

UCW Celebrates

50 Years

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

92.185P/643a, 1961. United Church of Canada Archives

In 2012, the United Church Women (UCW) celebrate their 50th anniversary. *Mandate* asked three members to reflect on what it means to be UCW today.

A Welcoming Community

As the national president, I believe I have a unique perspective on our work. I have been active in the UCW for almost 40 years, and a member of a number of churches. I have moved many times in my life, but there has been one constant for me—the UCW. Each church had a warm and welcoming group of women to take me under their wing and help me settle in.

At this wonderful time in our history, that image of welcome is one I see across our country. It has been said that if you are UCW and make a few connections, you can travel across this land and never pay a hotel bill. Welcome, hospitality, friendship, and a bed would be yours anywhere there was a UCW group. That hospitality is extended within the church and the community in many ways. But the UCW is more than an organization that provides welcome, coffee, and treats.

The purpose, vision, and mission of the UCW are lived out in many ways from coast to coast to coast. As I meet with women from each Conference, I sense a heartfelt passion for the church and its mission. There is a deep and lasting commitment to justice, peace, and God's community of faith. As I visit units, presbyterials, and Conferences, I am always encouraged and uplifted by the women I meet. In the face of many challenges, they carry on the work with joy and enthusiasm.

There have been many changes since 1962 when we were formed, and the UCW is adapting and changing, and remains a vital part of our church. Each UCW is exactly the same as every other UCW, and at the same time entirely unique. There is always a local flavour and response to the realities of the region, which affects the way the work is accomplished.


Despite the challenges, the women accomplish their goals



Betty Turcott

by trying new models and risking change. As our numbers decline and we age, the old ways don't work as they once did. Society has evolved as well, and that affects our focus and our processes. As part of the Women's Ministry Network—the United Church network that includes the UCW and all other women's groups in the church—we are encouraged to name our way of being and doing. To be able to do this is life-giving and enriching. We are free to let go of the things from that past that have become a burden instead of a blessing. We are free to engage in the things that offer hope and joy and spiritual nourishment to our minds, spirits, and bodies.

With new technology we can engage each other and the world in exciting ways that were unknown at our founding. As our world shrinks in terms of communication and contact, we need to reach beyond the limits that we know and love. The UCW continues to support people and projects around the world, and to find ways to connect with our sisters, ecumenically and in interfaith groups.

As we look to the future, I see the UCW reaching out across boundaries of all kinds to be an open, welcoming community of faithful, faith-filled women of the United Church. As the theme for our anniversary celebrations states, ours is a Tapestry of Love...and the weaving continues. 

Betty Turcott has been active in the UCW at all levels and is the President of the National United Church Women.

Left to right: Women sort clothes at the United Church Clothing Depot, Toronto. Kenya-Canada women's exchange, 1990. 45th anniversary cake, Corner Brook, Newfoundland, 2007



Carrying the Torch

What does it mean to be UCW today? The first words that come to mind would be “flexible, adaptable, and able to carry the torch.”

As President of Maritime Conference UCW (Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Bermuda), I look back and appreciate how far we have come, and look to the future with my UCW sisters and wonder what it holds.

It is exciting to be in a position to meet so many of my UCW sisters throughout the Conference and nationally, and to have the opportunity to share with them ideas, projects, plans, and celebrations. It is heartwarming to be a part of the UCW Cookie Cottage ministry of hospitality each summer at the United Church’s Berwick Camp in Nova Scotia, where approximately 500 dozen cookies baked by our wonderful members on a rotating roster are served with tea, coffee, and juice for the 10 days of the camp.

At the same time, it is challenging to provide encouragement to those groups whose numbers are dwindling, and who feel that they can no longer be responsible for fundraising for their congregations, as they have always done. I remind them that as long as they are baking for a family in need, visiting those who are sick and shut-in, or are coming together in any form in the name of Jesus, they are doing the work of UCW. I firmly believe that the younger women of our congregations will find their own ways to serve, will find new ways to be United Church Women, and we need to allow them to do that without feeling guilty or left behind.

On a personal note, the question “What does it mean to be the UCW today?” is an exciting one. I am carrying on the tradition of my mother, Florence (Manuel) Smith, and grandmother, Annie Manuel. In my current role of



Sharon Moyse

Conference president, I also follow in the footsteps of my mother-in-law, Ida Moyse, who served as the third president of Maritime Conference UCW.

Growing up on the South Shore of Montreal, I graduated through the ranks of Sunday school, Mission Band, Explorers, and CGIT—the latter having a very strong connection to the UCW. These wonderful women also assisted the junior choir, enabling us to enter the Montreal Music Festival each year. The year I won the piano duet class at age 13, my piano partner and I were invited to perform our piece for the UCW. I felt pretty important being billed as the UCW program!

My grandmother was an active member of both WMS and WA. My mother followed her example in becoming involved in WMS, and subsequently was a charter member of the UCW. So it seemed natural when I arrived in Summerside, Prince Edward Island, as a young bride in 1972 to accept an invitation to join a UCW unit in my new church. Since then, I have served in most offices of UCW in my local, general, and presbyterial levels.

It was at an annual general meeting of P.E.I. Presbyterial that my mother surprised me with my Life Membership pin. It remains a privilege to wear it and a challenge to convince myself that I am deserving of it.

Being UCW today means accepting change and challenge, witnessing and serving as we are able, and rejoicing in who we are, as we celebrate our 50th anniversary. ■

Sharon Moyse lives in Summerside, Prince Edward Island, with her husband, Dr. Cyril Moyse. She has been a member of Trinity United since 1972.



A Force for Social Change

I remember attending my first presbyterial meeting in the early 1980s. My friend and I were the young ones and we were truly puzzled by that odd “presbyterial” word. It is still an odd name that dates our organization. When the UCW was established in 1962, the adoption of the male church structure gave us influential access to all four courts of the church—congregation, presbytery, Conference, and national. This court structure has proved to be our UCW strength, but it certainly doesn’t suit the new wave of non-UCW women’s groups in our churches. These groups meet for friendship, support, and spiritual growth, and they will shape the women’s groups of the future, especially as UCW groups decline through attrition.

In 1962, the UCW encouraged a variety of preferences and styles in the establishment of new women’s groups. Over the years the groups have seen a lot of adaptation and change, but probably not enough for us to continue. The structure of UCW is now failing, with aging members unable to hold executive positions, especially in presbyterials.

On reading old records of the Woman’s Association and the Woman’s Missionary Society, I realized the dedication of these groups of women supporting their churches and their missionaries with a “sugar bowl” economy of small coins. How things have changed and will change again!

Working on issues of social justice has always been part of the UCW’s mandate. Currently in Alberta, the Conference UCW project is the Child Well-being Initiative. We pressure local and provincial politicians to deal with child and family poverty, low minimum wages, poor housing, and the lack of a poverty reduction strategy such as other provinces are contemplating or initiating.



Geraldine Dyck

In 2008, the Conference UCW decided to use the opportunity of our annual meeting in Edmonton to raise public awareness of the extent of child poverty and to push our provincial government toward action. So we preceded our meeting with a rally on the steps of the Alberta Legislature, of which I was glad to be a part. We followed the rally with the presentation of our 1,500-signature petition to the sitting legislative assembly.


In 2009, to represent the children of poverty in a highly visible way, we started making Poverty Dolls based on a design found by artist Carolyn Pogue. Beautiful, brightly coloured rag dolls with messages

attached to their wrists were made by UCW units and others throughout the province and distributed to officials in all levels of government and the church and to celebrities.

In 2010 we again visited the Alberta Legislature. With co-operation from Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), who presented our ongoing petitions, arrangements were made to have a doll placed on the desk of each of the 83 MLAs. Thirty-five UCW members in the spectator’s gallery watched our governing members getting acquainted with their dolls and message.

In 2011, just before the G20 summit in Toronto, our UCW presented all 28 of our federal Members of Parliament with dolls to call attention to poverty issues around the world.

My involvement with the UCW began in the early 1980s and these strong, senior UCW women ensured that we younger ones were mentored and given good education opportunities and leadership skills. Meeting with UCW friends and mentors is still a safe and comfortable venue for us to develop individual gifts and skills.

As I cast an optimistic glance forward, I feel that we need to stay attuned to the guidance of the Holy Spirit calling us into new ways of being. Women’s determination to gather and to contribute to our church and society will continue, especially with current UCW members in a mentoring role. 

Geraldine Dyck has been a member of the Coaldale, Alberta, UCW since 1985. She is currently chair of the Division of Communications of the Conference UCW, and President of the South Alberta Presbyterial.



Committee members of the Child Well-being Initiative with dolls.

UCW through the Years

1962-2012

Max Mercer



Dorothy Amos



Clockwise from top left: Executive of the Woman's Federation of St. James United, St. John's, Newfoundland, 1960, which became the first UCW of St. James in 1962. Thelma McEachern and Joyce Emmerson prepare for the Port Perry, Ontario, UCW fall fashion show, 1962. Dancing at the 45th UCW anniversary National Gathering, 2007. Parade of banners at the 45th anniversary. Coordination team for the 35th anniversary National Gathering, 1997.