



April 2, 2014

Centennial-Japanese United Church,
c/o 2609 Bayview Avenue,
Toronto, Ontario M2L 1B5

To the People of Centennial-Japanese United Church

Thank you very much for your invitation to join with you as you celebrate the 60th anniversary of Centennial-Japanese United Church. You have a great story to tell, and I very much appreciated reading the synopsis of your history – a story of faithfulness and change. As you ponder your future in yet another time of challenge and transformation, may you celebrate well!

I think we all need celebrations to remind us that good things are still happening, that God is not finished with us. Anniversaries are an occasion to look back and acknowledge what has been, lifting up the significant moments of ministry that have marked your congregation's journey. Anniversaries are a time to give thanks, perhaps recalling the words of Robert Bly, who suggests that the more things you can give thanks for, the stronger you will be - which means that you are invited to lift up not only your best moments, but also those times when things seemed to fall apart, and yet you discovered the spiritual strength to continue on.

Looking back over your history enables you to come to a deeper understanding of your identity, and, perhaps, to be clearer about God's presence with you throughout the journey. I think that's why there is so much "remembering" in Scripture (just take a look at the Book of Psalms). It helps you understand who you are, what you have been called to be and do. And, you need to recall the great (and little) actions of God in your past, so as to reaffirm your trust that God will do similar things in the future, even though you might be unclear about what God is doing in the present moment.

At the same time, you need to avoid the trap of only looking backwards, being caught up in nostalgia, and a plaintive remembering of "the good old days." An anniversary celebration must generate energy for the future, trusting that God really is calling you into a new thing. It can even be the occasion to try something risky, different, perhaps using the anniversary as a justification, an excuse.

I am sorry that I am not able to join with you on April 6th, but, as you celebrate your 60th anniversary you have my best wishes, and I will hold you in my prayers.

Many blessings for the day, and for your future ministry.

Yours truly,

Gary Paterson (The Rt. Rev.)
Moderator of the United Church of Canada