



DARWIN MEMORIAL UNITING CHURCH

Honouring the past, transforming the present, creating the future

Celebrating Acts of Peace and Reconciliation

The city of Darwin in Australia's Northern Territory was bombed on 19 February 1942 by the same Japanese Imperial force which devastated Hawaii and led by the same commander, Mitsuo Fuchida. Bombing continued across Darwin and northern Australia for many months after the initial attack.

The destruction caused by the 1942 attacks to land-based facilities and accommodation were rectified within a reasonable time. However, the eight ships sunk in Darwin harbour were not salvaged until nearly twenty years after the end of the war.



Fujita Salvage Company vessels in Darwin Harbour
Northern Territory Library, Norman C. Pearce Collection,
PH0088/0080



Men from Fujita Salvage L-R: Kazutaka Kobayashi (Chief Operator of Salvages), Sohei Fujita (older brother), Ryugo Fujita (father: President, Fujita Salvage Company), Senichiro Fujita (younger brother), Takeichiro Yukiata (Chief of Workers)
Northern Territory Library, Frank J. Clegg Collection, PH0841/0003

Ironically the salvage was done by a Japanese company Nanyo Bokki Kaisha Limited owned by Mr Ryugo Fujita. This became a very controversial issue in Australia. People were angry that the contract was given to a Japanese company. Most of the anger was expressed in Sydney and Melbourne and not so much in Darwin where the salvaging people were made welcome. Amazingly this controversy sparked a remarkable act of peace by Mr Ryugo Fujita.



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United States Military Headquarters, formerly McClure's Flats, Peel Street, Darwin
Northern Territory Library, Nancy Eddy Collection, PH0255/0104

In 1956 the decision was made to build a new church on land which had been the site of the United States Military Headquarters during the Second World War.

The building had received a direct hit by a large bomb. It is on this site that the church was constructed.

At the time of the salvage operations, Detective Sergeant Barry Tiernan was responsible as a member of the Police Special Branch for ensuring the safety of the movements of the Fujita Company workers. Mr Tiernan was also a member of the Church. He later recalled that Mr Ryugo Fujita explained to him why he had bid for the salvage tender. As a Christian, one of Mr Fujita's compelling reasons was personally to make some reparation for the damage that had been caused by the Japanese bombing in 1942. Since this church building was under construction at the time, it seems that Mr Tiernan and Mr Fujita were also thinking about some way for him to become involved in this new church.

Encouraged by his Japanese (Christian) church, the Japanese Ambassador to Australia, the architect of the newly constructed Darwin United Church and his own pacifist inclination, Mr Fujita decided to fashion seventy-seven bronze crosses crafted from metal from the salvaged ship MV Zealandia.



The vessel *British Motorist* refloated and used by Fujita Salvage as accommodation for workers.
Northern Territory Library, Lois & Geoff Helyar Collection, PH0092/0019

These crosses were donated to the church to be permanently displayed as a sign of peace and reconciliation.

The United Church in the Japanese city of Kyoto donated pulpit and lectern frontals to the new Memorial Church. The material is pure Japanese silk, with two symbols woven into the fabric. One symbol is an ocean wave and the other, a group of birds called Chidore or Plover. The birds, which express a spirit of joy, are carrying the Christian message across the seas.



Interior of the Memorial Church 23 July 1960
Northern Territory Library, Fay Cheater Collection, PH0049/0519

These words came with their gift: *"May this gift re-unite two United Churches in Kyoto and Darwin as a symbol of reconciliation in Christ."*

The new building was opened on 23 July 1960 and dedicated as a memorial to *"people of all denominations killed in Darwin during the war"*. Speaking at the opening ceremony Mr Fujita said he was grateful the gifts would help peace and goodwill between Japan and Australia. Ambassador Narita told the people it was unfortunate Darwin had become a theatre of war and so many had lost their lives.



Mr Ryugo Fujita speaking at the opening of the Memorial Church
Northern Territory Library, June Truskett Collection, PH0520/0006

Mr Narita added that the gifts to the church were a symbol of the fact that there would never again be war between Australia and Japan.

"Now, half a generation later, I greet with pleasure the establishment of friendly relations between Australia and Japan."



Interior of Church, August 1960,
bronze crosses fixed to the pews
Northern Territory Library, Steve Lorman Collection,
PH0141/0761



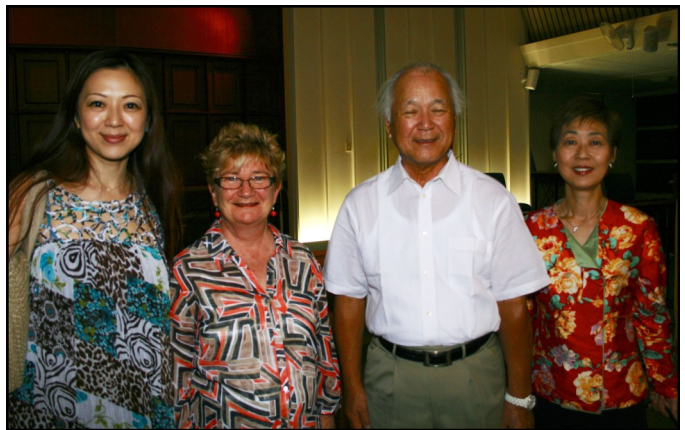
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The Fujita family has maintained links with Darwin and with the Memorial Church. In 2010 Mr Senichiro Fujita passed the company's records of the salvage operation to the Northern Territory Government for preservation. Most recently at a public event held in the church, Mr Fujita charged his daughter with responsibility for continuing contact with the church into the future.

Members of the Darwin Memorial Uniting Church congregation strongly believe that the crosses as gifts of peace and reconciliation must be shared with Darwin and the wider Australian and international communities. Planning is under way to create a museum type display telling the story of this act of reconciliation and peace by the Fujita Salvage Company. We hope it will become a major attraction for the people and visitors of Darwin.



Mr Senichiro Fujita and family with Rev Elizabeth Warschauer, Darwin Memorial Uniting Church, July 2013

To complement this, the younger members of our congregation are developing a garden in the style of a Japanese garden. This will provide a space for quiet and contemplation in the heart of Darwin's central business district.

For more information on this project please contact the Fujita Project Task Group through the church office email address: dmuc@bigpond.com

Sources:

The Northern Territory News, 26 July 1960

A United Church At The Northern Gateway, booklet compiled for the opening of the Memorial Church in July 1960 by Rev Norman Pearce

The connection between the Fujita Family and the Darwin Memorial Uniting Church,
Dr Wendy Beresford-Maning, July 2013

Celebrating Acts of Peace and Reconciliation, document prepared by the Fujita Project Task Group, Darwin Memorial Uniting Church, July 2014

Photograph of Darwin Memorial Uniting Church 2013
Dr Wendy Beresford-Maning



A SPACE FOR GOD
IN THE CITY'S HEART
Darwin Memorial Uniting Church 2013

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