

From our history

## **Joining the United Church of Canada**

St. Matthew's was founded at the time of the settlement of Halifax in 1749. Although the Church of England was the most prominent Protestant denomination, Governor Edward Cornwallis assigned a building lot for a dissenting church. What became Mathers Meeting House attracted non-Anglican parishioners from both the Nonconformist and Protestant Dissenting traditions.

For the most part ministers came from either the United States or Scotland. Although part of our history comes from the Congregationalist tradition, St. Matthew's leaned more to Scotland. Before it was 100 years old, ours was a united Presbyterian congregation and in 1841 members agreed to union with the Church of Scotland.

St. Matthew's has always had an independent streak, desiring to remain somewhat independent from church hierarchy and preferring to make its own ministerial choices. However, in 1875 St. Matthew's gave an overwhelming vote of confidence to the creation of a regional synod that would help form the new national Presbyterian Church in Canada. Accordingly, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, St. Matthew's was totally integrated into a Presbyterian framework.

However, by 1915 there was growing support in Canada for a wider union of the Protestant churches, and St. Matthew's had more choices to make.

In the winter of 1924, just over 75 per cent of St. Matthew's congregation voted to join the United Church of Canada, which brought together the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregationalist traditions. St. Matthew's was the oldest congregation to enter the union, and the only one with roots in two of the three uniting churches. Joining the United Church was described as a change "in the direction of a larger, more inclusive fellowship."

Not everyone agreed with the decision. Along with 150,000 other Presbyterians across Canada, some members of St. Matthew's refused to join the United Church. Many joined with other Halifax Presbyterians to form St. David's. Their church home -- the red brick building just up the hill on Grafton Street -- was a building given up by the Methodists at the time of church union.

Even those who voted for union didn't unequivocally embrace integration with the United Church and everything that implied. For instance, it wasn't until 1960 that St. Matthew's could say its church organization complied with the United Church Manual. A "healthy" mix of conformity and dissent has always been characteristic of this congregation, not just since church union in 1925, but from the beginning in 1749.