

# Canberra City Uniting Church

## HISTORY

The construction of the present church facilities and office block marked a dramatic step forward by a pilgrim church which, on 16th January 1929, as a homeless group of ten pioneers, decided that a Fellowship of Congregationalists be formed in Canberra.

For its first ten years the church worshipped jointly with the Methodists but conducted its own meetings and preserved its own identity. Thereafter, with its own Minister, the church worshipped at the YWCA Civic Centre until its own church hall was erected more than a decade later.

In 1940, the present church site was allocated for use by the Canberra Congregational Fellowship. A church hall was opened on this site on 6 December 1952 and kindergarten extensions were added in 1953. The Canberra Congregational National Memorial Church, with substantial assistance from Congregationalists throughout Australia, was opened on 14 November 1959.

The Uniting Church in Australia came into being on 22 June, 1977. It flowed from the union of Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. This Church then became known as the Canberra City Uniting Church.

In 1985 the church and hall were demolished to make way for the present church and office building. The pilgrim church returned to the wilderness and for two years worshipped in a builder's hut provided on site, growing in strength and planning enthusiastically for the future.

The new church and other facilities were opened on 20 February, 1988.

## THE CHURCH

In 1985 a study tour was undertaken by the Rev. Michael Johnson, Minister of the church and Mr George Neill, Architect of the firm Davenport Campbell & Partners, Sydney. Its objective was to gather information concerning recent church buildings in matters of design and materials, with particular emphasis on churches in commercial settings where there had been redevelopment of church sites. Many of the design features in the church relate directly to this investigative work. Architects having special input to the project were George Neill, Arnis Budlevskis and Bill Kiddell. Particular design features are outlined below.

*High Narrow Window* with triangular window above was a feature of a number of Irish churches visited. Its intention is to

provide a strong shaft of light to focus attention on the sanctuary area.

*Steel Tubular Spire* of thirty six metres in height had its inspiration from the Biblical Church in Tokyo which in their case used an open steel framework to indicate that a building which in outward appearance matched adjoining office blocks was in fact a church.

*The external shape of the church* is defined by its granite cladding. It has a moulded form to give it a specific identity and to indicate that the building had a different function and use from those of the office buildings which surround it. The spire and the cross declare it to be a place of worship. The design concept comes from St Peter's Lutheran Church, New York City. The granite cladding was chosen because it is a durable material requiring little maintenance. Its colours and finish provide a significant contrast with materials used in adjoining buildings. The stone is 'rosa porina' and comes from Spain.

*The Slate Floor* gives a live acoustic quality and is easy to clean and maintain. Slate is used exclusively in Irish churches. The slate is blue-grey and comes from Africa.

*The Chapel Walls* are of glass blocks which come from Germany. Two styles of block are used to maintain architectural lines from the church.

*The Plaza* immediately in front of the church is known as "Pilgrim Place". It gives the church a setting in the market place. The church is thus identified as having a ministry to the commercial offices and belongs within the business centre of the city. The design was influenced by the Church of St Joan of Arc in Rouen, France which has a central position in the city's marketplace.

*The Church Materials* include Australian Silver Ash panelling, Besser fluted blocks and blue-grey African slate.

*The Chapel* can be used either for small services of worship or can form part of the main church for larger services. The previous City Church had a similar arrangement.

*The Narthex* is a gathering place for people as they prepare themselves for worship and is used also as a place where people mix socially after the service. One section of it is designated a lounge and is an area for relaxed conversation. The design concept has a relationship to the Church Parlour that many American churches have, and also to the provision of a separate lounge area such as is provided in the Korean Church, Tokyo.

*Cooling and Heating* are provided by a combined system of forced air ventilation and underfloor heating.

## FURNISHINGS

While many furnishings were new, many others have a long association with the congregations worshipping on this site.

*From the Hall*, which served as both church and hall, we have the font, some of the Elders' chairs, the narthex table and the stained glass window near the basement stairs.

*From the Church* we have the communion table and lectern in the chapel, the pulpit (formerly a reading desk) and the Memorial Book and its desk in the Steele Craik Lounge.

*New Furnishings* included the communion table, the lectern, two flower stands and the choir railing. The Sri Lankan lamps and the Tongan Tapa are special gifts.

*Plaques* of various kinds and the foundation stones and plates commemorating the opening of earlier church buildings are to be found throughout the buildings. A charred cross mounted in an oak frame was made from a piece of timber from the City Temple Church, London which was destroyed in wartime is in the Binns Room. An oak plaque with a carving of the Mayflower, a gift from the United States, and a decorative plaster plaque depicting the family of humanity copied in bronze are displayed in Pilgrim House.

*Stained Glass Windows* are from a church now demolished near Salisbury, England and date from the nineteenth century.

*Organ*. The church organ was built by George Fincham and Sons, Melbourne in 1925 for St Andrews Presbyterian Church, Goulburn. It is a gift from the Goulburn Uniting Parish. It has tubular pneumatic action and has been restored by David Hudd Pty. Ltd. of Melbourne. It has two manuals and pedals with eighteen speaking stops and five couplers.

## CHURCH FACILITIES

The Church has normal seating for 320 persons, including 30 in the chapel. It has a Children's Room (Loki Pepe) with audio facilities and changing room.

*The Steele Craik Lounge* is part of the Narthex, a comfortable space for conversation.

*The Read Vestry* is for use by the minister. Nearby is a small room for the preparation of flowers and the elements for communion.

*The Johnson Auditorium* has tiered seating and can accommodate just under 200 persons. It can be used for alternative styles of worship services, lectures, chamber music recitals, conferences, film projection etc.

*The Riley Hall* can be used for many purposes: youth activity, lectures and catered-for meals. It can seat 120 for lectures, 100 for meals. A well-equipped kitchen adjoins.

The Gifford Room can also be used in many ways: for Junior Church, for meetings and as an ante room to the Riley Hall.

The Binns Room is also a room capable of flexible use as choir vestry or meeting room.

Church Offices - enable effective administration of congregational activities and use of facilities.

Early Morning Centre - used as a shopfront to provide services to the community

### NAMING OF ROOMS

The following persons have been honoured:

The Rev. John Bennett (Minister of the Church 1971-81) and Dorothy Bennett.

Ken and Amy Binns. Foundation members of the Congregation.

Don and Audrey Steele Craik. Long term members of the Congregation.

Mr & Mrs E. H. Gifford. Generous benefactors of the Congregation. The Gifford Kindergarten was opened in 1953 as a result of their generosity.

The Rev. Michael Johnson (Minister of the Church 1982-88) and Frances Johnson.

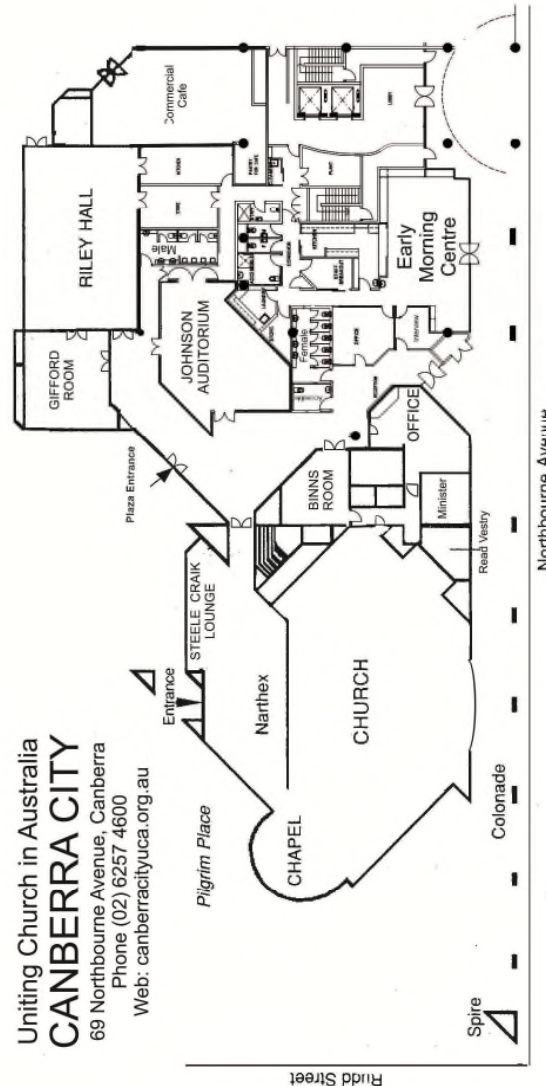
The Rev. Horace Read (Minister of the Church 1962-71) and Edith Read.

The Rev. Doug Riley (Minister of the Church 1940-42) and Joyce Riley.

### GENERAL FEATURES OF THE OFFICE BUILDINGS

Two main entrances: One is at 69 Northbourne Avenue to serve church facilities and first floor tenants, this portion of the building being known as 'Pilgrim House'. The other is at 71 Northbourne Avenue, the main lift lobby which serves the upper floors. Materials in the lift lobby include Carrara marble from Italy, reconstituted granite tiles from Japan and polished aluminium panels from Australia. Lifts serve five upper floors and two basement levels.

Basement contains two levels of car park. The church owns 50 spaces only for income purposes, but has access to 200 spaces on mezzanine level for its use on Sundays and after hours on weekdays.



Uniting Church in Australia  
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# Information for Visitors



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