



**JUBILEE UNITED CHURCH**  
**RESEARCHING OUR ROOTS**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

*This edition of 'Researching Our Roots' is dedicated to the memory of Bob Chisholm, whose tireless dedication to the task and endless hours of research provide the firm foundation on which this document rests.*

*This document was originally researched and compiled to honour the original amalgamation of Bethesda, Donminster and Victoria Village United Churches. It was presented to the Jubilee congregation in 2019.*

*In honour of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jubilee United Church, this document was updated in 2025 to reflect further amalgamations with St. John's and Forest Grove United Churches.*

*"What we consider common knowledge today will be history tomorrow. We need to write about the things we should remember.*

*Researching our Roots is like finding the roots of a tree. Some roots go deeper than others, but it takes all of them pulling together to keep the tree upright, strong and healthy. It's the same thing with a church.*

*We are well-'rooted' at Jubilee with several congregations having contributed to who we are today."*

*Bob Chisholm*

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*A special thank you goes to the amazing proof-reading team of Celia Ball, Dianne Clare,  
and Elda Scott, without whom I could not have completed this edition.*

*Pat Lansche, Editor*

\*deceased

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## **AN OVERVIEW OF DON MILLS AND ITS CHURCHES**

### *In the Beginning – The 1950s and 1960s*

The Don Mills Development Company, led by industrialist E. P. Taylor, purchased several farms in the area, about 3,000 acres by some reports, and built the “Planned Community” of Don Mills in the 1950s. It was developed to be a self-supporting “new town” and was at the time located outside Toronto proper, as a community of the Township of North York. In 1998, there was an amalgamation of municipalities and Don Mills became part of Toronto.

Along with this development came the need for more churches of various denominations, including Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian and United. The United Church led the way numerically with the Parkwoods, Donway, Victoria Village and Donminster United Churches. These new United Churches were in addition to the existing Bethesda United Church, which already had a long history in the Don Mills area.

In the late 1950s and the 1960s, there was substantial growth in the Don Mills community. Houses were being purchased by young married couples with children becoming established in the area. Church attendance was strong. Don Mills was showing much evidence of success, and it was believed by many at the time that this successful environment would have no need to change in any significant way in the foreseeable future. However, this proved to be short-sighted.

### *Changing Times*

During the 1950s and 1960s, the typical family was comprised of the bread winner (the father) and the stay-at-home mother who catered to the needs of her family. Starting with changing economic times in the late 1970s, and more so in the 1980s and 1990s, the typical family was increasingly made up of two working parents, with many young children in some form of day care for much of the day. Inflation was a compelling factor. Housing became less affordable for many people. Participation in life of the church became less of a priority for many families.

Commencing in the 1990s, many of the original Don Mills homebuyers reached retirement age. During the same period, a few ethnic-based Christian churches and churches of other religions were built to accommodate a gradual influx of newcomers. It appears to be that fewer Christian families were moving into the area while some of the retiring people were moving out.

## *The United Churches*

The United Churches in Don Mills were facing significant challenges. The changing demographics in society in general were reflected in the churches by a considerable drop in attendance. This also is shown in the dramatic decline in the number of baptisms (for example, from 1956-2000, Bethesda showed a drop from 337 baptisms down to four). While part of the impact of fewer congregants was financial, there simply were not enough people available in the congregations to attend to the requirements of maintaining a church building and running the programs and activities. Much responsibility was falling onto the shoulders of a few. The unsustainability of this situation dictated that steps were needed.

## *Facing the Challenges*

For a church congregation in such changing times, all one could do was look for a way to meet the immediate challenges and prepare for the future. The Boards of the participating churches concluded that efforts would be more rewarding should amalgamation with one or more United Churches in the area which were facing similar challenges take place, so that “the whole would be greater than the sum of its parts”. Expenses could be reduced and hopefully the ministry could be expanded in some ways.

With the encouragement of Presbytery, the Don Mills United Churches explored the options. The decision was made by Donminster, Victoria Village and Bethesda to amalgamate. Two others, Donway Covenant and Parkwoods United, were part of the discussions as well; however, both decided to remain independent.

## *The Outcome*

On June 30, 2000, Donminster, Victoria Village and Bethesda United Churches came together to form Jubilee United Church. On July 1, 2017, St. John’s United amalgamated with Jubilee, and Forest Grove United joined the fold on April 1, 2024. Our first service with all five churches was held on April 21, 2024.

The Jubilee amalgamations have been able to overcome many of the challenges faced by the individual churches. We have an attractive building and a strong ministry with many programs appealing to different ages and interests, both within the church and reaching out to the community, a fine reflection of all those who have come before.

# WHO ARE WE?

## HOW DID WE GET HERE?



**Bethesda**



**Donminster**



**Victoria Village**

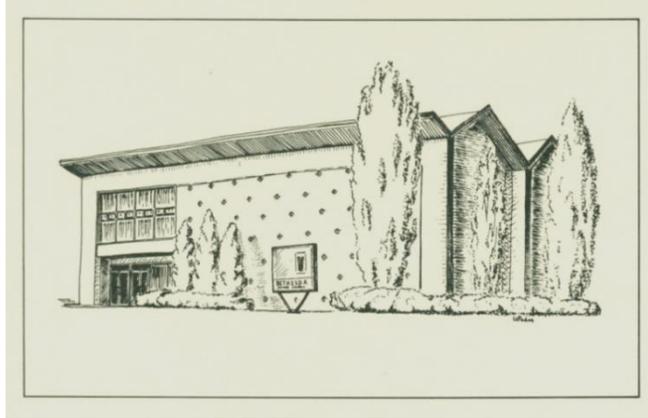


**St. John's**



**Forest Grove**

## MEMORIES OF BETHESDA UNITED CHURCH



Bethesda has a deep connection to the Don Mills area, going back to the early 1800s, and has had several different names and locations (see Appendix A). It became Bethesda United Church when it joined the Church Union of 1925.

Through the years, congregations amalgamated with Bethesda United: Oriole and Concord (1927-30), Oriole and Dawes Road (1930), and Cosburn (1934).

Bethesda United Church occupied a red brick church until the mid-1950s, when the new Community of Don Mills was being built. As part of the development, the municipality wanted the church property to rebuild the Lawrence-Leslie intersection and create a park on the northwest corner. The congregation exchanged their property for land on Larkfield Drive and built a new church there.

Following amalgamation, the Bethesda property was sold for residential development. About half of the houses in this new development face onto a new street named Bethesda Court.

## PERSONAL MEMORIES

I joined Bethesda in 1965 shortly after we moved into the area. It was a vibrant congregation with lots of young families and plenty of activities. I played many roles, including teaching Sunday School, singing in the choir, leading CGIT, and attending UCW.

For many years, we met in Sunnybrook Park every September for a corn roast, which included hot dogs and snacks. Harvey and Marianne Bride brought the corn, and Harvey led a sing-song with Elda (Telford) Scott playing the autoharp. Years later, we switched to gathering in the backyard of Bob Zavislake's home, where Bob roasted a pig in a huge barbeque.



For several years, in the fall and winter of the 1960s and 1970s, we had a Bethesda curling group at Avonlea arena every second Saturday night. Our minister at the time, Rev. Wes Morris, loved curling almost as much as he loved hockey. He never wanted to miss listening to a hockey game, so he carried his portable radio with him as he skipped one of the teams, and we always knew when the Leafs scored a goal because we would hear him yell.

For a few years in the late 1970s and early 1980s, we spent a February family weekend at Camp Tawingo, on Lake Vernon near Huntsville. We skied cross-country, skated, tobogganed, had sing-songs led by Jack Pearse and enjoyed the winter landscape.

We enjoyed a Winter Fun Day each year in January in the park behind Banbury Community Centre: skiing, tobogganing down the big hill, and then returned to the church for a delicious pot-luck supper. Friday Nighters was an adult group, organized by Pat and Don Robson. We met monthly and had a variety of events, such as car rallies, speakers, and games nights.



Over the years, Bethesda hosted many weekly youth groups: Canadian Girls in Training (CGIT), Explorers, Boy Scouts, Cubs and Beavers, and provided great leadership in the community.

We were very fortunate to have excellent choir directors to provide leadership in our services, and for a few years, we also had a junior choir, directed by Anna Fox.



In 1980, we sponsored the Nyugen family, who had narrowly escaped from Vietnam. The parents, Trang and Hue, their three children and one nephew, arrived on one of the coldest days in February to a warm welcome by our congregation. They enriched our lives over the next years as they flourished, and they taught us so much about life and adjustment to new experiences.

They were good years, and I have wonderful lasting memories.

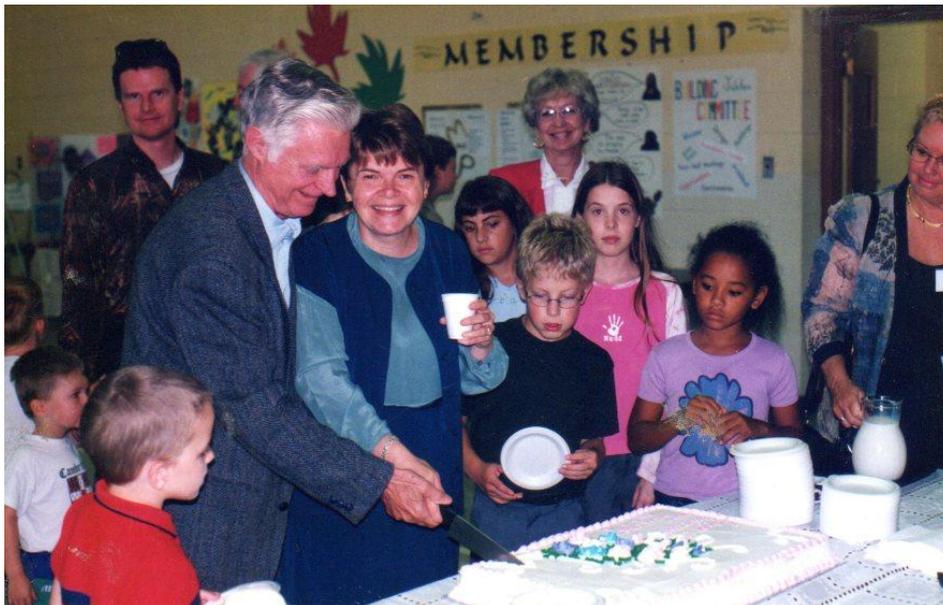
Elda Scott

## MEMORIES OF DONMINSTER UNITED CHURCH



Donminster United Church was established in 1960; the congregation first met at Broadlands Public School and was sometimes referred to as O'Connor Hills United Church, to reflect the name of the neighbourhood. The cornerstone of the church building is dated 1963; the building was opened in 1964 and was located just north and east of Lawrence Avenue East and the Don Valley Parkway, in the urban Community of Don Mills.





Bob Nichols, Ruth Nicholls, Joan Neylan, Rev. Cathy Britton

### *The Order of Good Cheer*

This social initiative was started in 1987 with a different event each month, ranging from concerts to games nights.



There were many creative folks in the Donminster congregation, culminating in the production of several variety shows, including Mother Goose is Loose in the 1970s, Mad Moments in 1994, and Mad Moments II in 1996. Show tunes were often given new lyrics by Ed Rutherford.

These hilarious presentations were fundraisers in support of the roof and organ purchases.

**Outreach**



Brookbanks Grannies for African Grannies, 1997  
in support of those living with HIV / AIDS



Health Fair, November 1999, led by Bob Nicholls, Mary Ann Hicks, and Ruth Boyd

## PERSONAL MEMORIES

My church life began decades ago as a member of Donminster United Church. Although I had a large family and a demanding job, I always looked forward to attending Sunday services and generally volunteered for various administrative undertakings in the church, such as participating in committee work , as chair of various committees, and later as Vice Chair and eventually Chair of Council, and most recently, Co-Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Among the many benefits that I derive from church attendance and participation in church administration activities is the opportunity to learn more about my faith and the opportunity to get know many members of the church. I believe among the many benefits of active church membership is the opportunity for church “fellowship”, which has been proven to relate to longevity, and which may, I believe, have had a positive affect on my life of 90 years (so far!).

I continue to attend Jubilee weekly church services on Sunday and the Ulterior services held bimonthly.

Charlie Scott

Music has always been a big part of my life. I started in the Junior Choir at age 7. In those days, the children would come out from Sunday School to sing, then go back to Sunday School. The congregation met in Broadlands Public School, where I was a student. It was a little strange to be in the same room for Sunday School as I was in during the rest of the week - I even sat in the same seat.

I graduated to the Senior Choir at age 17 as an alto and am still there. I remember the choir having a tea break during choir practice.

Janice Vitale

## MEMORIES OF VICTORIA VILLAGE UNITED CHURCH



Victoria Village United Church came into being in the late 1950s in response to the growing spiritual needs of the Victoria Village community. In anticipation of the construction of a new church, Toronto Home Missions Council (now Toronto United Church Council) acquired ten building lots for a future church site.

A community survey in the late 1950s revealed that over 40% of Victoria Village residents claimed United Church affiliation. Many of these came forward enthusiastically to offer their volunteer services. Toronto Home Missions Council, in conjunction with Toronto East Presbytery, conducted the first service on October 20, 1957, at Sloane Avenue Public School. The congregation was formally constituted by Toronto East Presbytery on June 18, 1958.

The congregation planned wisely in the pre-construction stage. A healthy down payment was raised even before construction commenced. To conform with estimated construction costs and to better align the building with community needs, ambitious Sanctuary plans were scaled back, a proposed tower was eliminated, and the seating capacity was reduced from 410 to 260. The projected Christian Education Wing was dropped in favour of the addition of two large rooms.

The sale of surplus land helped retire the mortgage debt after only 12 years and funds were able to be accumulated for endowment purposes. During the period 1961 to 1974, membership increased from 200 to a peak of 670.

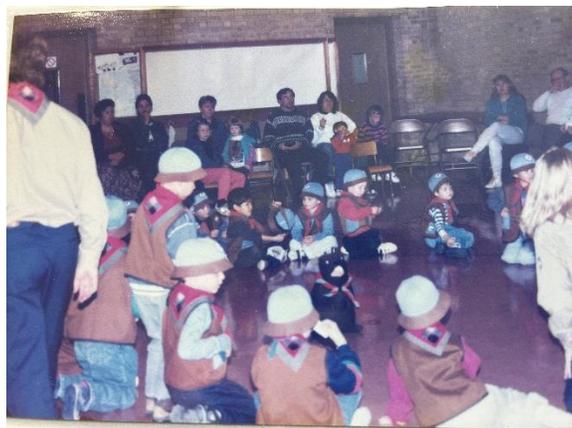
## Children and Youth



It was the 40th anniversary of scouting at VVUC on Baden Powell Day, February 1999. Left to right is Mr. Adrian Barker, Rev. Cynthia Scott and Peter Sharp, the first cubmaster in 1959. Supporting the development of young people has always been fundamental to Victoria Village UC.



Christopher Sharp at the Skydome Beaver sleepover in 1994. He was subsequently followed by CBC for the duration of the event.





Hallowe'en (undated)

### *Christmas Joys*



1986 - Christmas pageant performance by the children of the Sunday School. The choir sat on both sides of the chancel provided the musical part of the pageant. The decorations were lovingly put up each year by Irene Leeson and her team.



1993 VVUC Christmas pageant (left). Karen Stewart played Mary, and held a real baby, 7 months old James Sharp as Jesus.



Girl Guides assisting Santa



Christmas Dinner

Christmas 1999



UCW Sarah's circle 2000 Waterloo Women's Retreat



Picnic 2000

## MEMORIES OF ST. JOHN'S UNITED CHURCH



In the winter of 1956, property was purchased for the construction of St. John's. Both the Sunday School (beginning in September) and church services (starting in December) were held in a portable in the nearby Vadenburg School. St. John's was constituted as a congregation of the United Church of Canada in 1957, and the church building was dedicated in 1960.

St John's began as a congregation with young families. There were so many children for Sunday School – there was not enough space for all the classes. The baby boom was in full force, and in 1962, the Christian Education Wing was added to the building.

The church was very active in Outreach and Pastoral Care. We had a large committee who visited, called, and sent cards, food and flowers. Quilters added Comfort Quilts. UCW groups were active and made hundreds of "Teddies for Tragedy" to donate overseas as well as to the police force and fire departments. We sponsored a refugee family and furnished an apartment for them. St. John's co-sponsored a Syrian family with Parkwoods United Church. Outreach also included such initiatives as a social assistance program.

Norman Seli was presented as a Candidate for Ministry by St. John's and was subsequently ordained in 1991.

Some highlights of each year: the annual Christmas Eve Service with overflow attendance; Remembrance Day with many veterans in the congregation; Music Sundays; and guest speakers including Moderators of the United Church and Cardinal Carter.



Pastoral Care Committee prepared Christmas decorations for those not able to attend in person.

Fundraising was alive and well. Craft shows, rummage sales, bridge Valentine luncheon, cookbook sales, and GST (Goods, Services, Talents) auction all received a lot of excitement, and paybacks were received all year.



Maritime Dinner and entertainment – part of GST Auction (right)

We celebrated two big anniversaries, Year 50 and Year 60, with many dinners and events.



Signature Quilt for 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, 2006

The banners of St John's were displayed for the public on at least two occasions.



Pageant Prep 2007



2013 gathering of friends and alumni



Carmen and Josie Chisamore



WE ARE SO VERY HAPPY TO ANNOUNCE THEY HAVE ARRIVED! The Syrian Refugee family co-sponsored by [Parkwoods United Church](#) and St. Johns' United Church arrived this week. Mohamad Al Khateb, his wife Sheymaa El Najem, their son Ghassan Al Khateb and their daughter Batoul Al Khateb. The children are 10 and 8 respectively. The family is overjoyed, grateful and filled with r... See more

### Our Last Day



Pastoral Care presenting Appreciation Comforting Quilts June 2017  
 Rev. Ian Manson, Kelly Galbraith (organist), Suzanne McLeod, Lesley Anderson

Many tears were shed as we held our closing service in June, 2016.

## **PERSONAL MEMORIES**

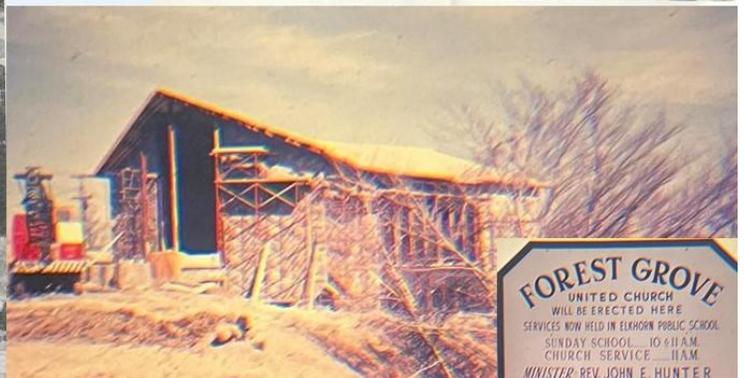
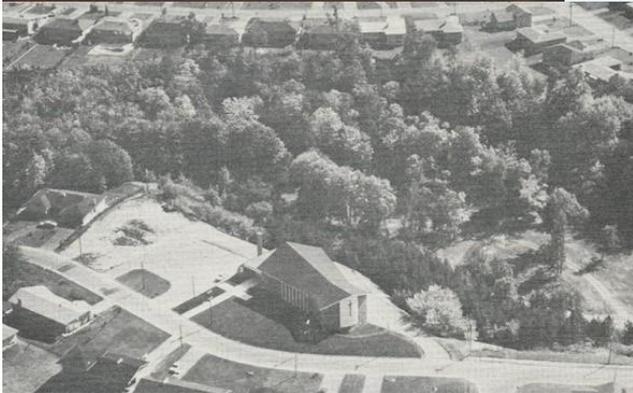
So many memories! St John's was a very important part of my family's life. I was there from the portable church in 1956 until we closed in June 2016. While I was involved in many aspects of church life, my great passion was for Pastoral Care. Our three daughters were baptized and confirmed, two daughters were married there, and my husband's funeral service and reception were held at St. John's.

Suzanne McLean

# MEMORIES OF FOREST GROVE UNITED CHURCH



Forest Grove UC was "born" in 1959 with 259 charter members. A ravine site on Forest Grove drive was selected and construction started.



This collage captures 4 stages of the construction of Forest Grove United Church. A ravine site on Forest Grove Drive was selected and construction started. Our congregation was "born" in 1959 with 259 charter members; a few are still around! The slogan remained the same throughout the 65 years of operation: "Everyone is welcome"

In 1961, the original building consisted of the sanctuary and narthex; it was a contemporary stone design in a neck-tie shape. The Christian Education Centre was added in 1964.



The original sanctuary at Forest Grove:  
 - light Oak pews  
 - electric organ  
 - no stained glass  
 - elevated altar.



Outside FG, ravine to the right



The original Forest Grove church included an electric organ, which failed around 2011. Under the leadership of Marty Smyth, our talented organist, a committee was formed to raise funds to overcome the many challenges, such as how to retrofit a full pipe organ in a sanctuary which was not designed for it?

An organ was located and purchased from a dismantled church in Ohio. It required many modifications to the console mechanism and to the pipes as well as other hurdles. Finally, the organ project came to fruition. It honours Forest Grove United Church members who, as a music-loving community, generously raised the money to purchase and install this wonderful organ. The inaugural concert was held October 19, 2014. After installation of the organ, the sanctuary at FGUC was used as a recording studio by our music team and by other professionals. A compact disc "Music from the Grove" was produced and sold commercially.



The Hearth Room was a much used and loved space at Forest Grove United Church. With its unique fieldstone, copper fireplace and large windows overlooking a treed ravine setting, the Hearth Room accommodated many church and community activities for some 65 years. Not only did the "Room" serve as a place for formal meetings and social gatherings, but also as a space for receptions (weddings and funerals); luncheons (potlucks and Witches Brew); dinners (Music School); classes (Bridge and Yoga); but also for weekly coffee before and after Sunday services. Others, including outside church renters, used the space for prayer and meditation. The Hearth Room was indeed a very popular and treasured space for many people.



The magnificent stained-glass panels at FGUC were not part of the original building. They were donated over the years by different families. Each panel represents a Christian theme except “Sputnik”, which represents the conquest of space.

The interplay of light and color in these panels always provided a calming, uplifting atmosphere and a sense of familiarity in our sanctuary. It is comforting to know that the new owners of the FG church building - though not Christians - have decided to keep the stained-glass panels in the sanctuary.

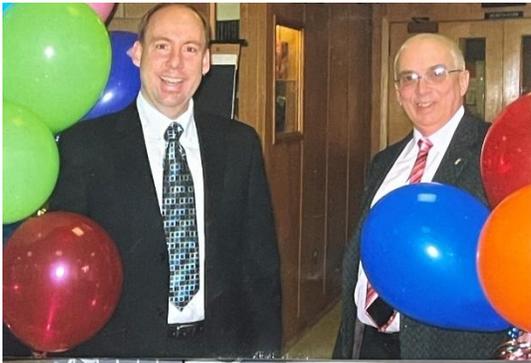


Christmas pageant 2012



### ***Forest Grove UCW 1959 to 2024***

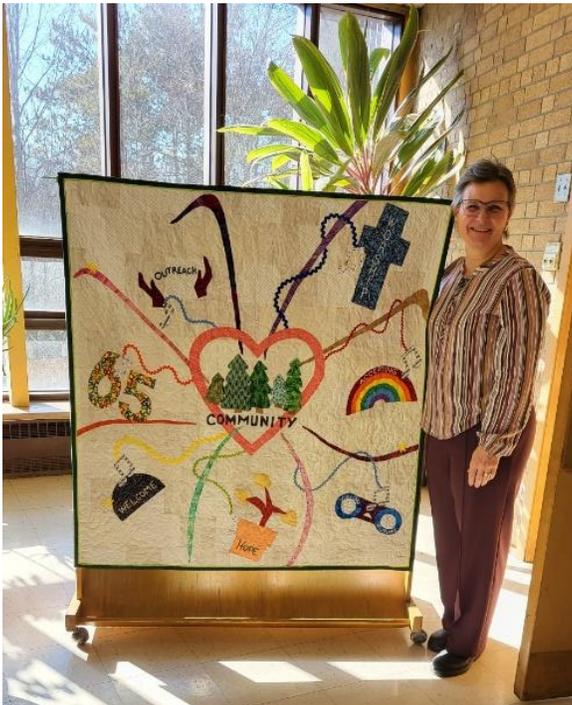
In the beginning, we divided into 4 units. Each specialized in something – for example, Unit 4 did mission study. We took turns meeting in our homes. We raised money for our church by holding bazaars, having second-hand sales, knitting, helping with church dinners, much as other UCWs did. Over the years, each unit took a general meeting, and chose a speaker from outside our church. We voted in a president every two years. We brought our own lunch, took turns making coffee and tea, and then had a meeting on a topic decided ahead of the meeting. Someone arranged a bridge day in the fall several years, and people who played paid a fee to attend. There were a few prizes, and members brought items to be sold to raise money. In the last few years, the UCW met as one group at the church. By the time our church closed, we had closed our UCW.



Top picture: Rev. James Lepard and Dan MacLaren during Forest Grove's 50th Anniversary in 2008. Middle and Bottom pictures: Dan MacLaren outside Robbie's Castle at Forest Grove United Church.



Robbie, the Dragon, arrived at Forest Grove United Church with Rev. James Lepard in the early 2000s. Every Sunday, James as "Robbie" and Dan would perform a puppet show during children's time. Through this medium, children and adults alike were drawn into the text / script in a fun and meaningful way. There was always a "good lesson" to be learned, and "Robbie" became one of the highlights of the Service. When Dan moved away, others in the congregation took over his part. When James departed FG, "Robbie's Castle" was decommissioned. However, "Robbie" came back for Forest Grove's Final Service on April 14, 2024.



Lesley Hirmann stands with our anniversary quilt. The quilt was made for the 65th anniversary and presented to the congregation at the February AGM. The speaker represents music; '65' is for the 65th anniversary; the spreading hands are for Outreach; the rainbow is for an affirming congregation; and the cross for worship in the community. The quilt is now at JUC and was hung in the Garden Room during our first year after joining.



This picture shows the congregation's resilience. During the COVID pandemic, Forest Grove, like all churches, respected the health and safety norms and closed the building. However, as soon as it was possible, we gathered in person on the front lawn with masks and appropriate social distance.



Ken Lund, Maguid Nashid and Ed Doidge 2023



The picture of Mary Crawford was taken at the final AGM on Feb 4, 2024. Mary was a member of Forest Grove since its inception.

## ***The Grove Music School and The Grove Band***

The Grove Music School was founded in 2012 as a ministry to the wider community. It was created to make music education accessible and be welcoming for people of all ages and skill levels, offering high-quality instruction in a setting that fostered creativity, belonging, and connection. From the beginning, the school sought not only to teach music but also to nurture community, keeping its doors open to all, ensuring that financial need was never a barrier.

The school began with traditional ensemble-based offerings such as children’s choirs, later expanding into ukulele and guitar classes, jazz ensembles, and other age-inclusive programming. Over time, it grew into a vibrant program reaching students, families, and the wider community, fostering what many described as a “music family.” Students spoke of the church as a “second home,” underscoring the deep sense of community the school helped to cultivate within Forest Grove.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought these activities to a sudden halt, and the school entered a critical period where its future was uncertain. In response, the focus shifted toward one-on-one instruction, ensuring that lessons could continue and that the program remained accessible. This adaptation not only sustained the school but also reshaped its model, pointing the way toward a bright new future.

In 2020, during this same period, the outreach program, The Grove Band, emerged as a new expression of Forest Grove’s musical life, exploring contemporary and often secular music in sacred ways. The content produced by The Grove Band was sought out by communities of faith around the world for use in worship and for inspiration, with many individuals expressing gratitude for the meaningful impact it has had in their lives. Even after in-person services resumed, The Grove Band continued to focus on outreach, both in-person and digital, connecting widely and steadily growing its reach.



Give Away Day was July 11, 2024. It was about finding new homes for the FG things that were not going to be taken with us to Jubilee. We felt it was a great way of sharing our resources with the community.



The Time Capsule in place (left), removed by Ed Doidge (right). The time capsule was installed on May 14, 1961, behind the cornerstone. It was taken out in March, 2024, and the items were made available at the final service on April 14, 2025. Items inside included the Land Transfer document, Church bulletin for the first service and a number of other items. It was opened for the Forest Grove's 65th Anniversary.



## PERSONAL MEMORIES

My husband and I joined the congregation in 2008, just around the 50th anniversary. We found it to be a very welcoming, vibrant community with a good mix of adults, seniors and children.

Liz Conde

Sixty years is a long time to attend one church. In the case of Forest Grove, it was from a vision of being a house of prayer for all people to closing the building and joining Jubilee United Church.

I remember moving with my wife, Lois, from Parkdale to Bayview and Sheppard in 1960 and finding the nearest church. Rev. Edge Young greeted us warmly and advised joining the newly formed Forest Grove congregation worshipping in Elkhorn Public School. We found a congregation worshipping in a schoolroom with its first minister, Rev. John Hunter, and a talented, active choir. John was a warm, generous pastor who welcomed newcomers into his and the congregation's heart with grace and charm. He even invited Lois and me for dinner on the evening of the first day we attended a church service.

The building was already beginning to rise in the heart of Bayview Village and Rev. Hunter attracted to it a large and lively congregation of new young suburbanites and their growing young families. Soon there was need for a Sunday School extension and a huge mortgage to cover the cost. As we signed covenants to support the mortgage, we rejoiced in being members of Forest Grove, the United Church with the largest mortgage. We held an Every Member Canvass and consolidated our financial position. The community of Bayview Village and its environs seemed alive with people brought up in the church or willing to be part of such a progressive and welcoming congregation.

Rev. Hunter was a modest liberal minister who reached out with joy and friendship to us, a mass of strangers suddenly finding ourselves in a new and young community where we could settle, raise our families and make life-long friends. He touched and responded to our wide-ranging attitudes whether conservative, evangelical or liberal. During his time, Forest Grove prospered with an overflowing Sunday School which required the building of additional classrooms, office spaces, a small gym and the friendly Hearth Room for meetings and happy gatherings. Its members ranged from businesspeople through to professionals to leading figures in our provincial government. Then we paid off the mortgage and Rev. John Hunter accepted a call to another church.

Our son Murray was baptised in the first baptismal service in the church, and we brought home a bright red rose. Our two daughters followed, Lois became president of the UCW, and I served as an elder and in the Sunday School.

It was a decade of growth, but the community of Bayview Village changed. Newcomers did not tend to have young families, and their religious commitments often did not bring them to Forest Grove.

We developed an active young people's group and several of its members decided to study for the ministry. One of them became Moderator of the United Church. Another is Norm Seli, who had his confirmation at Forest Grove, and later achieved ordination.

Many attempts were made to balance the finances, including pursuing amalgamation with Oriole York Mills United Church. We welcomed a Korean congregation for a time. Finally, under the insightful guidance of Rev. Cameron Watts, we searched for community organizations which could use our space and share its upkeep, but this endeavour too was in vain.

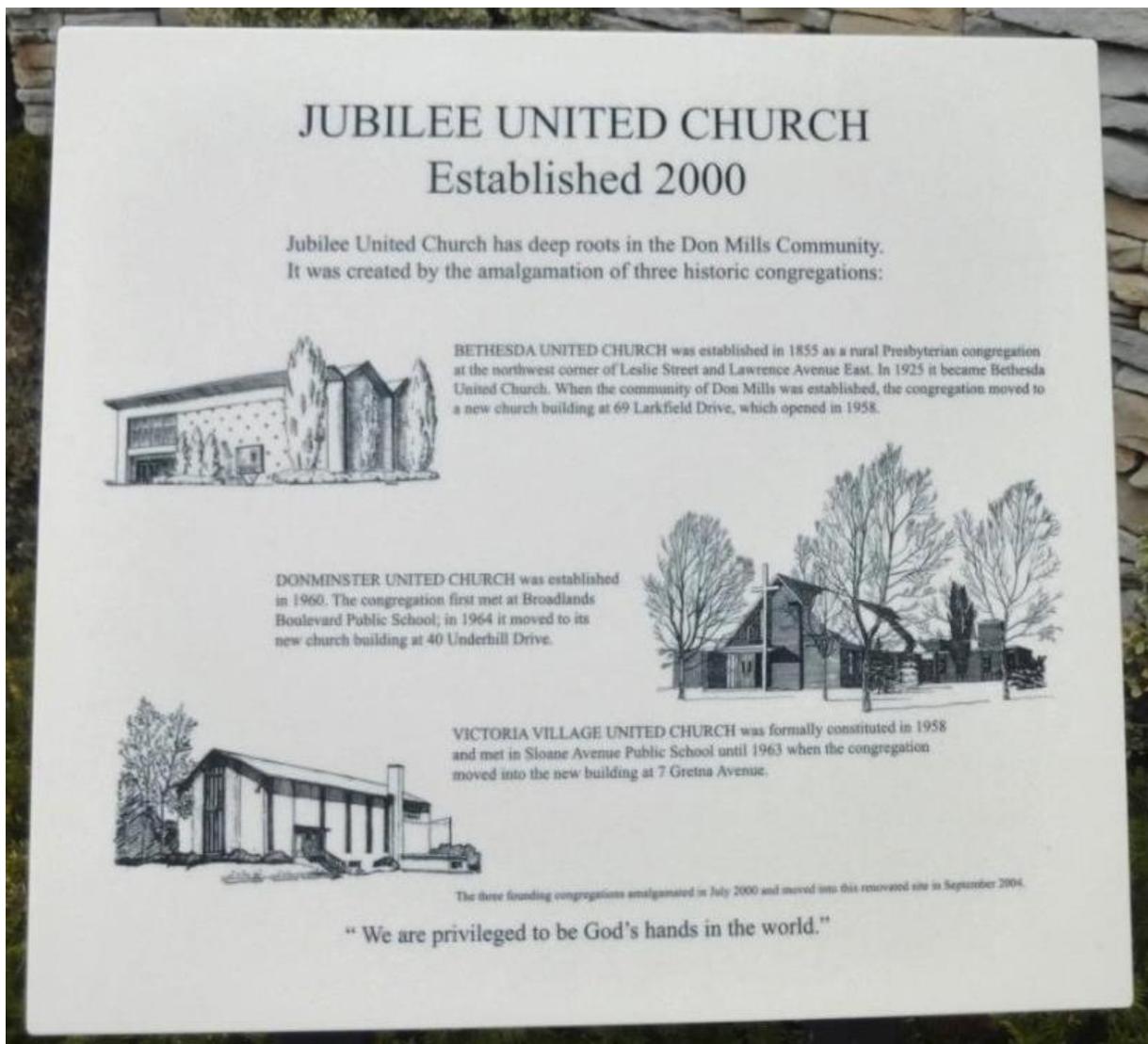
I rejoice in recalling the dedicated leadership of ministers and lay leaders who kept a warm and meaningful church congregation functioning. I especially am deeply grateful: my wife, Lois, suffered a long and debilitating illness during which our family was supported both spiritually by regular visits and physically by the delivery of a host of casseroles. The gift of such supportive care and friendship surpasses all understanding. There was also great personal sadness: Lois died in 1993. Before her death, we had experienced great joy in the marriage of our younger daughter in Forest Grove and later the addition of two grandchildren to the three with which our son and his wife had already blessed us.

Ultimately, the time came to close Forest Grove, to find a new accepting home with Jubilee United Church, and to enjoy the nurturing ministry of Rev. Norm Seli, who had earlier planted the seeds of his life purpose with us.

Ken Lund

# JUBILEE UNITED CHURCH

We are the result of all that has come before us: the people, activities, events, and celebrations which took place in the amalgamating churches have shaped us into who we are as Jubilee. On June 30, 2000, Donminster joined with Victoria Village and Bethesda United Churches in the formation of Jubilee United Church. The Auditorium, Friendship Room, main kitchen, and small kitchen of Donminster were incorporated into the design required to house the expanded congregation. St. John's United Church joined the fold on July 1, 2017, and Forest Grove UC completed our amalgamation process on April 1, 2024, with the first worship service all together on April 21, 2024.



Erected 2010 near main entrance to Sanctuary



Donminster under Renovation / Jubilee under Construction



November 2003



Re-Opening Day Stone



Jubilee Labyrinth

# MEMORIES OF JUBILEE UNITED CHURCH

## *Clergy*

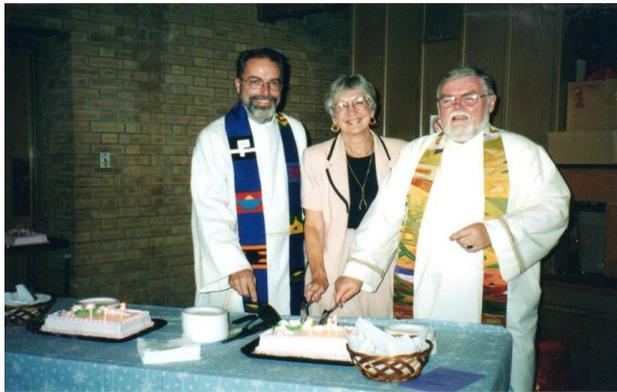
Jubilee's staff began with the joint efforts of ministers from each of the founding churches.

Rev. Catherine Britton (2000 – 2001).

Rev. Doug Varey (2000-2001).

Rev. Kathleen Mowatt (2000-2003).

Rev. John Smith (Interim Minister 2003-2005).



Anniversary Sunday, 2003, Rev. John Smith, Ruth Nicholls, Rev. Grant Kerr (guest)

Rev. Norman Seli (2005 - ). Norm has served as the backbone of Jubilee for the past 20(!) years and shows no sign of ever wanting to leave. He brought enthusiasm, a great sense of humour, and his love of music. His openness to new ideas and willingness to try anything has significantly shaped Jubilee.



March 5, 2005

Rev. Lee-ann Ahlstrom (Northlea United Church). On staff at Jubilee from 2005-2014 as a Staff Associate and later Lay Worship Minister, Lee-ann pursued ordination with Jubilee as her sponsoring support community. She is now retired.



Rev. Norman Seli and LWL Lee-ann Ahlstrom, 2007

Jubilee has long been a teaching / supervising site under Norm's tutelage for those called to ministry:

Rev. Henry Poutianinen (Thornhill United Church). A member of the Jubilee Congregation since its inception and at one time Chair of Jubilee Council, Henry discerned his call into ministry with the help and support of Jubilee. Rev. Norm Seli was honoured to lay hands on him at his ordination in 2012. Henry died in 2025.

Rev. Lorrie Daly-Price (Donway Covenant United Church). Lorrie was a supervised Emmanuel Student at Jubilee in 2012. Rev. Norm Seli was honoured to lay hands on her at her ordination in 2014.

Rev. Etienne LeSage. Etienne had an 8-month internship with Jubilee in 2014 - 2015. Rev. Norm Seli was honoured to lay hands on him at his ordination in 2015.

Jeanine Profeta. Jeanine served as Youth and Children's Minister from 2014-2017.

Rev. Jess Swance (Delta United Church). Jess was sponsored for ordination with Jubilee as her supporting community in 2017.

Rev. Greg Daly (Beach United Church). A member of the Jubilee Congregation since 2012, Greg discerned his call at Jubilee and Jubilee was his sponsoring community. Greg was ordained in 2018.

Rev. Jason Meyers (Metropolitan United Church). Jason had an 8-month internship at Jubilee in 2018 - 2019. Rev. Norm Seli was honoured to lay hands on him at his ordination in 2019.

Rev. Bri-anne Swan (East End United Regional Ministry). Bri-anne finished her ministry supervision at Jubilee in 2019, took on some short contracts with Jubilee and ultimately accepted a call into ministry with Jubilee from 2021 - 2023.

Rev. Anne Dionisio (Jubilee United Church). Originally, Anne came as an intern in 2015 – 2016. She welcomed a call to become part of the leadership team at Jubilee from 2016 - 2020 and returned to us in 2024, accepting a new call with Jubilee in 2025.

Rev. Jim Harbell (St. Luke's United Church). Jim was a supervised Emmanuel Student at Jubilee in 2021 - 2022.

### ***On-Line Ministries***

Beginning in 2013 with a short video entitled “What You Missed in Church”, on-line ministries expanded Jubilee’s reach to the wider community.

In 2019, a grant was received to begin Resistance Church, a venture designed to reach the ‘unchurched’ and headed by Bri-anne Swan. It began as in-person services, but after a major snowstorm, Resistance Church moved online. It is now part of the ministry at East End Ministries.

On March 15, 2020, at the beginning of the COVID lockdown, Jubilee’s digital Sunday services began, and that same week, on-line daily Bible meditation was started. Both of these opportunities continue.

## An Affirming Congregation



Jubilee became the first affirming congregation in North York on June 23, 2013.



2019



2024

**Orange Shirt Day**

Land Acknowledgements were added to the Sunday services in the spring of 2018. In recognition of the United Church’s role in the Residential School System and of Jubilee’s commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, Jubilee began observing Orange Shirt Day in September of that same year.



2021



2024

***We Are Part of The United Church of Canada***



Celebrating 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the United Church of Canada, 2025

***Easter Celebrations***

Maundy Thursday Dinner is an interactive meal in remembrance of the Last Supper, with participants telling the story. This annual tradition was begun in 2005.



2017



2019



2025



Easter Cross 2011



Jubilee Folks

***United Church Women***

The UCW has connected women in spirit, friendship, and purpose, and has been a mainstay in the United Church of Canada since its inception in 1925. It has been part of Jubilee since its beginning as well.



2015



Sarah's Circle UCW Retreat 2019



Women's Weekend 2006

### ***Jubilee 5K Walk / Run***

This fundraiser was initiated in 2020 by Gary Norris to replace Jubilee's participation in the Scotiabank Waterfront Walk / Run. The event is always held on the first Saturday of October. Participants get sponsorships. For their efforts, they receive event t-shirts, race

bibs, and upon completion, certificates of achievement and a “Goodie Bag”. Since the start. participation has been strong with generally 25+ single entries and teams of family, friends or other congregants totaling 30+ participants along with 15+ volunteers. Starting in 2023, a celebratory BBQ was added to the event for volunteers, participants, congregants and community members to enjoy an afternoon of fellowship.

The event has consistently raised over \$6,000.00 annually. Funds have been used to support the running of the day-to-day church operations, help fund the construction of the Sanctuary ramp, sponsor refugee families and several other church activities. As we celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jubilee, we will also celebrate the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Jubilee 5K.



***CHILDREN AND YOUTH***

***Confirmation Classes***



2004 with Rev. John Smith



2014 with Rev. Norm Seli and LWL Leeann Ahlstrom

***Vacation Bible School***



**2011**



**2014**

**Christmas Pageants**



2012



2013



2022



Youth Trip to Nova Scotia 2016

## ***MUSIC***

### ***The Jubilants***

The youth-oriented choir was begun in 2009 with three youth and a few back-up musicians singing contemporary music at Sunday services. It disbanded in 2016 as youth participants graduated, and several moved away from the area.



2011

### ***The Choir***

Music at Jubilee has always been an important feature of Sunday services. With dedicated choir directors and strong section leadership, musical performances have included selections from religious standards to classical selections to contemporary secular pieces. Concerts have showcased the talents of all members.



Jubilee at the Proms, 2017



2017



2019



2024

***Annual Carolling on the Labyrinth***



2013



2019

### ***Muffin Church***

In a café atmosphere, Muffin Church uses pop songs to enhance Sunday Worship service as members of the congregation sit at tables and discuss topics posed by the minister while enjoying beverages and muffins. Starting in 2017, Muffin Church continues to the present day.



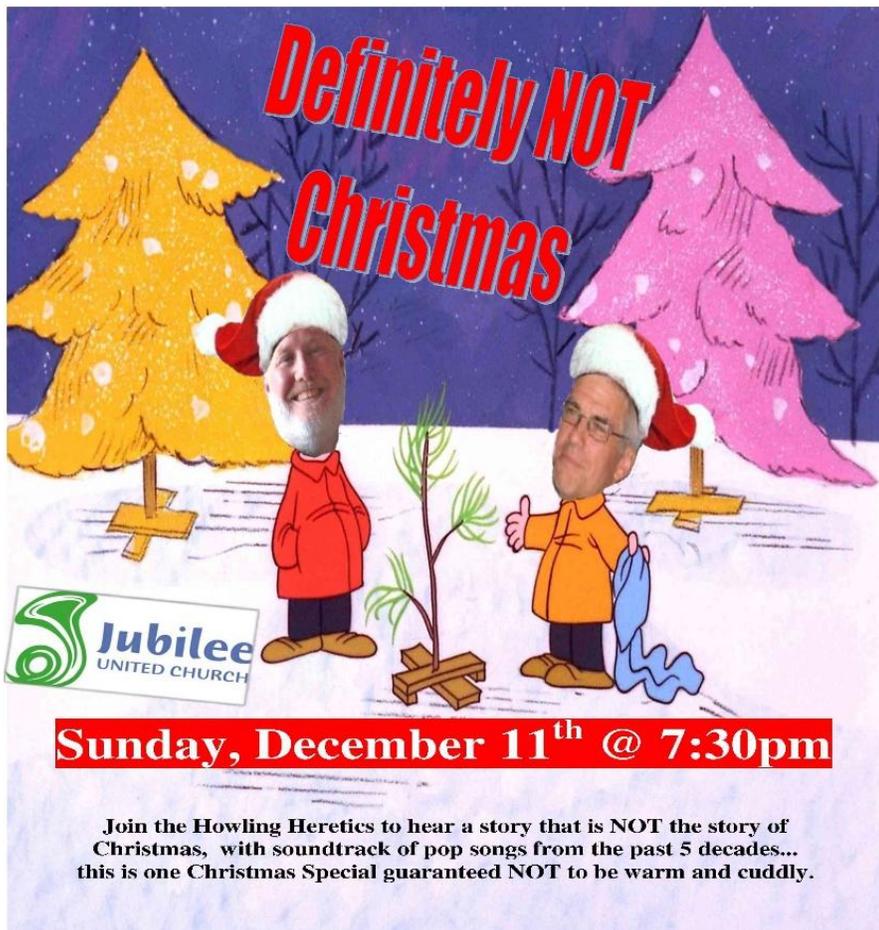
With “Elvis” (aka Bill Seli), 2017



2020 Pajama Church

### ***The Order of Good Cheer***

The Order of Good Cheer was a series of concerts held in the spring and fall which raised money for capital expenses, such as buying the grand piano and improving the lighting in the chancel. Many talented performers graced the floor and provided a wide range of musical genres. Concerts were always well attended and enjoyed by all.



### ***Definitely NOT Church***

Beginning in 2005, Rev. Norm Seli and Drew Winters have put together more than forty shows featuring music from the 1960s to present day to tell Bible stories in a tongue-in-cheek, entertaining way. Audience members frequently sing along.

2011

### ***The Grove Music School and the Grove Band***

When Forest Grove United amalgamated with Jubilee United Church in 2024, both the Grove Music School and The Grove Band carried forward as expressions of Jubilee's ministry. Today, they are active parts of Jubilee's story, shaping its identity through music education, performance, and outreach. The music school has never been stronger, continuing to welcome students of all ages, fostering growth, creativity, and community. The Grove Band supports in-person worship while also extending Jubilee's presence beyond its walls through digital content that reaches people near and far. Its content has since garnered hundreds of thousands of views and remains a valued resource for worship, guidance, and support. To this day, communities of faith and individuals continue to turn to The Grove Band's content. Together, the Music School and the Grove Band not only sustain Forest Grove's legacy but also continue to nurture community and share music in ways that impact lives within Jubilee and beyond.

## **OUTREACH**

### ***The Labyrinth Ministry***



Karen Steward

For several women in this congregation, our first experience of walking a labyrinth was in June, 1999 at a United Church Women's Conference. Karen Steward said of the walk, "When I walked the labyrinth the first time, I was unsure of what to expect. As I walked, my pace slowed. Upon reaching the centre, I felt as if I was resting in God and I was hooked."

In the fall of 2001, a group of us felt called to set up a labyrinth ministry right here at Jubilee. A proposal was presented to and accepted by the Jubilee Council. Our canvas labyrinth was received in time to be dedicated at a special Ash Wednesday service in 2002.

The vision of the Jubilee Labyrinth Ministry Team (Lee-ann Ahlstrom-Crew, Nancy Coyle, Elizabeth Cuthbertson, Barbara Ewins, Beth Macey, Barb Measures, Jennifer Ratcliffe, Barb Secord, Karen Steward, Janice Vitale, Bettyann Ward, and Valerie Winters (Chair)) was to provide spiritual support for existing services and programs within Jubilee and to reach out to our surrounding community with new programs. Over the years, we incorporated the labyrinth into several services, held open walks, offered workshops for adults and youth, and have had group presentations. We currently have open labyrinth walks on Open Doors Wednesdays in the foyer.

It was Karen Steward's dream that Jubilee would one day have a permanent outdoor labyrinth that would be accessible to our church and the wider community. This dream was shared by many others and plans were made. Sadly, after a lengthy battle with cancer, Karen Steward died in the summer of 2005. Her ministry with Jubilee United Church and her dream, however, did not end. With the financial support of friends from across the country and the continued efforts of friends at Jubilee United Church, the outdoor labyrinth beside the Garden Room became a reality.

June 5<sup>th</sup> was groundbreaking day. Esko Remmel's company, Valleyview Landscapes, was contracted to build the labyrinth. We planned to have a summer solstice walk on June 21 on the new labyrinth, as this was the one-year anniversary of Karen's last labyrinth walk before she died. Thank you, Esko, for helping us to realize this vision.

Lee-ann and Barb Measures organized the June 21 summer solstice walk with an indigenous theme that incorporated the earth, wind, fire and water elements that surround the labyrinth. Many participants, including Karen's family and friends, attended.

It is only fitting that we dedicated our outdoor Labyrinth in her name and that is exactly what we did on September 30, 2006.

At first glance, the labyrinth looks like a maze but unlike a maze the labyrinth has no dead ends. The labyrinth has a single, unicursal path to the centre. Its turns remind us of our own winding journey through life. Walking the path offers a unique space to slow down, still the mind and explore the inner self.

We live in an era where advances in technology have left us with less time, not more. Heeding the words of the psalmist to "Be still and know that I am God" often seems impossible. Taking the time to walk the sacred path of a labyrinth offers us an opportunity to be still and to ask the tough questions of life and to reflect on issues with which we are wrestling. It is a form of walking meditation, a body prayer that can help us discern our soul assignment in life or help us in gaining self-knowledge. Walking a labyrinth can be healing. There is no right or wrong way to walk a labyrinth.

May our two labyrinths continue to support and inspire our congregation and our community as we journey into the future.

### ***Community Table***

The Community Table was started in spring of 2014 to provide a monthly fellowship opportunity for the congregation, as well as helping to alleviate some of the lonely mealtimes for our single (and often older) congregants. One of the founding principles of the Community Table was that there was to be NO charge or need for a ticket to participate; also, there would be NO donations jars at the dinner - anyone in need of a meal is welcomed, whether or not they could or would contribute financially.

Community Table soon began to attract other members of the surrounding area who found themselves in need of a good home-cooked meal to help offset their food insecurity situation. On one Thanksgiving night, late in the dinner time, a multi-generational family of six in need walked in. Fortunately, we still had food and were able to provide all with a meal. As is our tradition, we were able to also provide them with a take-home box of food for an additional night's dinner. This truly made it abundantly clear that the principle behind the establishment of the Community Table was indeed a service that Jubilee should be providing to the community and the congregation.

Attendance has grown from 50-60 people at a regular dinner to Thanksgiving nights of 170 people. Many congregants have invited their family members to join them in having a celebration dinner together that they may not otherwise have. The first few years the attendance was 95% congregants, 5% community members. Today that mix has evolved to closer to 75% congregants and 25% community members. There is no doubt that this endeavour has also become vital outreach to needy members of the. In 2025, Jubilee celebrates 11 years since establishment and has been active for all but the two years COVID forced us to shut down.

In the early years, a small, dedicated team did all the dinners. Following the restart after COVID, we now provide Community Table every month with 12 teams preparing and serving the dinners. It has truly become a Jubilee "family" operation, one that is greatly appreciated by the community and Jubilee's congregants.

### ***Helping the Less Fortunate***

Beginning in 2009 as a youth project, this outreach has taken many forms over the years, including backpacks, bags, purses, and buttons / pins.



2013

## **Habitat for Humanity**



2011

## **Christmas Gift Bags**

Each year, packages of cheer are prepared and presented to those who are unable to attend Jubilee services in person.



2018



This was the first joint Outreach-Pastoral Care venture during COVID times (2020). Gift boxes with a message, a Jubilee magnet, cookies, and foil-wrapped candy eggs were assembled. Floral decorations were added to the container lids. These were delivered to those who were unable to attend Jubilee in person.

### ***Refugee Sponsorship***



Jubilee's first refugee sponsorship was in 2019. The newcomers were helped to find accommodations, employment and English language classes. Jubilee has since sponsored two more families.

### ***Jubilee Cares***

Jubilee Cares is a ministry with a passion for bringing people together. Whether it is about deepening already present relationships or helping to create new ones, Jubilee Cares believes in the importance of connection. Jubilee is blessed to have a variety of ages and interests, and so we work to ensure opportunities for everyone, both within our congregation and our community. Since its inception in 2022, we have enjoyed a variety of events and outings, including holiday parties, movie afternoons, campfires on the labyrinth,

a trip to the Scarborough Village Theatre, and an archery lesson! As we look joyfully toward the next 25 years, we are excited to discover what opportunities for connection God will give us.

## **ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS**

### ***Bridge***

Bridge games have long been a part of the Jubilee calendar. Beginning in 2006, lessons were given, with about 12 tables (48 participants) on a regular basis, and many appreciated the in-person, hands-on approach to learning. Each year, beginning in 2013, bridge players from the wider community met at Jubilee to play and learn from a couple of the best international bridge instructors. The events were always well-attended and took over the whole building! Post-COVID, bridge playing has continued on-line, though with fewer participants.

### ***Travel Time***



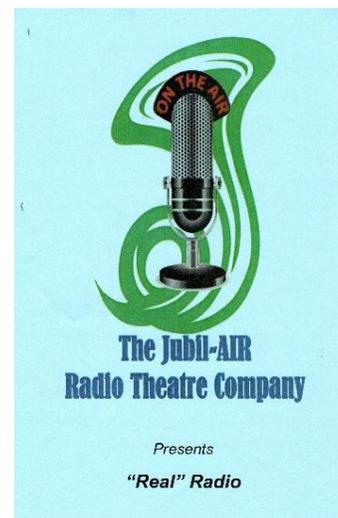
Charlie's Angels Travel Group  
October 2011 to Nice and Tuscany region

## Picnic at Broadlands Park 2012



### Radio Plays

One winter's day in 2013, Pat Lansche and Rev. Norm Seli were lamenting their 'misspent' youth. Norm revealed that he had a life-long love for programs of the Golden Age of Radio. Both agreed that perhaps they could bring these plays forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the Jubil-AIR Radio Theatre Company was born. Beginning with "A Christmas Carol", they discovered the hidden talents of many members of the congregation. They have performed 15 plays thus far and look forward to doing many more.



### ***The Jubilee Market***

The Jubilee Market was begun in 2022 to give an opportunity to home-based businesses to showcase their wares post-COVID. Twelve markets took place that year. Since then, the market has decreased its frequency but increased its size to house more than 30 vendors for a large pre-Christmas event. It's an excellent day for meeting people from the neighbourhood and finding out who in Jubilee has products to offer!



### ***Social Events***

There have always been ample opportunities to gather socially at Jubilee, whether it was for refreshments during a concert intermission, dinners, coffee time after church, soup lunches, or a holiday dinner. Yes, food does often seem to be involved!



2005



Medieval Dinner 2014



Murder Mystery Dinner 2016



Christmas Dinner 2017



Christmas Dinner 2019

## **WHAT JUBILEE MEANS TO US – PERSONAL STORIES**

When I worked at Patient Enquiry in the front lobby of Sunnybrook hospital, the ministers came to our booth to have their parking validated. I remembered seeing Rev. Norman Seli. When I first came to Jubilee United Church in March 2017, I recognized him. At the end of the service when we shook hands, I identified myself to Rev. Norm. He said, "That's where I have seen you, at Sunnybrook'. Small world.

I'm so glad that I transferred my membership to Jubilee United Church.

Sincerely,  
Sandra Park

Since I was now on my own and my daughter was at university in Montreal, one of my neighbours, Christine, had advised me that there was going to be Line Dancing instruction at Jubilee which she had just joined. So I went. I met a lot of people that day and enjoyed the activity. Many of the people said, "Why don't you attend the service tomorrow on Sunday?"

I did attend the service and was thoroughly impressed with Rev. Norm Seli's service and the music. As a "newer" member joining in February, 2024, I attend church regularly on Sundays, and Ulterior Service twice monthly, as well as some of the services held at Donway and review the virtual services regularly.

I also was warm-hearted by the many activities that Jubilee undertakes and involvement of the community, young people and children. It is truly inspiring! I have learned and grown my faith in God, met a lot of like-minded people and, most importantly, gained fellowship.

Since joining Jubilee, I have become involved in the Grove Music School and have taken an active role as Chair of the Grove Music School Board committee. As I started out as a violinist, and then had a successful career mostly in banking and financial services, marketing and large event management, it is nice to add my experience and drive to the Music School endeavours.

I look forward to many more activities, comradeship, faith learning and practice, and the wonderful music at Jubilee United Church!

Doreen Gribbon

I joined the Jubilee community in the summer of 2009, as the Office Administrator. I really knew nothing about Jubilee at the time but immediately felt the welcoming and supportive atmosphere. Jubilee soon was my second home, and I became involved in many aspects of church life, including Sunday services, the choir, the Radio Plays, the markets, Outreach, and even Council. I am so pleased to be able to continue worshipping here and appreciate all the love and support I have felt for all these years.

Pat Lansche

## APPENDIX A

### ***PRE-1925 HISTORY OF BETHESDA UNITED CHURCH***

This church originated as a Presbyterian congregation on Yonge Street at York Mills Road, during the early 1800s and was supplied with preaching as a Presbyterian Mission Station. A church building was erected in 1835 on the east side of Yonge Street, which was dismantled and rebuilt on the west side of Yonge in 1859 when a parishioner donated land. The name was changed to York Mills Presbyterian to reflect the neighbourhood.

Because most of the members lived in Don Mills and they wanted a church in their own area, the York Mills Presbyterian congregation rented a property known locally as Barron's Church and was owned by the Bethesda Primitive Methodist Church, at the northwest corner of Lawrence Avenue East and Leslie Street in 1885. Before long, the Presbyterians adopted the Bethesda name, although there is no formal name change recorded. The Presbyterian congregation rented the "Bethesda Church" continuously until they bought the property in 1888.



In 1904, Bethesda Presbyterian replaced the original wooden structure with a new red brick building at the same location. The cornerstone of the church still survives at Jubilee United Church.



This water colour reproduction of Bethesda Presbyterian Church was commissioned by the Bethesda UCW (United Church Women) in 1984 and was painted by Phyllis E. Pemberton, a local Don Mills artist. It is based on a photo taken in 1929 in celebration of Bethesda's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a congregation.

## APPENDIX B

### **SOURCES:**

Bethesda United Church April 26, 1958, dedication program

*"Donation Start of Church Story"*, The Toronto Star, June 30, 1987

*"Pioneering in North York"*; a history of the borough by Patricia W. Hart, published by General Publishing Company Limited for the North York Historical Society in cooperation with the Borough of North York, 1968.

History of Toronto and County of York, Ontario, 1883

The Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives, 50 Wynford Drive, Toronto, Ontario

The United Church of Canada Archives, 40 Oak Street, Toronto, Ontario:

Minutes of Meeting of Eglinton and Bethesda Sessions January 23, 1894

Minutes of Session 18<sup>th</sup> August 18, 1885

Minutes of Presbytery Sept. 1, 1885

Minutes of Presbytery Oct. 6, 1885

Scarborough Methodist Circuit (includes Don Mills, Malvern, Wexford, Bethesda, Parsonage, and Providence Churches) 1884–1888 Minutes July 28, 1884

Board and Committee Records 1884-1888, Accession 88.034L, Box file 1-8

Legal/Property Records 1888, Accession 88.034L, Box file 1-9