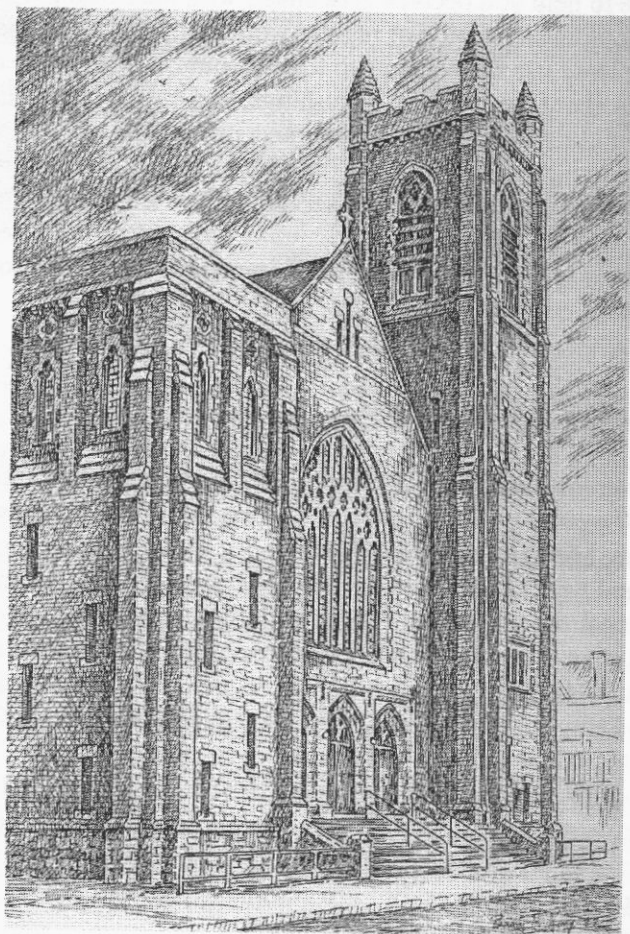


A Historical Guide to

First Metropolitan UNITED CHURCH



Reprinted courtesy of Barry F. King

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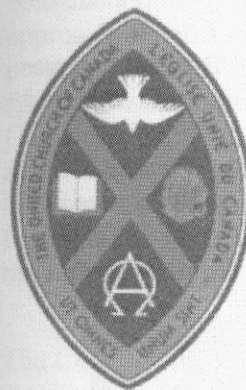
Introduction

Welcome to First Metropolitan United Church. We are pleased that you are visiting or worshipping with us today. We offer this brochure to help you become acquainted with the heritage of our church buildings. Outside of regular worship times and special events, please use the contents to tour the public areas of the church and learn about the features, furnishings, and memorials in this lovely building of faith. If you are interested in becoming part of our faith community, please contact the Church office or speak with one of the greeters at regular church services. They will put you in contact with the Newcomers Welcoming Network. We invite you, your family and friends to continue to worship with us and join us in community.

History of the Church Congregation

The congregation of First Metropolitan United Church resulted from the 1997 amalgamation of two of Victoria's historic downtown churches, Metropolitan United (Methodist background, founded in 1859) and First United (Presbyterian background, founded in 1862) at this location, the second church built by the congregation of First Presbyterian. The two founding congregations have a membership from throughout the entire metropolitan area and are drawn from all walks of life. As the largest United Church congregation in Greater Victoria, and the only United Church in the downtown area, First Metropolitan offers diverse opportunities for exploring and living the Christian faith. As well as worship, the congregation offers worship-related programs, education and communication, outreach and community services, links to community groups and organizations, and fellowship.

The congregation of Metropolitan United Church was itself the result of an amalgamation with First Congregational Church that took place shortly after union in 1925. In that year, the Methodist



Church Canada, the Congregational Union of Canada and 70% of the Presbyterian Church in Canada entered into an organic union to form the United Church of Canada. Joining as well was the small General Council of Union Churches, centered largely in Western Canada. The United Church is the largest Protestant denomination in Canada, ministering to over 3 million people in over 3,700 congregations across the country.

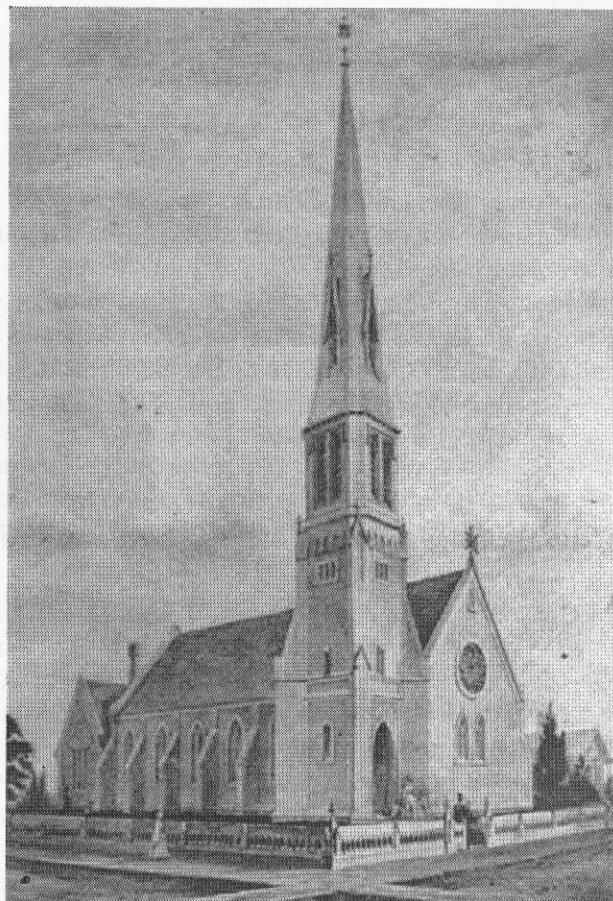
The former Metropolitan United Church at the corner of Pandora Avenue and Quadra Street was the second church built by that congregation and was opened in 1891. Additions to the church complex were built in 1952, 1959 and 1960. The Victoria Conservatory of Music now owns the complex. The former First Congregational Church building at 1600 Quadra Street was for many years the home of First Baptist Church. The building is no longer used as a house of worship.

History of the First Metropolitan Church Buildings

The First Presbyterian Church of Vancouver Island was founded in 1862 and opened its first church, designed by the firm of Wright and Sanders, on the corner of Pandora Avenue and Blanshard Street in 1863. John Wright and George Sanders, partners in the company, were both founding members of the congregation. John Wright designed the Fisgard Lighthouse and keeper's residence, the Pandora Avenue Methodist Church (the first church built by Metropolitan's congregation located at the corner of Pandora Avenue and Broad Street), Angela College on Burdett Street and many other structures before being joined in practice by his brother-in-law George Sanders. Together, they designed many residences,

churches including First Presbyterian Church and the Temple Emanu-El synagogue at 1461 Blanshard Street.

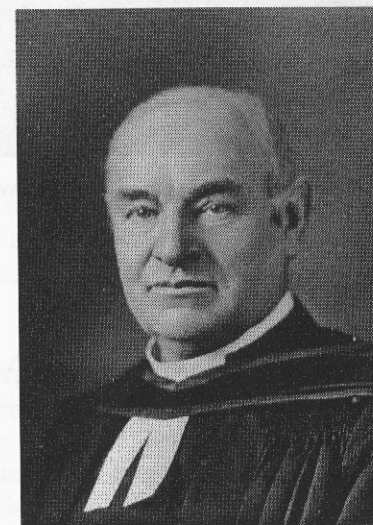
After a schism in 1866, the congregation of First Presbyterian was inactive until 1876. Following an 1883 fire that severely damaged the church, reconstruction began. The enlarged building was rededicated on January 6, 1884. As the congregation continued to grow, plans were made for a new church building. During the pre-First World War real estate boom, the Pandora Avenue church property was sold and a lot purchased at the present site.



Original First Presbyterian Church, Pandora Avenue and Blanshard Street

Architect J.C.M. Keith planned the first period of church construction in two phases. One reason for this building-in-stages approach was that the money received for the Pandora Avenue property was received in installments stretching to August 1915. The first stage saw completion of a Church School Hall by West Coast Construction Company in 1913. The congregation of the church assembled on Pandora Avenue for the last time and led by Rev. John Gibson Inkster, session, choir and Sunday School, walked to its new home on May 11, 1913. This procession foreshadowed the similar march by the united congregation of First Metropolitan in 1997.

The Church School Hall building was used for worship until the Sanctuary was completed, an urgent task as the church membership had doubled from 345 to 742 during 1913. Work began with the old cornerstone from the Pandora Avenue Church and the John Hall memorial tablet being re-laid on September 7, 1914 by Alexander Wilson, the sole survivor of the founding members of First Presbyterian. Luney Brothers excavated the site and Stevens Brothers erected the building. The new church Sanctuary was opened on May 2, 1915.



Rev. John Gibson Inkster, Minister of First Presbyterian at dedication of new Sanctuary

This Gothic Revival style concrete, red-brick and stone church was modelled after First Baptist Church in Vancouver, a structure that had impressed the building committee when they visited many churches in Vancouver and Victoria in 1912. The basement of the Sanctuary and Church School Hall housed a basketball court and a banquet hall respectively.



Laying the cornerstone for the new Sanctuary, 1914

John Charles Malcolm Keith, Architect of First Presbyterian Church, 1915

Of Scottish origin and educated in England, J.C. M. Keith began his architectural career in Scotland. After thirteen years with the architectural firm of Alexander Ross, he emigrated to California, then Seattle. He arrived in Victoria in 1891 specifically to enter the competition for the design of Christ Church Cathedral. Although his was the winning design, the buildings were not built until the 1920s. In addition to First Presbyterian Church, he designed many Victoria buildings during his 30-year career in the city. These buildings include Sir James Douglas School (now demolished, though the arch of the main entrance has been retained as a free-standing element of the school yard), the Victoria Police Station, and the Pemberton Memorial Chapel of Royal Jubilee Hospital (recently restored.)

The next major phase of construction took place in 1954 when the Fellowship Hall was erected. The hall was dedicated on January 28, 1955. Although the Church School Hall and Sanctuary were built with the needs of classes and recreation in mind, during the post World War II baby boom these quarters became too cramped. The completion of the Fellowship Hall was soon followed in 1957 by the construction of the Social Suite addition.

In 1962, the Church School Hall was severely damaged by fire. The congregation was already planning construction of the Christian Education Wing and expanded architect Charles E. Craig's contract to include rebuilding the damaged structure. Craig had previously designed the Fellowship Hall and Social Suite addition. His redesign of the Church School Hall replaced the gable roof with a flat one and divided the Hall into two rooms – the present Chapel and Doreene McLeod Room.

The rebuilding of the burnt-out section and construction of the Christian Education Wing was completed in 1964. Ironically, shortly after the construction was completed, the baby boom was tapering off, as was church attendance.

Starting January 1, 1997, following the decision to amalgamate the two congregations and to sell the Metropolitan United Church building to the Victoria Conservatory of Music, the congregation worshipped at the Pandora Avenue location for seven months. This served two purposes: it allowed the former Metropolitan United Church members to say goodbye to a building they loved and it enabled the Quadra Street building to be renovated to better serve the new combined congregation. Renovations included upgrading the Chapel, the Doreene McLeod Room, the Vestry, the Library and the Social Suite. The basement was gutted and rebuilt to accommodate the Intercultural Association. An elevator was installed to serve the needs of persons with disabilities and improve access to the basement and upper floor.

On July 27, 1997 after a service of leave-taking, the congregation marched "up the hill" to First Metropolitan United Church. Discussions started in the fall as to how best to renovate the Sanctuary. In the summer of 1998, architect Carl Petersen supervised substantial changes to the worship space while the congregation held Sunday services in the Fellowship Hall. One final addition to the structure was the construction of a purpose-built archives room.

The church facilities you see today result from these construction and renovation projects. Renovation is an ongoing process, as the congregation improves accessibility and responds to the changing needs of the congregation and community.

Touring the building

Narthex

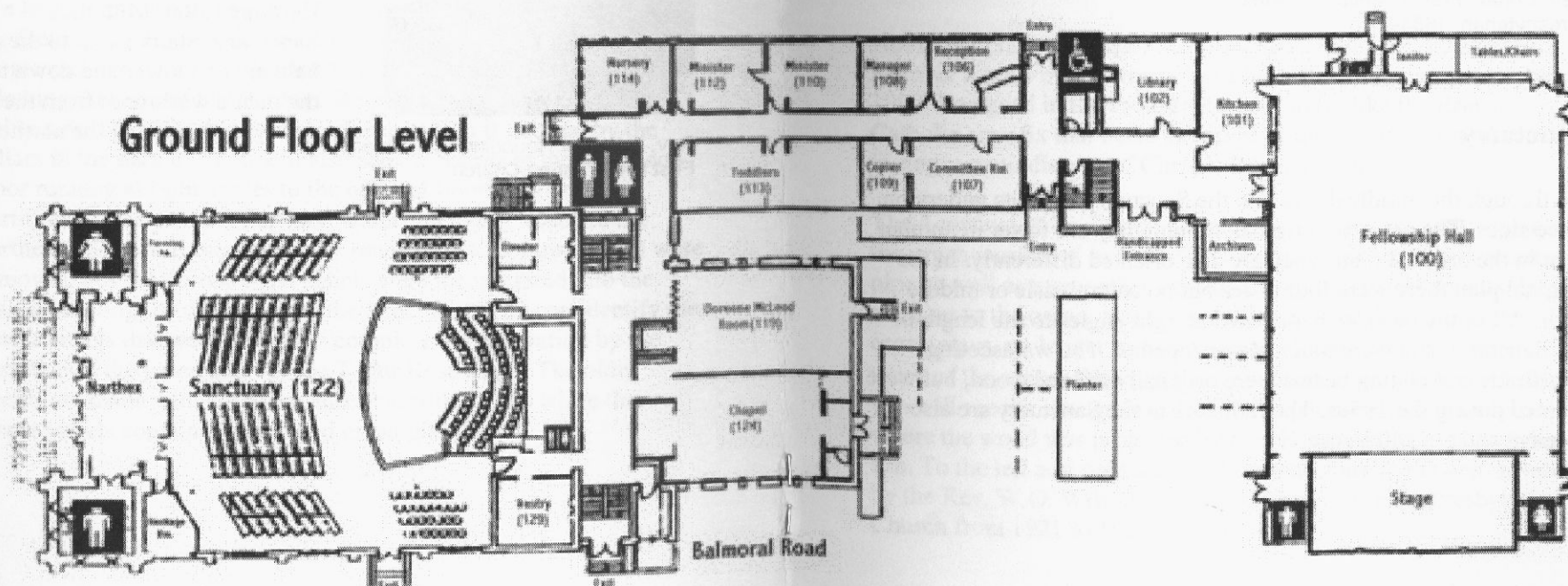
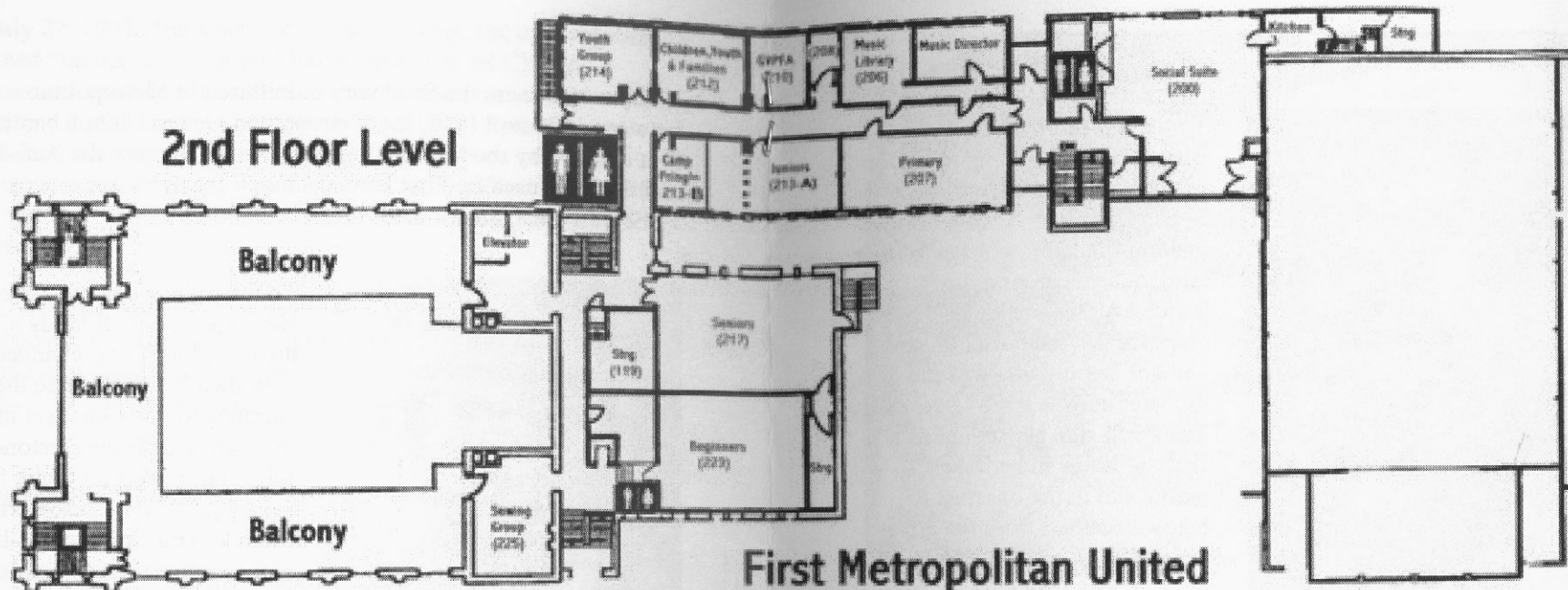
We begin our tour of the complex in the narthex (main vestibule of the Sanctuary). In the renovation of 1998, the narthex was expanded by moving the interior wall back five feet into the Sanctuary, allowing creation of the Heritage Room and Parenting Room to either side. The location of the earlier partition is marked by the pillars in the narthex. You will also see the boards in the hardwood floor running at right angles to the original flooring where the partition formerly stood. Partition walls previously added to the narthex (possibly during the 1950s renovation to control drafts) were removed, but the stained glass panels were incorporated into the wall separating the narthex from the Sanctuary. You can identify the newer panels that were needed to complete the renovation by the variation in the green glass of the Tudor Rose motif. The older panels are made with a streaky, machine-rolled glass while the newer panels contain a hammered green glass.

In the entrance are the Sanctuary pulpit used in Metropolitan between 1920 and 1960, the Metropolitan United Church baptismal font donated by the Metropolitan Couples Club (now the Acti-Mets), and the table used by First United Church for its visitor's book from 1949 until amalgamation.



Rev. John Hall, founding Minister of
First Presbyterian Church

To the right of the entrance is the Heritage Room. It holds a display of artifacts, changed periodically. Just inside the entrance to this room, set into the wall, are the cornerstone and John Hall memorial tablet from the original First Presbyterian Church. You can catch a glimpse of the cornerstone and tablet through the window into the Heritage Room from the Sanctuary. Stairs go up to the balcony and tower and down to the men's washroom from the right (south) side of the narthex.



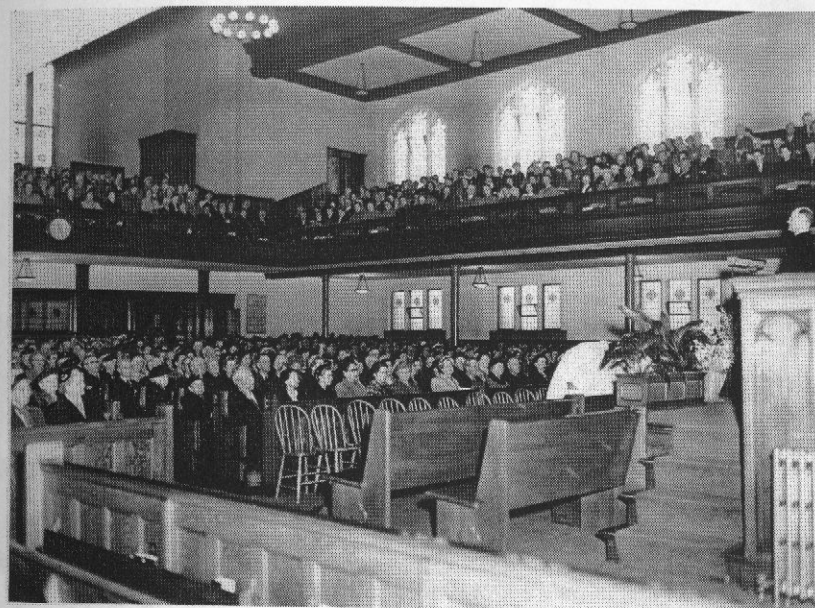


Rev. Donald Fraser, Minister of First Presbyterian, 1884-91

Sanctuary

Go through the middle doors into the Sanctuary, with its gallery on three sides. The pews are original, though they are fewer in number than in the original plan. They are also oriented differently. In the original plan there were four aisles but no central aisle or middle door. All of the pews were oriented at right angles to the length of the Sanctuary and were much closer together. The wainscoting, balustrade and ceiling beams were originally stained wood, but were painted during the 1950s. The radiators in the Sanctuary are also original and are still in use.

To the left (north) of the entrance is a parenting room for families with young children. This room is also used by brides making final adjustments to their attire before entering the Sanctuary. Just inside its entrance is a memorial to Rev. Donald Fraser, who was the minister between 1884 and 1891. The north side also contains a first aid room and a ladies' washroom in the basement below accessed from the north staircase.



Sanctuary before woodwork was painted

Above the chancel hangs a 12-foot cross crafted by congregation member Kees Vogel in memory of his sister and hung in October 1999. Designed in the Protestant tradition (unlike the Roman Catholic crucifix that bears an image of the crucified Jesus) the cross is empty reminding us of Christ's Resurrection.

The 4-manual Allen Digital Organ was installed in 1999, replacing the organ purchased in 1933. The organ is capable of full volume pipe as well as many other versatile, even whimsical sounds. In addition to the organ, a Steinway piano is used during services. The organ pipes, no longer in use, conceal 34 speakers that produce the voice of the organ. Walk up the main aisle. If you look carefully, you will see the change in colour in the paneling below the pipes where the wood was protected by the choir pews from fading due to sun. To the left and right side of the chancel are hymn boards built by the Rev. W.G. Wilson, who was Minister of First Presbyterian Church from 1921 to 1938.



View of cross and large west window of Sanctuary (photo by J. Mason)

At the front of the main aisle, turn around to view the large west window at the back of the Sanctuary. This window, restored in 2000, has a pattern of interlocking crosses in the lancets and quatrefoil tracery lights. On both sides of the main window, notice the organ pipes. These are non-functional and hide two of the organ's speakers. They and the portion of the wall above the balcony exits were added during renovations in 1998.

Returning your gaze to the chancel, you will see a communion table donated in memory of David Moore McCall, the pulpit, and two flower stands donated in memory of Frederick Halpin Cole. Although built at different times, these furnishings have a similar design featuring a gothic (pointed) arch. A matching large pulpit used previously and donated in memory of Sidney G. Watts sits behind a screen at the far right hand (south) side of the Sanctuary. A pair of flower pedestals donated in memory of Captain and Mrs. W. H. Whiteley and Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Whiteley, late members of Metropolitan United church, is also found in the transepts to either side of the chancel platform.

To the left (north) of the chancel, memorial plaques are set into the wall, commemorating those of the First Presbyterian/United Church congregation who died during the First and Second World Wars. A locked cabinet holds a Book of Remembrance from Metropolitan United Church listing members serving in both wars as well as members of the First Congregational Church who served in World War I. Below the plaques and cabinet is the communion table from Metropolitan United Church.

A memorial of carved wood listing members of the congregation of First Congregational Church who died in World War I is located on the adjacent wall. Three original Minister's chairs from First United grace the wall below the First Congregational memorial plaque. These Minister's chairs and a baptismal font were designed to match the pews and were built by the same manufacturer, Berlin Interior Hardwood Company of Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario.

On either side of the chancel, hang two of the banners in the church's collection; many of these banners were created by talented needlewoman Katherine Inglis. They are changed seasonally. Proceeding toward the door at the right side of the chancel, you will find a cabinet displaying two Books of Memory recording gifts to the church. The cabinet is designed to match the communion table and pulpit.

Beyond the door, you are entering the earliest part of the building (i.e., the Church School Hall) to be constructed. To the left is the control panel for the Flemish carillon, which was donated by the Onwegos, a bible class for boys, in memory of its late leader, R.G. Howell. This carillon was damaged in the 1962 fire and was built and restored by the Schulmerich Carillon, Inc. of Carillon Hill, Sellersville, PA. The carillon can be played like a player piano and has similar perforated rolls. To the right of the hallway is the Vestry (Rm. 129) now occupied by the Health and Wellness Coordinator.

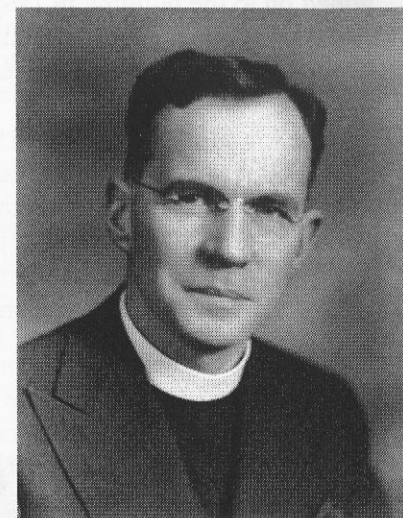
Former Church School Hall

The hallway leads into a concourse that runs the width of the building. Across the concourse is the flower room (Rm. 127). Proceeding to the left, you will find the Chapel (Rm. 124) on your right hand side. The Chapel located in approximately half of the main floor of the old Church School Hall building was created in 1964. Above the door to the Chapel, hangs a large bas relief wood carving of the Last Supper, created by Jack Bains. Inside the Chapel, note the cherry wood paneling on the walls, the Celtic Cross in the chancel and 1960s style light fixtures with their cross motif. Hanging in the chapel is a newly installed quilted wall hanging, created by Joyalle Bunyan-Maynard and other women of the congregation. The hanging symbolizes the liturgical year through its use of colour and intensity of hue, with the white symbolizing the feast days of Christmas, Epiphany, Easter and Pentecost. The chapel also contains the baptismal font from the Metropolitan United Church Chapel.

Located next door to the chapel, the Doreene McLeod Room (Rm. 119) is used for receptions, meetings and fellowship. It was dedicated in memory of Doreene McLeod, who was very active in organizing women's groups and couples' clubs in the church during the tenure of her husband, the Rev. Hugh McLeod as Minister of First United Church. The photograph of her hanging in the entry to the room was her engagement gift to Hugh.



Doreene McLeod



Rev. Hugh McLeod

Returning to the concourse from the Doreene McLeod Room, enter the short hallway leading back to the Sanctuary. From this hall, you may access the elevator. To the left of the elevator is a glass case with displays of artifacts. Above the case, hang four wood bas relief carvings, created by Jack Bains. These depict the story of the Prodigal Son, the flogging in the courtyard, knocking at the door, and Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Return to the concourse and walk through the double doors and down the ramp into the newest part of the complex.

Christian Education Wing and Fellowship Hall

The Christian Education Wing connects the main church building and the Fellowship Hall. It houses classrooms and offices. Beyond the church office on the north-east side of the building are the Mountford Library (Rm. 102) and the kitchen built as part of the Social Suite addition. The library is named after Florence Mountford, who was instrumental in establishing and enhancing the library at Metropolitan United Church. Just outside the Fellowship Hall on the right, is the Jones-Pitchford Archives Room that was

added on to the building in 1999. It is named in honour of Alvin Jones and Janet Pitchford, archivists of First United and Metropolitan United respectively.

The Fellowship Hall, built in 1954 at a cost of approximately \$110,000, has a large gymnasium floor and stage, with change rooms below. Note the glue-lam beams and the details of the windows. It is used for sports, presentations, congregational social gatherings, night shelter for street youth and inner city dinners. Above the kitchen on the second floor is the Social Suite (Room 200), used for many purposes.



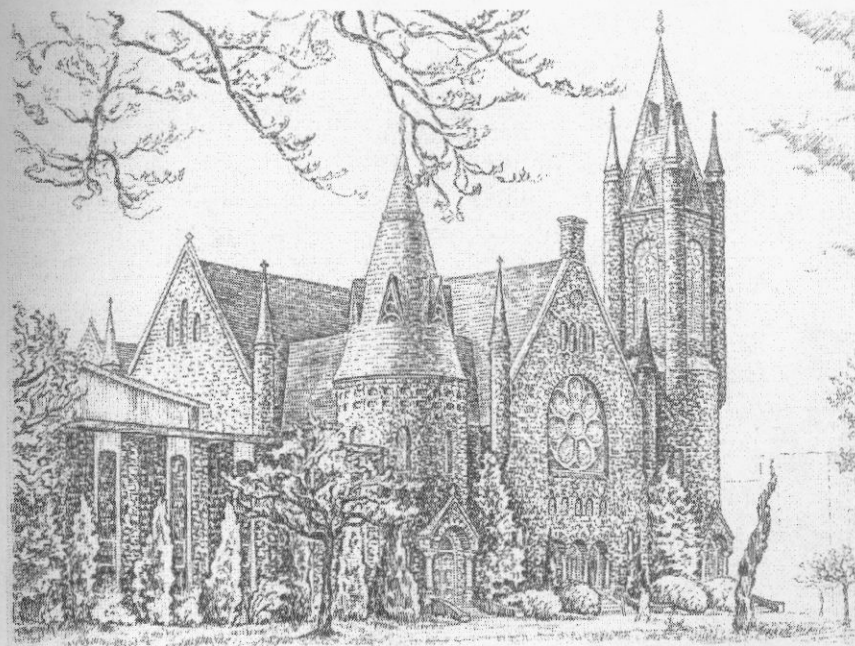
Exterior of Fellowship Hall (photo by J. Mason)

Church Exterior

Leaving the church through the Balmoral Road exit, stop to view the exterior of the building. First look at the south side of the Fellowship Hall with its cement-block construction incorporating the cross in the wall detail. Then note the Gothic Revival red-brick construction of the main church building. If you look carefully at the gable-end of

the main church, you will see the outline of the gable roof of the Church School building before the fire of 1962. Below the roof line, notice an inset rectangle of newer brick where five windows were originally located.

Walk west toward Quadra Street. If you look down Quadra Street to the south, you will see the former First Congregational Church on the right side of the street at 1600 Quadra. Its American Classical Revival style reflects the American roots of the Congregationalist Church. If you walk past the building with its large Ionic columns, you will notice the words "First Baptist Church" engraved on the entablature above the Ionic columns, acknowledging its use by this congregation in the years following union of the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist Churches. On the left side of the street is the nearby Anglican Church of St. John the Divine with its own interpretation of the Gothic Revival style.



Metropolitan United Church (Reprinted courtesy of Barry F. King)

Beyond you may catch a glimpse of the former Metropolitan United Church, now the Victoria Conservatory of Music. Victoria architect Thomas Hooper chose a Romanesque style for this Koksilah Island rough-cut stone Methodist church. His design owes much to the well-known American architect, Henry Hobson Richardson. Hooper also designed the British Columbia Protestant Orphanage (now Cridge Centre), the Victoria Carnegie library and many commercial buildings in downtown Victoria.

Walking to the north side of the building, you can enter the small garden space and see the large Spanish chestnut tree (*Castanea sativa*) planted in 1914 and now designated a heritage tree by the Heritage Tree Society of Victoria.

Acknowledgements

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- records in the archives
- *One Hundred Years, 1862 – 1962, First United Church, Victoria, BC* (a church history published in its centennial year)
- the City of Victoria bylaw giving heritage status to the church building
- *Building the West: the early architects of British Columbia* by Donald Luxton (Vancouver, BC: Talon Books, 2003)
- *Exploring Victoria's Architecture* by Martin Segger and Douglas Franklin (Victoria, BC: Sono Nis Press, 1996)
- *Victoria's Landmarks* by Geoffrey Castle and Barry F. King (Victoria, BC: Geoffrey Castle and Barry F. King, 1985)
- Ed Schaefer of Mercer and Schaefer Glasstudios

Photographs are from the church archives, unless otherwise noted.