



**Cedar Park
United Church**
of the United Church of Canada

More than a century of faith, family and community service

The History of Cedar Park United Church

By Jeannie Walbridge Blevins

In 1893, founder of Cedar Park, Otto Lilly, bought the Perrier farm in Pointe Claire. The land stretched from the St. Lawrence River north to the Grand Trunk Railway tracks. The Lillys lived in the 200-year-old homestead at the corner of Lakeshore Road and the present Cedar Avenue. Otto, originally from Sweden, and his Canadian wife Mary, had a vision: to build a permanent community with a school and a church. He named it Cedar Park because of the abundance of cedar trees, and built Cedar Avenue, a macadamized road that he lined with apple trees, a wooden sidewalk, and residential lots for family homes. He convinced the railway to build a station at the north end of the avenue.



PHOTO: Otto Lilly and wife Mary and baby Victor (c. 1870's)

Next came the school. In order to establish a Protestant school board, Cedar Park needed to “secede” from the Roman Catholic parish of Pointe Claire. Lilly undertook this procedure and also funded the building of Cedar Park School, a white wooden one/two room structure, which opened in 1895.

Worship services and Sunday School for the children were held in the Lilly’s home during winter, and in the school house during summer. By April 1899, Pointe Claire Presbyterian Mission was an official entity – our church was born. With a school and a church available, summer residents became permanent, and the community began to grow. Otto Lilly died in 1913, but the seeds he had planted flourished into the vibrant community of Cedar Park.

Between 1913 and 1920, four church elders governed the congregation, which was chaired by Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Lachine, the Rev. A. G. McKinnon. By 1920, the Ladies Aid Society of Pointe Claire started raising funds towards the cost of a church building and a full-time minister. The first fundraiser took place on the Cedar Avenue “circle” across the street from the old school house, and 4 red brick classrooms.



PHOTO: Painting of Lilly Memorial Church by Edith Scott

The congregation’s first minister was Rev. William Shearer, Doctor of Divinity. By 1922, enough money had been raised to build a dark brown brick church in the Cedar Avenue circle. It was named Lilly Memorial Presbyterian Church, and opened its doors in 1923. The following year, Rev. Shearer retired and Rev. N.D. Keith took his place.

Although the congregation’s name was Presbyterian, there were many Christian Protestant denominations represented by its members. In 1925 when the United Church of Canada was formed, the congregation easily became Lilly Memorial United Church.

However, it was a disappointing year for Rev. Keith. After a series of controversial sermons, the congregation voted to exchange Keith for Rev. D. A. McCuaig. Under McCuaig’s leadership, the first Committee of Stewards was created, the Young People’s

Society was formed, and the Ladies Aid Society (renamed Women's Association in 1933) continued to be very active.

The next minister was Rev. Albert Hinton in 1933, about whom there are many stories related by his daughter, Muriel Cliff. (See Centennial Stories of CPUC)

In 1939, Rev. Victor Rose, a member of the first class of ministers ordained by the United Church of Canada, became Lilly Memorial Church's first minister called by the congregation (vs. Presbytery appointed.). He was our leader for 25 years. He saw us through the years of World War II.

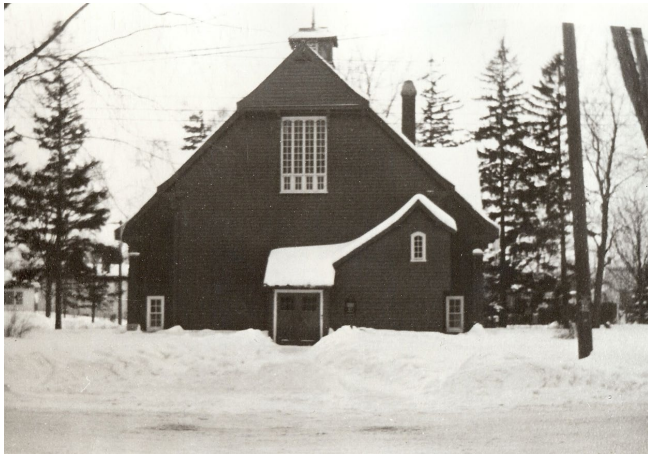


PHOTO: Lilly Memorial United Church Winter 1954

With the post-war baby boom, the congregation grew until it no longer fit in the little brown church on Cedar Avenue. By 1953, the Women's Association had 145 members, there were 400 Sunday school students, and 637 families totaled 1610 members. Larger church buildings were a must. On September 18, 1954, the corner stone was laid on Lakeview Avenue, and the congregation became Cedar Park United Church.



PHOTO: Cedar Park United Church Cornerstone Laying 18 Sep 1954

The doors of Cedar Park United Church were opened on 17 June 1955 with a ceremonious knock at the Sanctuary door by Rev. Victor Rose.



(PHOTO: Rev. Victor Rose knocking on CPUC Sanctuary Door) 17 June 1955

The next year, the original white school house, which had been used as a Scout Shack, had to be demolished. But in the new church buildings around the corner on Lakeview, there were new groups, new activities and new members reflecting the dynamism that was the start of CPUC. There were two worship services every Sunday morning, with a marvelous Musical Director, Margaret Douglas. Eventually, the work took its toll on Rev. Rose, who became ill. Rev. Lindsay King was brought in from 1958 – 61 as an assistant. It was in December 1959 that artist Hazel Henry painted the creche figures that graced the church lawn every Christmas for decades.



PHOTO: Creche by Hazel Henry created 1959 and still in use in 1998

In 1962, Christian Education Director, Kay McIntosh, took over Sunday School and Youth groups. This was also the year the church received carillon bells in the tower, a donation in memory of long-time elder George Henderson by his family.

Times were changing. In 1965 the names of two lady elders finally appeared in the Session Minutes. Rev. Jacques Beaudon of Eglise St. Jean spoke on "Some aspects of separatism in Quebec".



PHOTO: Rev. Lorne Brown and wife Eleanor

Rev. Rose retired in 1964, replaced by Rev. Lorne Brown from Toronto. It was the '60s: bell bottoms, tie dye, Expo '67, drop-outs and love-ins, Coffee Houses and everything was groovy. At church there were 928 active members and 120 adherents. Music Director Boyd Pellow introduced folk mass music. Sister Rita Patenaude, the singing nun of Montreal, presented the "Ballad of the Word" with her guitar. Alcoholics Anonymous and Spira (drug rehab) were invited to hold their meetings in the church hall. Meals-on-wheels was launched with the help of the minister's wife, Eleanor Brown.

Two of the United Church Women's groups dwindled to almost no one. However, an enthusiastic Outreach Committee organized numerous activities helping both the congregation and the community. In 1973 Rev. Brown was ill for 6 months. Lay leadership helped out with preaching, Pastoral care, etc., until he recovered.

In 1974, Sunday Worship was reduced to a single service due to changing demographics in Pointe Claire and Quebec. The extraordinary suburb population growth and house building of Pointe Claire in the 1950's and 1960's was over.

In 1975 Rev. Brown accepted a call to Milton, Ontario. On their departure, Eleanor Brown said, "I have fond memories of a caring, creative congregation and staff whose gracious and generous ways supported...us with their friendship, love and prayers."



(PHOTO: Rev. Jack Nield and wife Sharon)

Cedar Park United Church's seventh minister was Rev. Jack Nield, preacher par excellence. He brought with him lots of new ideas about Sunday School programs, Stewardship pledge campaigns, Easter sunrise services. Easter 1978 saw the installation of a new stained-glass window in the sanctuary donated in memory of Barbara Anne Browne. In October the congregation was stunned by the news of Rev. Lorne Brown's death in a car accident. A bursary fund in Lorne's name was set up at the Montreal Theological College.



PHOTO: CPUC's large Stained Glass Window at the front of the Chancel

On a happier note, this was when Marian Siminski became Cedar Park United Church's musical director. Innovative worship services made 1982 – 84 interesting years with guest speakers followed by discussions in the main hall. The theme: "Beyond Ourselves". Easter service featured a liturgical dance, and in November there was a pulpit drama (with Jack Nield and actor Phil Spensley) on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's death. The Country Fair was revitalized. The Sunday

School began sponsoring a foster child and a refugee family from El Salvador, while the Outreach committee sent money to the Ethiopia famine relief.

Another significant event was the granting of sanctuary to “Julio” in November 1984, a Chilean refugee under threat of deportation. Church families cooked for Julio who stayed within the church. Thanks to the efforts of the congregation, and particularly Chair of the Congregational Board, Bruce Munro, after 3 months Julio was granted refugee status.

Family Life Center, short-term counselling referrals, was born in 1987. The C.A.R.E. apartment project was launched in 1988, food was collected for St. Columba House’s food bank in Montreal, and more refugee families were sponsored. The church office obtained its first computer. Then in September 1989 came the sad news that Rev. Dr. Victor Rose, our Minister Emeritus, had died. The following March, Rev. Jack Nield announced his call to a church in Ottawa.

In September 1990, Supply Minister Rev. Paul Evans arrived. By April he was our permanent minister. His tenure was marked by a youthful vigor and enthusiasm: more theatre and shows, Sunday School musicals, dinners (with wine!), new repairs, the launching of Dix Mille Villages (international fair trade craft store), a new Mission Statement, and a grand party to celebrate the Centennial of Cedar Park United congregation in 1999. For the Centennial Year, Jeannie Walbridge Blevins wrote a 97 page book “Centennial Stories of Cedar Park United Church”. This was based on stories from interviews of longtime members and historical facts from the paper archives and official documents.

But this is one of the toughest jobs around, and Paul succumbed to the punishing demands and took a leave of absence. Later, he announced that he would not be returning.



PHOTO: Rev. Paul Evans (right) and centennial cake 09 May 1999)

On December 1, 2000, Supply Minister Rev. Brenda Bell arrived. She took good care of the congregation while Paul was on sick leave for six months, then for a year while we

went through the process of finding a new minister. During that time, CPUC established its first web site. In June 2001, a Joint Needs Assessment Committee was struck to determine what kind of minister was desired. Their report was accepted by the congregation in November 2001, and a Joint Search Committee was formed to find a new minister who fit the report's description.

That minister was Rev. Sharon Moon, who was called to Cedar Park in April 2002. Her first worship service with us was on September 1st. Her eight years with us were truly full of marvels.



PHOTO: Rev. Sharon Moon serving Communion in 2010

A Wednesday Morning Connections fellowship group began under the leadership of Margie Ann MacDonald in 2003. That year also marked the beginning of a chapter of Free the Children, Youth in Action group, under the leadership of young Lisa LeRoy. They went on to raise thousands of dollars over the years for Outreach projects in Africa, and third world countries on other continents. 2004 initiated the Healing Pathways treatments, involving non-invasive therapeutic touch. This service was a kindred spirit to Sharon's guided meditations CD and book "Healing Oasis", and later "Returning to Healing Oasis".

In 2005 – newcomer Norman Jones started a Men's Group; Friday evening Coffee Houses were renewed from the 1960s; and the 80th anniversary of the United Church of Canada was celebrated on the theme "Dare to be United".

Meanwhile, Elizabeth Chown had been admirably filling the role of Office Administrator since December 2002. Her title was later changed to the more appropriate "Church Administrator".



PHOTO Elizabeth Chown Lafreniere cutting her CPUC 15th Anniversary Cake

2007's Grandmothers for Grandmothers group helped African grandmothers bring up their grandchildren since their children had died of AIDS. Covenant for Harmony was created to help us communicate with each other more effectively.



PHOTO Douglas Knight

In June 2007 Douglas Knight became CPUC's new Music Ministry Director. He was well known in the Montreal area for his many years of work with orchestras, choral groups, church organist, and teaching. In 2008, he started the popular community choir "Voices for Hope" based at Cedar Park to raise funds for charitable causes.



2008 featured a Covenant with Creation (Green Church policy), and CPUC became an Affirming Ministry (supporting gays). This was followed by a new Identity & Values Statement in 2009.

By the end of 2009, Cedar Park Church had a much-needed new green 50-year roof on the sanctuary. The roof of the Christian Education building was completed the following spring.



PHOTO New Metal Roof on the CPUC Sanctuary and Fellowship Hall.

Rev. Sharon Moon retired in June 2010. While we worked to find a new permanent minister, Supply Minister Rev. Ron Coughlin, storyteller par excellence, spiced up our year with courses like Christianity 101, and Lyrics of The Messiah. Rev. Ron also helped the congregation's baby boomers with Pastoral Care and memorial services for their beloved parents. A beautiful new organ was donated by Christmas 2010. We bid Rev. Ron a fond farewell in June 2011.



PHOTO Rev Ron at Story Time with the Children

In August 2011, we welcomed our new permanent minister, Rev. Elisabeth Jones. She was already a familiar part of our congregation, as she directed studies at the United Theological College in Montreal. We were delighted to have her with us in her new role.



PHOTO Rev Elisabeth Jones, known to all as “RevE”

February 2012 brought a milestone – the approval of a first time CPUC logo representing the spirit of Cedar Park United.



Another first – early in 2012, an audio-visual retractable screen began to be used as part of worship in the sanctuary. It was an enhancing new era of technology in the life of CPU congregation. An exciting and complimentary article about CPU was in the July/August issue of the United Church Observer magazine entitled “An Irrepressible Spirit”.

At the February 2013 CPU Annual Congregational Meeting, the congregation was presented with a Five-year Vision of our Journey Forward. It guided the projects, activities, worship and mission of CPU as we lived God’s dream for us.

Since two of the church roofs were renewed, the priority for physical resources in 2013 was “Lighting and Loos”. Within a year, Fellowship Hall lighting was upgraded with energy-efficient LED lights, in keeping with our Green Policy. With help from a grant, a

new washroom was added, and the two existing ones were enlarged to accommodate people with walkers or wheelchairs.

April brought the Café du Livre. Besides the sale of books, there was a supper, a tea room, home baking, and children's activities. There was a Literacy Unlimited benefit connection. This event turned out to be the final CPU book sale of four-and-a-half decades. From 1970 to 1999, Shirley Walbridge and the St. John's Road UCW group had coordinated 60 book sales. 2000 – 2013 produced 25 more book sales coordinated by Shirley's daughter, Jeannie Blevins = 85 book sales in all. It was the end of an era.

F4 monthly Friday suppers and films continued to be popular. These evenings of food, fun, film and family which began in autumn 2010 provided fellowship and also an entrance for new families into CPU. Thursday morning "Tot Time" play group, started in September 2011 and later renamed "Mini-Connections", proved to be another introduction of new families to CPU.



PHOTO: Monthly Family dinners "F4" – Family, Food, Film, Fun.

In accordance with our 5-year vision plan, June 2014 brought a new part-time staff member: Family & Youth Ministries Coordinator, Christie Smith Favit. The following year Christie's family was transferred to Ontario, so in September 2015, Martha Randy became FYM Coordinator.

The Coffee House monthly Friday evening of music celebrated its 10th season in October 2014.

Another 5-year vision plan was to involve more lay participants. In May 2015, a Sunday service featured a Worship Band. Amateur congregational instrumentalists played flute, oboe, trumpet, guitar, tuba, glockenspiel, piano, drums and other percussion instruments during some hymns. "A joyful noise..." was made, and repeated in October.



PHOTO: The “Worship Band” in performance during a Sunday service.

In addition, the December 2015 “NO FUSS Participatory Pageant”, written by Rev. Elisabeth Jones, included people from the congregation costumed as Marys, Josephs, angels, wise ones, shepherds, lambs, cows, doves and one donkey. This event proved to be so much fun that it was repeated in following Decembers.



PHOTO: NO FUSS Participatory Pageant in Dec 2015

As per our accessibility policy, the walkway from the street level to the church Sanctuary and the Fellowship Hall was redone, eliminating all stairs.

In September 2016, a popular new activity was started by Susan Knight: a line dancing class in the Church Hall, with proceeds going to CPU.

In 2016, a new Social Justice need presented itself: a Syrian Refugee Response. A team led by Ernie Bauer applied to support a Syrian family which needed refuge in Montreal. CPU was assigned the Mohammads: a mother, father and 3 boys. The congregation raised enough funds to support them for a year. October 2016’s bicycle “Ride for Refuge” in Montreal’s West Island, took on a more personal tone this autumn, as we waited for our own refugee family.

After a 2-year wait to get permission for our sponsored family to immigrate, the five arrived in Dorval airport in April 2018. We met and welcomed the Mohammads at a special dinner in the Fellowship Hall. The SRR team found them a rental home in the

West Island near the 2 younger boys' school. By July, the father had a job with CN Railway, and in August, the father, mother and oldest son started French lessons.



PHOTO: CPUC Welcoming Dinner for the Mohammad family 28 April 2018.

Meanwhile in 2017 the church's leaky flat roof over the offices, lounge, meeting room and kitchen was replaced, and is expected to survive for decades.

Another 2017 highlight was Rev. Elisabeth's sabbatical, September to December, which coincided with her final year of Doctoral studies in biblical preaching. By June 2018 CPU celebrated RevE's successful completion of her Doctorate of Ministry degree. She officially became Rev. Dr. Elisabeth Jones.

2017-18-19's Social Justice focus was food security. Meals on Wheels had cooked meals for seniors in CPU's kitchen since 1970. A CPU garden involving KidZone helpers planted, raised and reaped vegetables for Montreal's Saint Columba House lunch program. The congregation often brought in non-perishable food for food banks.

The church kitchen was 63 years old. Renovation was a must. A new up-to-code ventilation system was installed in June 2018, and by the end of October, our amazing modern functional kitchen was completed, with separate sections for food preparation, serving and cleaning. Soon, baking teams were producing cookies and muffins for Montreal's Chez Doris, an Aboriginal Housing Program.



PHOTO: The new Church Kitchen in action

June 2018 brought an innovation: Coordinator, Terry Wiebe, joined the staff to take care of Congregational Care with Seniors. The goal was to increase the effectiveness and reach of our caring ministries, and to decrease social isolation.

Mid-September featured another annual Faith Fiesta Saturday at Cap St. Jacques. This one was entitled Vision 2020, to discern together what vision God had for our congregation between 2018 and 2020.

At CPU's Annual Congregational Meeting in February 2019, we reviewed our Vision 2020 themes for the future: Christian worship & discipleship, Families with children at home, Seniors, and Beyond our walls.

Then came the flood. A November 2019 power outage put the sump pump out of order and a massive rain storm filled the lower level with water. The Day Care moved upstairs into our Fellowship Hall and common room, using our church kitchen and bathroom facilities. Church activities moved into the sanctuary after several front pews were removed to make room.

Reparations to the lower level were completed by the end of summer 2020. However, it became clear that our 64-year-old sanctuary needed a new floor: one without curling tripping tiles. With the financial help of grants, construction plans were made.

The lower level Healing Pathways room which also housed CPUC's archives had to be emptied for flood repair. During December 2019 and the following January, February, and into March, the archives were re-organized into water-tight tubs, while 10 boxes full of outdated papers were shredded or recycled.

2019 was our congregation's 120th anniversary, and a booklet was written and published: "Cedar Park United Church's Second Century, Second Decade".

Then WHAM! In mid-March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic shut down our church building. The Day Care remained functioning to attend to the needs of critical and essential workers in the health care and civil protection sectors. Our amazing staff and technological team changed gears without missing a beat. Within two days, "Baler Twine" studio was created in RevE's kitchen in time for a Facebook computer Sunday worship service. This included our CPUC choir assembled on-line thanks to the magic of Douglas Knight and audio editing. Activities such as Faith Discussion, youth groups, women's group, men's group, Congregational Board Meetings, etc., switched to on-line Zoom. Our food security mission continued via home-cooked meal packages deposited into a church freezer, and occasional non-perishable food drives.



PHOTO: RevE On-Line Sunday Worship Service on 23 May 2021

During the summer of 2020, Montreal's West Island United Churches took turns producing and sharing Sunday on-line services.

Meanwhile, with the Sanctuary shut down, it was an opportunity to rebuild and renew the space. CPUC's old sanctuary pews were taken out and recycled. These were replaced by upholstered chairs, ready for post-pandemic activities. The 65-year old windows were replaced. By early 2021, a beautiful new tile-free epoxy-coated concrete floor was installed, complete with an embedded painted labyrinth design. Syrian family engineer Najah and her husband Sa'ed helped the sanctuary re-design team with installing the painted labyrinth and rebuilding of the chancel steps. A five-tiered stage was created for worship services, where the communion table, lectern, organ, piano and choir were located. This also provided a performance space for external renters, e.g. the West Island Youth Symphony Orchestra on April 24, 2022.



PHOTO: New Polished Concrete and coated floor with labyrinth

The Narthex balcony (a storage area for 65 years) was reconstructed with a new floor, balustrade, and a permanent stairway. The sides of the stairway and the front of the balcony has clear glass panels, allowing the stained glass windows to show through. This space now houses the technical center for audio-visual effects and live-streaming on-line.

By November 21, 2021, our Sunday service was on-line from the sanctuary, and in-person with masks and vaccinations being requested.

Outside, a meditative labyrinth was created on the church's eastern front lawn (2021).

In October 2022, a circular Indigenous Healing Garden was dedicated down the hill of the western lawn. Throughout the pandemic, Cedar Park United Church has begun each Sunday worship service with an acknowledgement of North America being unceded Indigenous land. A donation was made to the First Nations Healing Fund (2021).

The pandemic has had at least one benefit: once our church went on-line, we were enabled to include and serve more people nationally across Canada and internationally around the world.

Now in 2023, Cedar Park's 124 year-old congregation continues to strive towards fulfilling God's loving dream for all of us.



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