Christ Church of Chicago

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Gathering Place Name Also Connects to:

- Chicago Union Church
- St. Mark's English Evangelical Lutheran Church
- Temple Emmanuel

Historical Overview

Christ Church of Chicago, previously known as the Chicago Union Church, began in 1946 when 16 survivors of Japanese internment camps came together in Chicago, Illinois to form a congregation dedicated to creating community despite the exclusionary practices to which they had been subjected.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 in February 1942. This order resulted in the relocation and internment of Japanese Americans regardless of age, place, or relationship to the attack on Pearl Harbor. The founding member of the Chicago Union Church emerged from the horrific experience determined to create a community of opportunity and inclusion beyond race.

The group, known as the Issei, or first-generation Americans, first met on May 12, 1946, in a member's apartment and in a few short months their small congregation grew rapidly. On November 10, 1946, the congregation moved into Epworth Methodist Church. As the congregation continued to grow the Issei knew it was time to add a Nissei, or second-generation American, Church. After receiving approval from the Chicago Congregational Union, the first Nisei service was held on April 11, 1948.

Despite a steadily growing congregation, the Chicago Union Church struggled to find a space that would satisfy their congregation's needs in the long term. As a member of the United Church of Christ, the congregation had to seek approval for relocation from the parent organization. Therefore, it was not until November of 1953, that the Chicago Missionary Society approved the purchase of a new home. By 1954 the congregation had grown from 29 members to 139 members, 23 non-residents, and 90 children; a larger, more defined space was desperately needed. On March 16, 1954, the Chicago Union Church purchased Temple Emanuel, renaming it Buckingham Place, for $50,000 and held their first joint Issei/Nisei service on the 28th of the same month. It would be in this new home that the congregation would pass a constitutional amendment in 1970 renaming the organization as Christ Church of Chicago, United Church of Christ.

The congregation would remain at Buckingham Place until 1987 when a reduction in membership no longer warranted such a large space. Therefore, the group opted to sell Buckingham Place and move to a temporary home at the Japanese American Services Committee (JASC). While temporarily housed at the JASC, the congregation began renting space at Bethany United Church of Christ so that the Christ Church of Chicago congregation would have consistent access to its own chapel, church office, pastor's study, multi-purpose room, and classroom. However, this would not be the congregation's forever home. In the year 2000, Christ Church of Chicago purchased St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church where they remained in 2023 when this report was compiled.

After purchasing St. Mark's English Evangelical Lutheran Church, the congregation has done little to change the appearance of the space. One of their major additions has been the handmade banners that now hang in the main sanctuary and represent the values of the congregation. Due to the exclusion of Japanese Americans

in public activities throughout the twentieth century, Christ Church has often had its own sports teams and hosted other recreational activities for members and non-members. The Church has also turned their basement theater into a dojo and brought life to the exterior of their building with a pride banner and community garden.

Since their founding in 1946, Christ Church of Chicago (who occasionally calls themselves Tri-C) has been a beacon of hope and acceptance within religious spaces. The congregation has had multiple female ministers and has supported the LGBTQ+ community. Originally founded as a safe place for survivors of Japanese internment camps, Tri-C prides itself on being "an open and affirming congregation of the United Church of Christ." (Tri-C website)

Timeline

5/12/1946	The first meeting of the Issei Church was held in the apartment of the late Mr. O. Koshino at 856 Wilson Avenue. They had 16 members and were known as the Chicago Union Church.
11/10/1946	The Congregation rents space in Epworth Methodist Church.
1947	The Issei met with the Chicago Congregational Union to discuss the founding of a Nisei Church.
4/11/1948	The first Nisei service was held in the Chicago Congregational Union conference room at the YMCA located at 19 South LaSalle Street and included 29 members.
3/1949	Reverend George Aki, from Fresno, California, becomes the first ordained minister of Christ Congregational Church. He serves as minister until 1960.
11/8/1953	The Chicago Missionary Society approves the search of a new home for the congregation.
3/16/1954	The Congregation purchases the Temple Emanuel for $50,000.
3/28/1954	The first joint Issei/Nisei service was held at Temple Emanuel.
5/2/1954	Temple Emanuel is dedicated as Buckingham Place.
1954	The congregation grows from 29 to 139 plus 23 non-resident members and 90 children.
1958	Christ Congregational Church becomes financially independent.
1961	George Nishimoto serves as pastor.
1964	Tsuneo Miyashiro serves as pastor.
1967	Keith Torney serves as minister.
5/24/1970	After the passing of a constitutional amendment, the church's corporate name was changed to Christ Church of Chicago, United Church of Christ.
1972	Neal McPherson serves as minister.
1980	William Hirshfeld serves as minister.
1981	Edward Biergert serves as minister part time.
1987	David Hirano serves as minister.
4/19/1987	The Temple Emanuel building was sold after a reduction in membership at the last service held on Easter Sunday 1987.
4/26/1987	The Japanese American Services Committee became the new home of Christ Church of Chicago as the congregation searched for a more permanent residence.
9/1988	Christ Church of Chicago signs an agreement with Bethany United Church of Christ to rent 1713 W. Cullom where the congregation would now have consistent access to its own chapel, church office, pastor's study, multi-purpose room, and classroom.
1990	Sharon Thorton serves as minister.
1995	Joseph Liang serves as minister.
1996	Barbara Taylor serves as minister.
2000	Christ Church of Chicago purchases St. Mark's English Evangelical Lutheran Church, at 6047 N. Rockwell in West Rogers Park, originally built in 1926.

Annotated Bibliography

Christ Church of Chicago. WordPress, 2023. https://christchurchchicago.wordpress.com/.

The congregation's website's "About" section contains a brief history of Christ Church of Chicago's journey to the present in 2023. It includes the congregation's mission, invitation, and history that the gathering place report desired to expand upon with further research.

Gathering Place Records. Held in the church office of Christ Church of Chicago. Chicago, IL

Christ Church of Chicago's church office holds the *50th Anniversary A Celebration of Faith* Booklet from 1998. Within its pages is a detailed history of the congregation as they moved from a small apartment in Chicago to Bethany United Church of Christ. The office also holds anniversary books for the 10th and 25th anniversaries, as well as numerous yearbooks that convey financial reports, membership lists, and activity information.