

Thornhill United Church Profile 2021

March 2021

Overview

Thornhill United Church (TUC) is an urban church of approximately 300 households in the Greater Toronto Area. Although a new building was built in 1957, the congregation dates back to 1803. As such it is one of the oldest in the greater Toronto area, and was one of the oldest Methodist congregations in the country at the time of Church Union in 1925.

Thornhill is an affluent residential community with a rich history and vibrant ethnic and cultural diversity. It is well serviced by excellent schools, hospitals, and a variety of service clubs. There is a strong sense of cooperation among churches and other faith communities. TUC is in close proximity to Toronto and other larger centres, drawing its congregation from those areas. While the church building is in Thornhill, members of our congregation reside not only in Thornhill, but in several of the surrounding areas including Toronto, Vaughan, Richmond Hill and Markham. We are in a suburban community with a mix of single-family homes, apartments, retirement homes and long-term care homes.

The church is located on 1.8 acres and there is no mortgage on the property. We have a large parking lot that can accommodate 150 cars and some spaces are rented out to neighbours on a monthly basis. We have a memorial garden located at the front of the church and a community garden at the back of the property which is well-used by our neighbours.

We have a newly created mission statement which appears on our website. It reads as follows: “Our faith in God's love moves us to celebrate spirituality, to care with compassion, and to welcome all warmly”.

Priorities

A Ministry and Mission Profile was completed in 2015 following an extensive review and consultation with the congregation. It defined eight priority areas for the Church. This created a framework, for the leadership of the church to set annual goals, review progress towards meeting these goals and generally strengthen the mission of Thornhill United Church. To date TUC has made considerable and measurable progress towards meeting its goals and the framework continues to guide our work. The eight priorities are listed below.

1. Worship

Our congregation is predominantly middle-aged people and seniors. Services are a blend of traditional and contemporary. A range of theology, from quite conservative to progressive, spans across the congregation. This can be an exciting challenge for the ministers. Scripture readings and prayers of the people are led by lay members every service.

In recent years, our membership has started to become more ethnically diverse and TUC welcomes people of all backgrounds. In that regard, we have a very active Intercultural Working Group that establishes yearly goals to strengthen and reflect the multicultural nature of our community. Our celebration of Black History Month and Asian History Month are just two examples of the work this

group is doing. We maintain close ties with other faith communities represented in our community/region including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism.

Music is an extremely important part of worship. We have Sanctuary, Junior and Handbell choirs and our Director of Music involves guest musicians, many of whom are youth, in worship on a regular basis. We are consistently inspired by beautiful music designed to fit with the themes of worship.

2. Leadership

Leadership rests with the Ministers and Council and is collaborative in nature. Council ensures communication to the congregation following every Council meeting to keep everyone informed. The governance model has been recently reviewed and revised. Unfortunately, COVID 19 has delayed its implementation. Committees of the church are active and have continued their work in spite of pandemic restrictions.

A Welcoming and Affirming Working Group has been established and is regularly bringing information forward to the congregation as we move towards becoming an affirming church.

Ministers work in a “team” environment, sharing responsibilities where appropriate and working closely with the Director of Music and the administrator to ensure things run smoothly.

3. Discipleship

The Christian Development Committee is responsible for coordinating and promoting the Christian Development and Spiritual Nurture programs at TUC. Currently these programs fall under five areas: Sunday School, Youth, Family Life and outreach to families, Adult Faith Development, and Library.

Sunday School is coordinated by a group of parents under the direction and leadership of the Minister of Christian Development and includes three classes: K-Grade 4, Grade 4-8, and High School. The Grades K-8 classes are continuing to use the Workshop Rotation curriculum. In 2020, students completed rotations and participated in activities that included: art, cooking, science, drama, and games.

There was no Confirmation course for 2020, but the Youth Group for grades 5 and up, (22 members), met once a month on either a Friday night or a Sunday afternoon. Activities for the youth included a chocolate Easter egg sale, movie night in the Sanctuary, snow tubing, pizza making, a Zoom call with a scavenger hunt, a campfire in the church backyard, and cookie baking to raise money for the Out of The Cold program. The pizza making and cookie baking events were done via Zoom and provided an opportunity for the youth to connect and socialize during lockdown. In the fall, Sunday School families participated in the following outdoor events: apple picking, a sugar bush walk, and pumpkin carving. The Minister of Christian Development hand delivered a card and colouring package to each Sunday School student's home a few days before Christmas. This was a welcomed surprise for the children. These activities also provided an opportunity to check in on the wellbeing of the children, youth and young families.

In the area of adult faith development, TUC provides opportunities for the congregation to deepen and further develop their faith through Bible study, book study, and meditation groups. “Tea with Leigh”

(the Christian Development Minister), and a Lenten book study are regular events at TUC. "Take 10's" are offered every few weeks which give the congregation a time to ask questions of the preacher following a worship service.

Four individuals take turns staffing the library before and after the church service on Sundays. They make sure the books in the library are catalogued properly and they help congregational members choose books that they might wish to take home to read.

4. Pastoral Care/Spiritual Care

Our Pastoral Care Team is made up of the two ministers, an Associate Minister, lay members and the church Administrator. There were 193 households under pastoral care in 2020. This Committee meets monthly to update each other and coordinate pastoral work. The Ministers provide counselling and guidance in preparation for baptisms, weddings and funerals.

Our Pastoral Care Team visits members of the congregation who are in need. Sympathy cards, get well cards and special occasion greeting cards are sent out regularly. Under the direction of the Worship committee, a small group of people provide services on the 5th Sunday of the month in the long-term care area of the Mackenzie Health Care Centre. The Coordinating Minister organizes a monthly coffee and conversation hour at a local retirement residence where several TUC members reside. We have an active prayer chain and hand-knitted prayer shawls are provided to those in need. This is an area of strength for the church.

5. Justice and Outreach

Our community outreach is very active. We offer a program for physically and mentally challenged adults (Club Handi) weekly for six-week intervals. In cooperation with other Thornhill Churches, we host an Out of the Cold program on Friday evenings from January to April. In cooperation with Shining Waters Region, we have hosted a summer Day Camp—"Camp Awesome". Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, these three activities were cancelled in 2020. The Breakfast Club has been part of TUC's outreach for 20+ years. Even though our volunteers are not allowed to participate in the program at this time, TUC continues to support the program financially.

TUC Continues to support a young teenage girl in Indonesia. The money we send helps her to continue her education. Pre-COVID-19, she attended a safe school. Now she learns through radio broadcasts. Our sponsorship also assists her family with issues relating to food insecurity and the lack of clean water.

The refugee family that TUC is co-sponsoring to come to Canada remains in very dangerous circumstances due to civil unrest, militia activity and rampant kidnapping in Libya. Unfortunately, there has been very little progress since the sponsorship application was approved by the United Church of Canada refugee staff and by the Ottawa office of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada. It is too dangerous for IRCC personnel to travel to Libya to interview the family and COVID-19 restrictions have added further obstacles.

6. Spirituality/Self care

TUC endeavours to support our ministers in their ongoing professional development and self-nurturing. Study leave is granted within the guidelines of the United Church and ministers are encouraged to

involve themselves in Regional events and activities of the wider church. We encourage them to collaborate, support and seek support from their peers. We recognize that “burnout” can happen and encourage our ministers to take care of themselves while caring for others.

7. Ministry Partnerships

In Thornhill, the churches and other faith groups meet and cooperate on a number of initiatives. The Thornhill Ministerial Association meets monthly and it includes Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Pentecostal and United churches. Thornhill United Church is part of the Mosaic Interfaith group, which runs a number of events per year, including the Peace Meal. In addition, through the Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold Program, we are also in contact with, and work together with three other Christian churches, Temple Har Zion Jewish Synagogue, two Islamic centres, and a Mennonite church. In addition, we work cooperatively with other Thornhill churches to provide a Christmas Assistance program of food baskets and toys delivered to the needy in our community. During Lent, TUC participates in ecumenical Sunday afternoon services held at different churches, each with a minister/priest from another church delivering the message. Other partnerships include Yellow Brick House, Food Grains Bank, and Scouting.

8. Stewardship

TUC has not had a formal stewardship project for several years. The congregation, however, is informed on a monthly basis, of the status of church finances. This is done through an addendum to the order of service. When required, letters are sent to member of the congregation identifying financial needs. Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas letters include special donation envelopes.

Weekly “givings” are usually supplemented by two major fundraising initiatives annually—the “Spring Fling” and the “Countrye Faire”. The church also rents out space to other Community organizations. Our two major renters were ESL York Region and the Taiwanese United church of Toronto. Needless to say, both of these revenue streams have been lost temporarily due to the pandemic. We have been pleased at the response of our congregation through increased “givings”, and our Treasurer has secured assistance from the Federal government to assist us through these challenging times. Despite the suspension of in-person services in mid-March, “givings” by the congregation exceeded 2019 by almost \$8,000 and were only \$2,000 less than budget.

Summary

We are a church that is passionate and hard working. The last year was challenging with so many activities having to be cancelled due to the pandemic. However, committees continued their work virtually whenever possible and our Sunday Zoom services have been extremely well attended. Several people who had moved away from Thornhill have rejoined us on Sundays. This speaks to the strong connections people have established with TUC and to the fact they still have a sense of belonging.