable, in whatever form that takes.

It's a complex task. Today, Council is responsible to more than 300 congregations and presbyteries covering much of south-central Ontario, from Muskoka to Lake Ontario. And these congregations are not the formulaic creatures of the 1950s. They run the gamut from decades old to brand-new, from thriving financially to struggling mightily, from knowing exactly what to do to being mired in despair.

They are urban, suburban and rural. Culturally diverse and not. Devoted to pipe-organ hymns and also exper-



imenting with guitar-chord gospels. Neighbourhood-based and regional.

To support these far-reaching efforts, Council has launched a \$20-million fundraising campaign called Seven Years of Plenty. It is the first fundraising push for Council in nearly 50 years, following the one begun in 1957, and it is the fifth in the organization's long history.

The campaign is aimed at building funds to imaginatively and generously support three broad areas of church development:

- Outreach to society's most vulnerable;
- Youth (in the form of modernizing the Conference's four camps); and
- Healthy congregations.

Seven Years of Plenty started quietly with a large gift. In the past two years, as the fundraising plans have taken shape, other gifts have come in to support this new vision, garner-

ing a total of more than \$4.5 million toward the goal of \$20 million.

These past two years and the coming five, ending in 2011, represent the campaign's Seven Years of Plenty.

Like the other four campaigns of Council's history, it is a bold initiative. During a time when few congregations feel as though they live in the midst of plenty, the campaign will remind church members that in Toronto Conference, we live in one of the most affluent societies the world has ever known and that this affluence is for sharing.

It will remind church members that our faith calls us to live in gratitude for life's generosity, its beauty, its bounty and its challenges to the human spirit.

Bringing spirit to a generation of seekers

Mary Joseph, spiritual leader, Pathways project, Markham

How does the United Church be the United Church in a sprawling, fast-growing, post-modern urban society containing a highly educated, professional, young population of all races, languages and religions?

The task of Mary Joseph is to find out. To do that, she is setting up Pathways, a new church for many faiths in Markham.

It's a giant experiment. To her, it is the opposite of proselytizing. Instead, it involves embracing other systems of belief in order to grow in one's own.

"This is absolutely crucial in this modern age," says Joseph, who has dubbed this "the age of new thought."

"The idea is to encourage people to come to their own conclusions and encourage them to talk with others in the community," she says.

"If we are doing our jobs as followers of Christ, it is mandatory that we reach out to people, not to convert, but to love," she says.

Toronto United Church Council has played a critical part in the birth of this venture by helping to develop the vision of what a regional church could look like.

"What is so incredibly joyful is that in TUCC, we already have an institution with its buildings, resources and mentorship and the will to use all of these collectively to put these projects into place," says Joseph.

Will the experiment work? Signs are good. The Pathways community of faith already has three strong components. A strong group of local worshippers forms the core of a community that includes hundreds of others locally who take part in an on-line group and hundreds more who participate in the on-line Pathways community around the world, largely from the southern United States, says Joseph. "They want to be part of the growth," says Joseph.



Seven Years of Plenty Synopsis

The root narrative that tells the church what it is, is changing. While congregations are still shaped by physical and organizational traits appropriate to a time when the relationship between church, society and culture was more clearly defined, many are becoming aware that these do not reflect what our church might become in the era unfolding before us. Our church has a duty to recreate itself, to get on with the business of transforming lives and society.

A network of creative visionaries is seeded in every congregation. These “midwives” see new life emerging within our church and seek to nurture it to health. The Seven Years of Plenty campaign represents a critical element of this new life.

A compelling new understanding of “church” is emerging – with input from within and outside the church. There is a deep longing for a new, healthy church: Christ-like, relevant to the young, continuing to translate hope into action for the marginalized, experienced in congregations with fresh energy and purpose, respectful of where God is active both inside and beyond its boundaries.



Seven Years of Plenty is a bold initiative inviting us to dream ‘big’ and serve faithfully. During a time when few feel as though we live in the midst of plenty, the campaign will remind church members that we live affluent lives, blessed by the richness of life itself. It will remind church members that our faith calls us to live in gratitude for God's generosity, for life's beauty, its bounty and its challenges to the human spirit. And it will remind us that God's gifts are given to us to share.

Toronto United Church Council

Council's membership is made up of representatives from congregations across the Conference. Members are appointed by each of the presbyteries of Toronto Conference and members-at-large are named by Council itself.

Council's Financial Development Committee leads the campaign and is chaired by Jim Hilborn.

The Campaign's Advisory Board is made up of members from across Toronto Conference.



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