



Nisei young peoples group (1955)



Nisei young peoples group at Lake Scugog (1955)



Queen Street United Church (circa 1950)

## Centennial-Japanese United Church History Synopsis for CJUC's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, April 6, 2014

**Introduction** - These few pages are not a complete history of CJUC. The trends of each decade are described as are specific turning points in the life of the church.

**The 1950s** - The formation of the Toronto Japanese United Church Issei Congregation (Japanese speaking) in 1946 was a necessity because of the spoken language. Church leaders hoped that the English speaking Niseis would attend and join a local congregation. Due to the war experience and the close-knit bonds made during the evacuation, most Niseis did not go to local churches. Thus, the Toronto Japanese Nisei Congregation was established in 1954 under the leadership of the Rev. K. Shimizu. The facilities of the Queen Street United Church were used, close to many Japanese Canadians living in downtown Toronto. The expanding Issei and Nisei congregations required more space and in 1958 accepted an invitation from the Centennial United Church on Dovercourt Road to share their building. This necessitated constructing an upper chapel resulting in its catacomb-like architecture, designed by Raymond Moriyama. The post-war baby boom was a reality for Japanese Canadians too and it showed in the large number of married couples and a growing Sunday School.



Upper chapel at Dovercourt (circa 1966)



Primary Sunday School class at Dovercourt



Japanese Beatles perform at Satsuki Matsuri (1964)

**The 1960s** - The birthrate continued to be high and the Sunday School kept growing. An active couples group and the leadership of the charter Nisei members was an important part of our church life. Mid-week groups like Explorers, CGIT, Tyros, Sigma-C, CJs flourished. The “youth”, as they were called wanted to be heard. The church, located in downtown Toronto, purchased a manse in the suburb of Don Mills. This reflected the geographic diversity of the congregation. People were travelling many miles to church rather than attending a local congregation. The manse’s location, close to major highways, was purposely chosen to minimize the distance that the minister travelled when visiting church members spread throughout the region.

The close ties that were very evident between Niseis were being learned by Sanseis who were now growing up together in the church.

Events like the church picnic in June, the May concert, Mother’s Day tea, worldwide communion, Christmas turkey dinner, Married Couples Club dance, bowling night and other events, established themselves as memorable and long-lasting traditions.



Boys camp 1976 at Camp Koyu



Sunday school Christmas Pageant



Sunday school worship service at Dovercourt

**The 1970s** - The maturing Sansei portion of the church was growing in the early 1970s and hit their peak numbers in the mid-70s. The Sunday School reached an enrollment of nearly 200, necessitating renovations for classroom space. Christmas Pageant by the Sunday School students (1974) As a further response, the congregation leased the North Camp (renamed Camp Koyu) of the United Church's Lake Scugog Camp about 50 miles east of Toronto. This was an important aspect of our church life and activities; a place to meet for summer camps, worship services and spring and fall retreats. It was a place to bring and make friends, develop leadership skills, and a place to examine oneself with respect to God. The camp brought many new people to the church, sometimes with the children leading the parents.

We also saw the emerging prominence of the younger Nisei members holding positions within the church once held only by the older charter members.

At the very end of the decade, youth participation started to fall as many headed to university in out-of-town centres. Some felt that they outgrew what the church had to offer and went to explore new endeavours.





Banner makers in the Upper Chapel



CJUC amalgamation celebration (1986)



10th year of Vietnamese sponsorship (1989)

**The 1980s** - This era saw the emergence of Sanseis into church leadership roles. The movement of Sanseis into adulthood meant that the need for Camp Koyu decreased. Sanseis that had been married in the late 70s and early 80s were having children – a new generation into a now smaller Sunday School. Few charter members were in leadership roles with older Niseis entering retirement. Sanseis and younger Niseis were now on the board. The most significant event of the decade was the amalgamation of the Toronto Japanese United Church with the Centennial United Church to form the Centennial-Japanese United Church. Quoting from the Centennial history book: *“Rev. Judy Shand (Mission Strategy Coordinator for Toronto West Presbytery) jokingly referred to the amalgamation as being like a marriage. Centennial as the “bride” had received a proposal from the Nisei Congregation, representing the “groom”. The “bride” was hesitant to accept the proposal, fearing a loss of members, identity, etc. The “groom” had waited patiently for over a year for an answer to the proposal, not pushing in any way. The “bride” finally accepted and the courtship followed before the marriage could be finalized. A dowry was arranged. On Sept. 21, 1986 at 2 P.M., the “Marriage”, the Amalgamation Service will take place at Centennial United Church. The working name of the newly amalgamated congregation, for the time being will be Centennial-Nisei United Church. To fully describe the new church, ideally, the name should encompass the traditional, historic nature of the Centennial congregation, the founders of the Nisei congregation, and the Canadian-born reality of its members with many having Japanese ancestry, however a visible occidental group as well.”*



Christian Education Retreat at Friendly Acres (1991)



Musical benefit show for Momiji Centre (1990)



Finance team counting the offering (1997)

**The 1990s** - (written in 1992) We are early into this decade, but here are some trends. From a base of Sanseis who are now married with children, there is a possible increase in the ranks of the Sunday School. The emotional ties between Sanseis is weaker than it is for Niseis, so we cannot depend on racial ancestry alone to be a gluing force. Japanese immigrants are more comfortable attending the services of the Nichigo church, so although their children attend our Sunday School, immigrants from Japan will not play a major role for us. The members from Centennial United Church will be as strong as ever, but because they are few in number, their impact will not be a large factor.

**The Future - So what is our church's direction? No one knows for sure, but here are some questions to think about.**

1. Will we continue to be a Japanese ethnic church? Our ethnicity is because of racial ancestry and not cultural reasons. Is that enough reason for the existence of this church?
2. Is it a need that our minister be of Japanese background?
3. What is our role as a church in downtown Toronto and what should we be doing for the local community?
4. When charter members are gone, will there be enough members to make the church viable in terms of numbers, finances, and programs?
5. What is our role in the wider church? Are we seen as a model for other ethnic churches' evolution?





Last worship service at 701 Dovercourt (2006)



First service at Lansing United (2006)



CJUC service at Lansing United (2007)

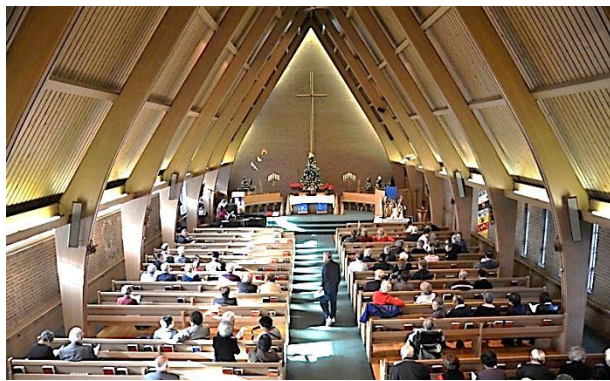
**The 2000s** – The gradually smaller CJUC congregation finds it increasingly difficult to manage the church building. The Dovercourt site is deteriorating and maintenance costs are increasing. A task group is formed to investigate the future of the church and make recommendations. After much discussion and analysis, it is decided to sell the church building and to seek rental space. Lansing United Church offers CJUC its sanctuary and gym after its Sunday service is finished. Preparations are made to clean up the Dovercourt church and put it up for sale. In 2006, CJUC moves to Lansing where shared accommodations work well with our host church and CJUC members are happy not to have to park their cars on narrow and crowded downtown streets. Eventually, 701 Dovercourt is reconstructed into a 28 unit condominium with underground parking.



Church sign at 701 Dovercourt (2003)



Artist rendering of 701 Dovercourt for fund appeal in 1957



Sanctuary at OYM (2011)



Church council retreat (2013)



Choir rehearsal at OYM (2012)

**The 2010s** – Lansing United Church is pursuing the redevelopment of its building in conjunction with the construction of two large condominiums. CJUC decides not to live through years of construction and seeks to rent another worship space. Oriole-York Mills United Church and CJUC decide to share its worship space and minister. It is a win-win situation for both churches, as CJUC needs a rental space and OYM needs a minister due to the retirement of its minister. In the fall of 2011, CJUC moves from Lansing to Oriole-York Mills. Both churches have to adapt their traditions in order to respect each other's history and the cooperation is very apparent. CJUC is grateful for its new space and welcoming nature of the host church. OYM is grateful for new energy and people into their church home. Also in late 2011, CJUC amalgamates with the former Toronto Japanese United Church Issei Congregation, creating a Japanese language section of CJUC worshipping in Japanese on the first Sunday of each month at 1 p.m. In March 2014, CJUC and OYM vote to start the process of amalgamation to be finalized on Sept 28, 2014. To quote from the CJUC's song *As God Goes With Us*: "The Spirit leads; the future still unknown, Is not to fear, we trust in God alone, Be with us still as we move on again, Strengthen, inspire us, our Saviour and our Friend."