

All of this invites us to consider our own story here at UPC.
Who are those who have run the race here?
Who are the people who make up this congregation?
What is their history?
What are their strengths and weaknesses?
How has this church been part of their lives?
How have they been part of this church?
How have they served Christ in this community?

The history of this church is fascinating. The first Presbyterian services were held in the Markham area in 1817 by a Scottish born minister William Jenkins who abandoned mission work among the Indigenous people of New York state. He was known for his radical political views that led to attacks on his person and property even before the Rebellion of 1837. The issues were unfair governments, no true democracy and lots of corruption and entitlement within the political world. on main street. But it wasn't until 1875 that a lay person, Mrs. Isabella Mustard opened her home and invited the retired Rev. Donald N. McIntosh to conduct services and start a young people's group. The budding Presbyterians soon purchased a wooden church on the east side of Main Street from the Unionville Congregationalist's who were building a new brick church on the west side of Main Street at the corner of Fred Varley. Twelve years later as the attendance at Unionville Congregationalist church dwindled, the enterprising Presbyterians purchased the brick church and continued to meet there until the great union which also was a split of 1925. Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians all joined together to create the United Church of Canada in 1925, but not all Presbyterians agreed. The remaining few continued as the Presbyterian Church in Canada and in Unionville they were given the brick church. However the closest remaining Presbyterians were over two and a half miles away, and so the church closed and the building was sold to the Markham Township in 1926 for \$2,750.

(For a fuller history of Unionville Presbyterian please see John S. Moir's booklet by the same title - available at UPC)

In the early 80's the Presbyterian Church in Canada again started holding services in Unionville beginning with recently graduated Rev. Jost Kreplin

knocking on doors and inviting people to meet in William Breczy school for Presbyterian services.

Bob and Jessie McEwen attended. Bob, always a presbyterian, always a gentleman, full of grace, served as first clerk of session. He remembers Jost knocking on his door - this young good looking man. Bob served as site supervisor when UPC built the present church building. In his words they were putting faith in God who loves us.

His wife Jessie, along with others - Marjorie and Jean among them - picked up beer bottles and pop bottles along the country roads of 16th concession - returning them and collecting the money. They say in everyday beer bottles something larger. They used the beer bottle money to bring the word of God to the people. Literally. With the money they purchased what affectionately has become known as the Beer Bottle Bible the pulpit Bible that is on the communion table to this day. The word of God, from the world into the church - that's part of the history of this church, part of the story.

And there was Jean and Lorne Cook - here from the very beginning. Lorne created the Duck Race at Toogood pond as a means of letting the community know that the Presbyterians were alive and active. This event still happens to this day but has been taken over by Unionville Festival. Its beginnings though were here at this church. Jean served in many ways - she was part of the Beer Bottle Bible drive. She was the Chair of the Building Committee. She served as an elder and effective leader in the congregation and continues to do so to this day.

Margaret and Rod Mckenzie with their son Bill who was just a baby were part of the first group to attend. Margaret had not been baptized and so according to 'church rules' could not sign the original charter. Neither could she answer the questions of faith when her children were baptized. Both of these things were difficult for Margaret but she worked it out with her faith, recognizing that faith in God and a relationship with God was something bigger than the institution. Margaret is now an integral part of this congregation serving as the office administrator.

Marion Ballard attends Unionville Presbyterian Church. She was the first woman to attend Knox College (the Presbyterian college for ordination to ministry). She worked hard to get her B.A. first - then on to Knox College with one reason, one dream, one calling - to be an ordained minister within the Presbyterian Church in Canada. But controversy about women in the church had raged on for years and in 1966 the 'issue' came to the floor of the General Assembly

In 1966, the General Assembly was bitterly divided over the issue of the ordination of women. Many spoke up clearly, stating that it was, and always has been, the will of God that women should not be ordained as elders or ministers within the church. Scripture was quoted, hateful and unkind words were spoken.

Marion later said: "I had wanted to be ordained, but after witnessing that cruel and vicious debate at Assembly, I decided to do something else with my life – something more helpful and caring."

I met Marion Ballard 3 weeks ago - she told me a little of her story. She said she was so hurt back then that part of her wanted to leave the church. But as she put it - Christ won out. Christ tapped her on the shoulder and told her to go to work in the world. And out in the world she worked for many years in correctional and parole services. Out in the world she met a man who happened to be a minister in the church - she did not meet him at a church function

After a time she was back in church - God had won out over the church. She said to me, "in the church she celebrates God - in the world she meets God each and every day". UPC has been her church home for the last number of years. She still feels the pain of it all in part perhaps because the national church has never asked her and others who were also hurt so terribly for forgiveness. But Christ is bigger than church, she says.

So many beautiful stories. So many people who have run the race set before them. So many people who continue to be part of the witness of this church, part of the cloud of witnesses all around.

These and many other stories need to be told. Because people are inspired and interested in stories of others. The community around would be interested in these stories. We need to tell them.

So what are your stories?

What is your history?

How have you run the race of faith in and through Jesus the Christ?

How has God revealed God's self to you?

What are your struggles and joys in faith?

What does this church mean to you?

I invite you to write your story - each of you. As a church we can create a profile of stories, publish them and in that way create a living history of this church. A history that can be made known. A history that makes this church come alive in the Spirit, in the joy and strength found in being in relationship with God.

People everywhere are looking for compassion, community, hope - authentic compassion, authentic community, authentic hope.

People in this community need to know how you have experienced it as the people of UPC.

And they will find it in the stories you tell.

Thanks be to God