

Aurora United Church to formally celebrate 200th anniversary Sunday



By Brock Weir

53 years ago, Aurora resident Bob McRoberts first put on his choir robes.

Aged just 12, he had followed his mother's lead and decided to lend his voice to the group which sent theirs soaring through the vaulted ceilings of Aurora United Church.

Those vaulted ceilings may be a part of Aurora's history following the church's disastrous fire in the Spring of 2014, but the congregation itself remains and will formally celebrate its 200th anniversary with a special service this Sunday at their temporary home at Trinity Anglican Church.

And, as he has for just about every Sunday of his life, Mr. McRoberts will be there to once again lend his voice to the spiritual experience.

?When I started that September, one of the first outings that choir had was to go down and see The Sound of Music when it was first in theatres, and I have been an active member of the choir ever since,? he says.

A history buff, Mr. McRoberts has been an active member of the committee steering the bicentennial celebrations, alongside, among others, Helen Roberts, the Aurora United Church community's long-time historian.

?Sunday will be an amazing service because they are bringing in all our music: the choirs, all the bell [choirs] and there are going to be a couple of great guest musicians as well,? Ms. Roberts tells The Auroran, noting long-time congregants will also receive a blast from the past when it comes time to take communion. If you have ever taken communion in a United Church in the past, you know it was served in the pews from communion sets that have little tiny glasses and a platter. The platter was served first with the bits of bread and then the sets of glasses with grape juice would be served down and each person would get a tiny glass. We haven't served it that way for a number of years ? now we usually serve from the altar ? but those communion sets were one of the few things that survived the fire.?

The communion sets, she explains, were stored in a different part of the church, apart from the main sanctuary that was levelled by the fire, but they survived in tact and will be pressed into service once again.

A highlight of the church service will be an address from Nora Sanders, Secretary of the General Council of the United Church of Canada which Ms. Roberts says promises to be a rousing talk.

?This is the big culmination of our year,? she says. ?It will be followed by the congregational turkey dinner in November which harkens back to years ago when we always used to have a turkey dinner, then we'll wind up the year.?

It has been a year that has included not only a service, but also an exhibition at the Aurora Museum & Archives celebrating the church's ongoing history at Yonge and Tyler Streets, as well as the revision and update of a book first published to mark the church's centenary, which will be on sale at Trinity this Sunday.

A lot has happened over the past 200 years, and a lot will happen in the century ahead as Aurora United Church inches towards breaking ground on a new church building at their spiritual centre on that small corner on Yonge Street.

?I think we have actually accomplished quite a bit,? says Ms. Roberts of the 200th Anniversary year. ?We were a small committee

and it has been a good year. Everything that we have planned and hoped to do has worked so far and I think, with help from other people in the congregation, outside people like Shawna White and Michelle Johnson (at the Aurora Museum and Archives), it has just all come together very nicely. It has been a good year, but if we had a new building it would be an even better year!?

Mr. McRoberts shares similar sentiments.

?I am looking forward to having a new home,? he says. ?I am hoping that ? and I think it probably will ? a new building will help some of the members of the church to return. It is wonderful the Anglicans in Town have shared their sanctuary and building with us so that we can gather and sing, think and talk, and socialize, but I think having a new home [will be a hub] for community groups.? Aurora United Church's 200th anniversary service will take place this Sunday, October 28, at 11 a.m. at Trinity Anglican Church on Victoria Street. The service, featuring performances from the AUC Chancel Choir, Faith-A-Peal, EmBellished & Bellissimo Handbell Ensembles, the Alderbury Gardens Brass Quartet, and Wesley Bells on the violin, will be followed by a lunch following worship.