



## Sharing the Language of Faith

By the Rev. Dr. Emily Bisset,  
Calvin Presbyterian Church  
in Toronto, Ont.

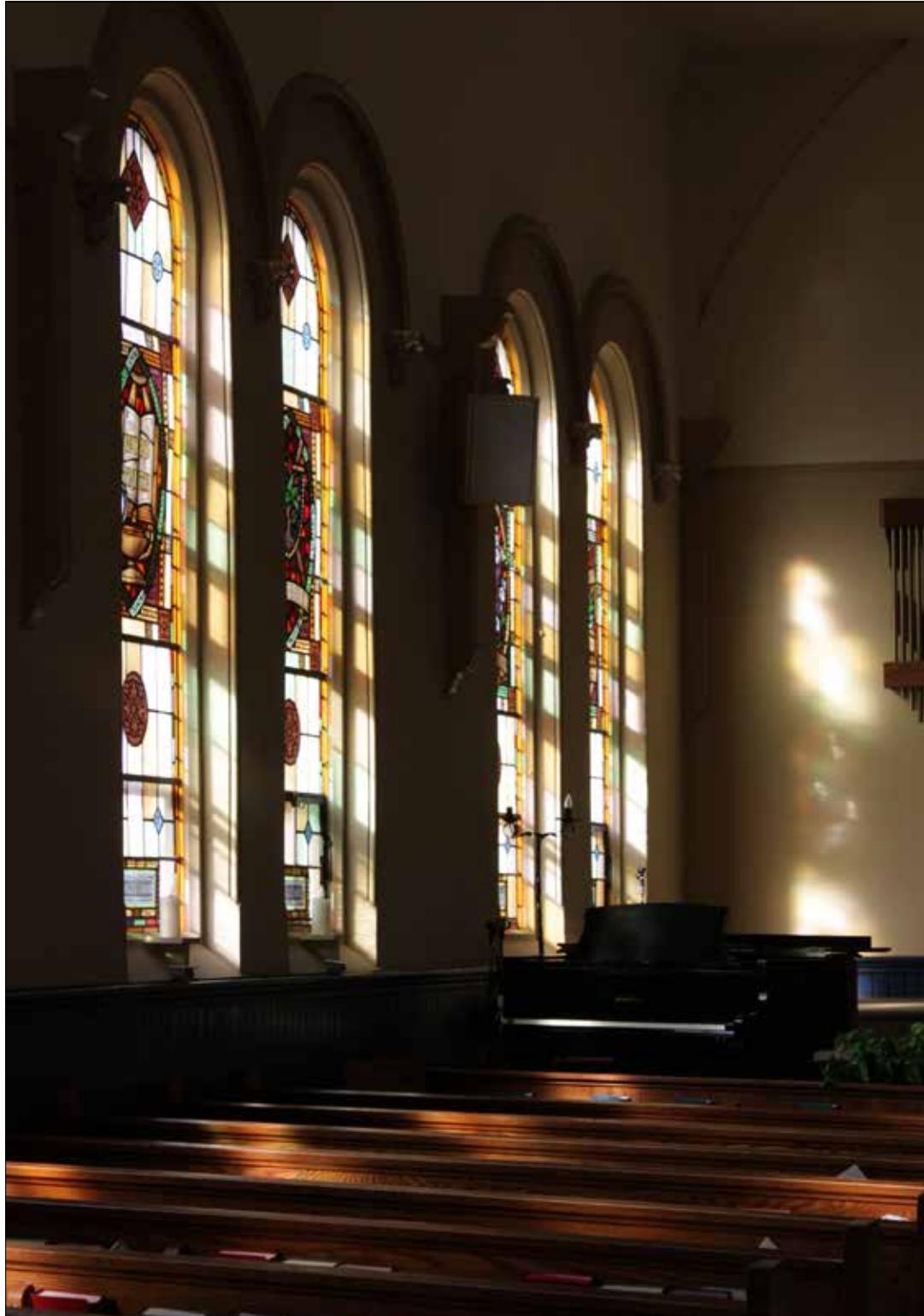
It has always been my conviction that the words we use in Sunday morning worship and to describe the rhythms of church life are the domain of the people of God. This is *our* language. It is a gift of God to the church. Knowing what theological words mean, how to explain them and feeling comfortable with this vocabulary allows for a deeper and more meaningful experience of life and faith.

If someone asked you what *sin* is, could you describe it? How about, what do *justification* or *atonement* mean? Or what does *holy* actually look like? What is the difference between being *blessed* and being in the right place at the right time?

Some people might be quite comfortable answering these questions. Other people would love to have a conversation about similar questions with fellow church members. While some in the church might call the minister over in hopes that a “professional” could answer them, many others might squirm at being involved in this kind of conversation at all—even the minister!

In an era when we are often concerned about the role of church and church communities in a secular and diverse society, understanding and sharing the language of faith makes the church stronger. Presbyterians have a unique corner on the denominational market. We are a thinking church that cares; we are allowed to ask tough questions. We are encouraged to engage with the scriptures directly. And we recognize that the ministry of the church is an equally shared venture between clergy and lay people.

Ministers can’t be the only ones who know how to use and explain the vocabulary of faith.



That is the work of all the people of God. The role of ministers is to equip the saints for this work. In this case, all of us in the church are the saints. *Saints* in Greek is *hagios*, which is “holy ones.” Let’s think about the word *holy*

for a moment. Holy is the ultimate adjective for God, but it gets a little trickier when applied to humans. The theological word for the process of “becoming holy” is *sanctification*. Sanctification is an important word for the church

and your grandparents probably knew it quite well. We may need a refresher.

In the Old and New Testaments, there is a dual meaning to the word *holy* when it is used in relation to people: it is a command-

ment, but it is also a gift that is given right now. Sanctification is a gift from God—it comes to us through Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the New Testament, it is clear that through Jesus Christ we *have been* sanctified. Many times, when we come across the verb “sanctify,” it is in a passive form of the past tense. It implies a past action that has been done to us or for us.

Yet, at the same time, the New Testament also maintains a sense of commandment. Sanctification is not something entirely done for us or given to us: it is still a call to *be* holy.

Holiness—becoming closer to God and being more in the likeness of God—is therefore both a gift and a mandate. You are holy. And now we are called to become holy and reflect holiness in our living.

So even if God makes us holy, and this holiness is a gift from Jesus Christ, there seems to be room—and even demand—for our participation in the process of becoming holy.

In a Biblical investigation of *hagios*, the holy and sanctification, three statements are simultaneously true:

1. God has sanctified us.
2. God will sanctify us and bring this work to completion.
3. We can and must strive for sanctification.

The questions are:

1. How does this sanctification happen?
2. Where does sanctification happen?
3. How do we know that it is happening?

Let’s start with the first: How does this sanctification happen?

There have been numerous attempts to answer this question. Some theologians say that Jesus accomplishes our sanctification

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**UPDATE FROM THE MODERATOR**

# Visiting a National Residential Schools Monument

The Rev. Mary Fontaine, Moderator of the 2023 General Assembly, participated in the site selection ceremony of the National Residential Schools Monument on Parliament Hill on June 20, 2023.

Call to Action #81 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada states that: "We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Survivors and their organizations, and other

parties to the Settlement Agreement, to commission and install a publicly accessible, highly visible, Residential Schools National Monument in the city of Ottawa to honour Survivors and all the children who were lost to their families and communities."

Speakers at the ceremony included Residential School Survivors as well as the Governor General of Canada, Her Excel-

lency the Right Honourable Mary Simon. The moderator was accompanied by the Rev. Dr. Karen Dimock, Minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Ottawa, and the Rev. Victor Kim, Principal Clerk of the PCC.

*For more information, visit [canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/art-monuments/upcoming-projects/residential-school](http://canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/art-monuments/upcoming-projects/residential-school)*



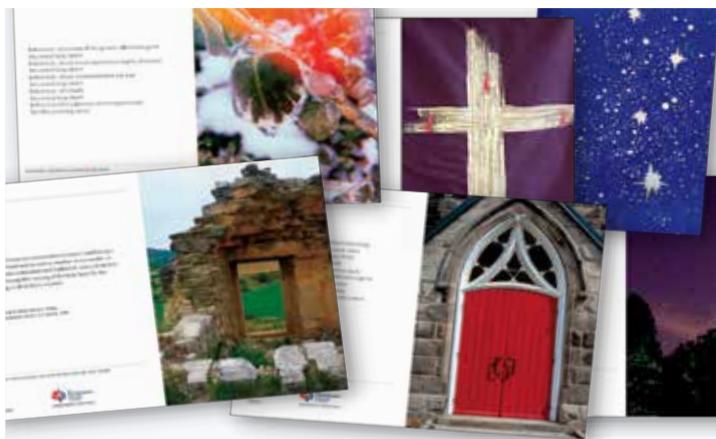
**Her Excellency Governor General Mary Simon (left) and the Rev. Mary Fontaine, Moderator of the 2023 General Assembly of the PCC.**



**The Rev. Mary Fontaine, the Rev. Dr. Karen Dimock, Minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Ottawa, and the Rev. Victor Kim, Principal Clerk.**



**Her Excellency Governor General Mary Simon, the Right Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne, Moderator of the United Church of Canada, the Rev. Mary Fontaine, and Archbishop Linda Nicholls, Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada.**



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## The Moderator's Travels

**September 26 – October 1:** Montreal trip to visit Presbyterian College; Indigenous Solidarity Montreal of the Montreal Presbytery event; Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul, along with possible other events being planned.

**October (dates to be finalized):** Moderator's international trip to Israel and Palestine.

**November 6 – 8:** Life and Mission Agency Committee meeting in Toronto.

**November 24 – 25:** Presbyteries of Huron-Perth, Lambton West-Middlesex and London are planning events for local congregations and local Indigenous communities.

**November 26:** The 175th anniversary service of St. Marys Church in St. Marys, Ont.

**November 26 – 28:** Assembly Council meeting.

Continued from page 1

quickly and completely, but it just takes us a while to figure that out. Some say we can actually reach full sanctification—or perfection in love—in this lifetime (this is a common belief in the Methodist tradition). But another perspective that comes from John Calvin, and is elaborated on by others, says that sanctification is a daily gift and a continuous process.

We are never free from sin—there is no notion of perfection here.

Our movement away from sin and toward holiness—or the restoration of God’s image in us and the new life in Christ—is a slow evolution that takes daily doses of God’s grace.

In this sense, sanctification is countercultural. There is no instant gratification. There is no fast-track, high-speed Internet method of sanctification. There is no magic formula or a set of criteria that means we are sanctified.

Calvin teaches that, “We must move steadily forward, and though entangled by vices, daily fight against them” (Calvin, *Institutes*, III.iii.14). We are able to do this because of the Holy Spirit, who always gives us the upper hand in the struggle.

We do see progress and growth in sanctification. I appreciate Calvin because he is a realist. He urges Christians not to set ridiculously high goals for themselves, such as the attainment of perfection. He insists that it is better to set small goals and make small steps of progress unceasingly in the journey toward the sanctified life (Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vii.5).

The second question: Where can we see this sanctification happening?

The basic answer to that question is that sanctification is particular—it happens in our lives. And it happens in the life of the church and within communities.

The 18th century German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher had some thoughts on this subject. According to Schleiermacher, the new life in Christ is particular to each individual because of each person’s “personal idiosyncrasies” (Schleiermacher, CF, §121, p. 561). Sanctification involves the whole person and all the circumstances that they face in life.

To illustrate this, Schleiermacher uses what he calls the “sphere of vocation” or “the sphere of sanctification.” For Schleiermacher, as well as Calvin and many other Reformed thinkers, vocation isn’t just about our occupation. Vocation is about our whole life. God may call us to specific work, but God also calls us to relationships, to the service of others, to an authentic, well-rounded, full life.



Our vocation includes all of those things. God is at work within our vocation, illuminating ways we can journey towards holiness, right at our fingertips.

We can use the sphere of vocation as a tool for ourselves or for our faith community. It can help us figure out who we are, and what opportunities God is giving us right now to take a step closer to holiness.

The sphere of sanctification incorporates one’s individual situation in the world, one’s particular challenges to activity, the powers or abilities at a person’s command, knowledge of surrounding conditions and how all these things interrelate (Schleiermacher, CF, §112, p. 522).

In other words, God doesn’t expect us to be someone we are not. God works with us, where we are, to bring us closer to God, to restore the image of God’s fullness in us, to help us act in mutual love. Our sphere of vocation can and will change sometimes. And change always brings different possibilities and new opportunities to become more Christ-like—as individuals and as the church.

The third question: How do we know that sanctification is happening?

Many theologians tell us that there are signs of sanctification that we can see. This is not to say that there is a measuring

scale of sanctification. Reformed theologians caution against trying to judge someone’s level of sanctification. This is another distinction of the Reformed tradition with respect to other traditions of the wider catholic church—we cannot single out individuals and rate their level of holiness.

Twentieth century theologian Paul Tillich says that one of the principles that marks the presence and progress of sanctification is “increasing awareness” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol 3). People and communities on a journey toward holiness are becoming increasingly aware, and there is a double-sidedness to this awareness. First, there is growing recognition of the human predicament and the forces that work against human beings at every turn. At the same time, we become more aware that the answers to those great predicaments are found in the One in whom we find both the Ground of our Being and our Ultimate Concern. What are the great obstacles and are we aware of them? And how is the Spiritual Presence of God constantly at work to affirm the power of life and its vital dynamics despite all of life’s ambiguities?

Another theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, adds to this. The life of grace and the process of sanctification, he says, always includes “a constantly increasing sense

of social obligation” (Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny*, 190). The character of sanctification is best described by Niebuhr as mutual love. This is true in the realm of culture and society as much as in the realm of the heart.

In being sanctified, we become increasingly aware of the world outside ourselves, of our obligations in love toward that world and even of the obstacles to that love. This is not naive love, nor is it immature love. Indeed, it is the opposite. It is eyes-wide-open love and the striving toward love that extends beyond the self and the familiar. It is difficult love. It will not be perfect love, but it is God given and directed.

Through sanctification, Christians live under this normative law of love. We who have been graced, then, must be intimately involved with the world through efforts of peace-making, the achievement of justice and through reconciling love.

Tillich adds another principle or mark of sanctification for us to consider—increasing relatedness. This sign of sanctification has to do with compassionate relatedness and investment in others, as well as getting to know our own true self. There is a healing within ourselves that needs to go on in each of our relationships. And in this sense, sanctification includes a reunion with one’s own self who is made, created and gifted by God (Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol 3, 234). And at the same time, there needs to be an increasing connectedness with those around you and the ability to band together for God’s common purposes.

In trying to tie together these various signs of sanctification and the character of the new life in us, a metaphor or image may be helpful. Let’s think of friendship.

A friendship is both a gift and at the same time demands something of us. Often, friends come into our lives in unexpected ways as a blessing when we most need it. Friendship may grow out of an immediate need (for example, meeting each other in a support group), a particular context (such as a university campus), or a particular time in life (maybe parents who all have children at a similar time).

Friendships are particular, unique to our time and place. In communities, also, friendships have distinct qualities. It is often because of these particularities that friendship become such a gift to one’s life. To maintain the gift of friendship, much is required. There is no set of rules to follow and no defined way of acting in each situation. But there are marks of good and healthy friendship.

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**Moderator of the General Assembly:**

The Rev. Mary Fontaine

The national office of The Presbyterian Church in Canada is on the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, Petun, Seneca and, most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit Indigenous peoples.



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# Friends seek to know one another

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Friendships are marked by increasing awareness. Friends seek to know one another more and more as the friendship unfolds. Getting to know one another involves becoming more aware of positive as well as negative aspects of the other person. It also involves increasing awareness of one's own self, both positive and negative. There may be unpleasant aspects to the friendship that need to be recognized; but friends can become aware of the life-giving power of friendship that can sustain us each through the vast ambiguities of life.

Friendships are also marked by increasing relatedness. Friends develop a shared history and a trust that lead to an increased investment in one another and a loyalty to one another. Friends are increasingly more willing to forgive one another, defend one another and support one another. One's concern goes increas-

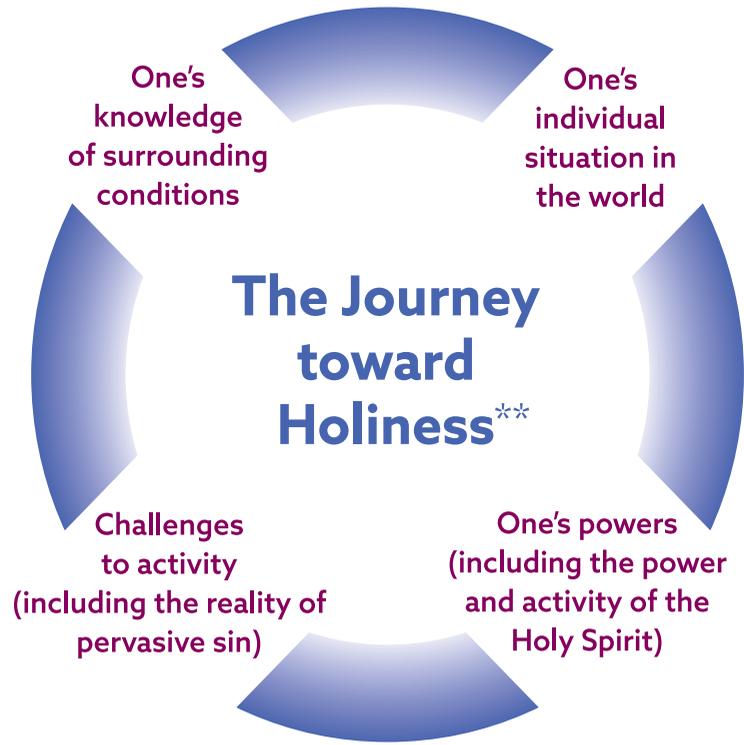
ingly beyond one's own self and one's own good and is expanded through friendship. To maintain and particularly to deepen a friendship, courage is required; an investment of one's whole person is required, which involves vulnerability, trust and risk-taking.

Such is also the case with the process of becoming holy. It, too, as both gift and commandment, requires risk-taking and trust in Jesus Christ, who is the guarantor of our sanctification. It takes courage to live into God's vision of the world and pursue holiness.

Becoming holy is ultimately about friendship with God. Sanctification is the process by which that friendship matures into a closeness that will sustain us and fortify us both right now and into eternity. It will also make the world a kinder, more just, holier place.

We are the saints of God—this is true, and we are called to prove it to be true.

## Sphere of Sanctification\*



**Table Notes:**

\* Schleiermacher also refers to this as the "sphere of vocation."

\*\* Within the sphere, and only within it, good works (the fruit not the cause of sanctification) are possible.

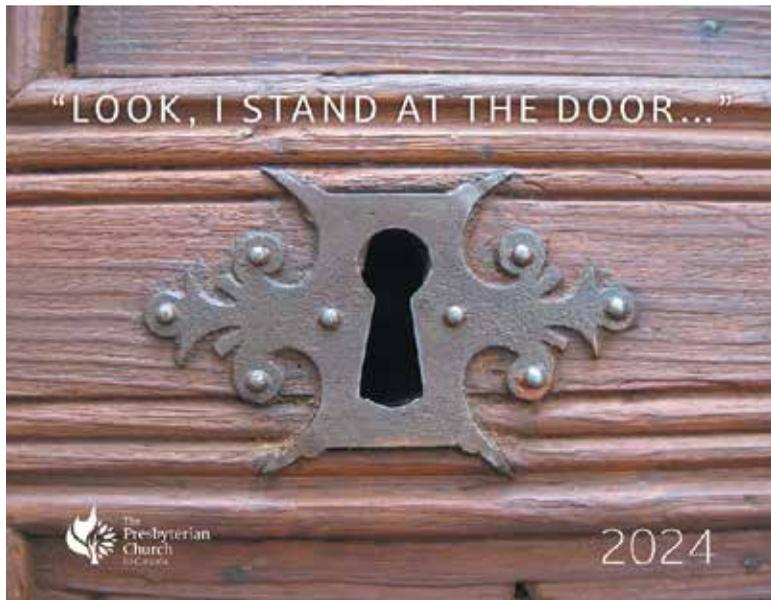
This kind of drawing could also be used to evaluate a community's sphere of sanctification.

As the particulars of our lives and communities change, the sphere, along with the possibilities for sanctification within it, will change also.

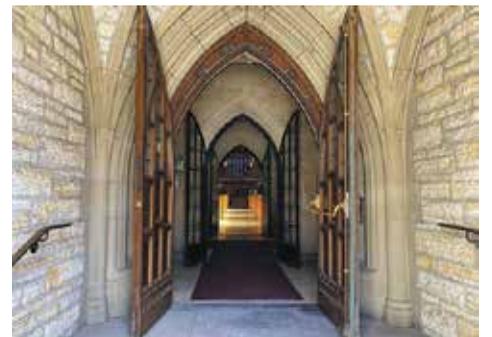
# 2024 Wall Calendar



AUGUST 2024						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31



The PCC wall calendar for 2024 features photos of church doors, crossings, thresholds and other places we consider as in-between places—spaces filled with the promise and possibility of encountering Jesus.



NOVEMBER 2024						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

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# HIV and Stigma

By Callie Long,  
Communications Office

In 2022, the United Nations Joint Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) reported that “multiple and overlapping crises have rocked the world [with] a devastating impact on people living with and affected by HIV, [knocking] back the global response to the AIDS pandemic.” Yet, even as the world grapples with different disasters, we must continue to talk about Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)—an ongoing crisis that is fast disappearing in the public rear-view mirror. And with “progress faltering, resources shrinking and inequalities widening,” what does this mean for the estimated 38.4 million people living with HIV globally?

While we live in a world where HIV is entirely treatable, preventable and non-transmissible, one of the most significant barriers for people who need treatment is the stigma associated with living with HIV. On April 19 this year, an online round table organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) gathered a global cohort of faith leaders, HIV program practitioners and others working to eliminate the stigma and discrimination associated with HIV to discuss new ways to tackle the harmful and debilitating perception that continues to cling to HIV.

Two panels participated in the online discussion: one focused on current research and work on HIV stigma, while the other provided theological and faith-based reflections and perspectives. The panellists’ task was to revisit responses to HIV and consider why we cannot stop our negative responses now, despite the massive biomedical gains made. Gracia Violeta Ross, program executive for the WCC Ecumenical Aids Initiatives and Advocacy, pointed out in her welcome remarks that stigma causes terrible harm “to people who need access to prevention and treatment.” Adding to the urgency, Dr. Manoj Kurian,

WCC coordinator for the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, noted in an opening prayer, “We are told to see the good in each other, but still, we stigmatize.” Asking for forgiveness, given how “we exclude” people, Kurian prayed: “Help us to design ways, with your wisdom, to overcome and eradicate stigma.”

Stigma is never just stigma and is always enmeshed in power relations, as Dr. Umunyana Rugege, from UNAIDS, who joined from Johannesburg in South Africa, pointed out. Historically, “people living with HIV [have] died without access to treatment, they [have] experienced violence and were ostracized because of their HIV status.” This was particularly true for South Africa because of AIDS denialism. Dr. Rugege reminded us that it was a faith leader—Archbishop Desmond Tutu—whose powerful voice joined with those of other AIDS activists to advocate for the human rights of people living with HIV. Yet, for decades, HIV has been overlaid with moralizing and stigmatizing judgements that continue to harm people living with the virus and all who love them.

Sharing lessons learned at a country level, Harry Prabawo, from the Global Partnership on Stigma and Discrimination’s Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV (APN+), spoke about the intersectionality of the disease and stigma and discrimination and how self-stigma can profoundly affect people, preventing them from not only accessing treatment but also living their lives fully, including living out their faith. Prabawo’s points were echoed by Nadine Ferris France, founder and CEO of Beyond Stigma. Working with young people living with HIV in Zimbabwe, Ferris France explained that the ripple effects of internalizing stigma could have severe and debilitating long-term consequences, especially for young people born HIV positive.

Tackling HIV stigma and discrimination remains a “core area



of [...] intervention” of the WCC, explained the Rev. Dr. Kenneth Mtata, WCC program director for Public Witness and Diakonia, pointing out that people living with HIV stigma and discrimination become increasingly isolated. “We have heard many testimonies of people living with HIV who witnessed and succumbed to challenges, some [dying] not because of HIV but because of the chronic depression from stigma and discrimination.” He highlighted the role of churches and their faith-based partners’ continued efforts to seek justice for vulnerable people, noting that “the faith sector, with the right information about HIV, can become a source of hope, reconciliation, and education.”

The Rev. Canon Gideon Byamugisha—co-founder of the African Network of Religious Leaders Living with and Personally Affected by HIV and AIDS (ANERELA+), and the first religious leader in Africa to make it publicly known in the 1990s that he was HIV positive—shared how his own experience with HIV changed because his church leadership decided to extend their compassion and love to him. Theirs was a love grounded in a faith that included him.

This is what we can think of as “statistically significant love,” said Dr. David Barstow, a consultant with the WCC studying churches’ responses to HIV stigma, who shared the main findings

of the study—all of which can be replicated within a faith-based context. One of the 15 recommended practices Barstow highlighted was that, as faith communities, we should “openly discuss HIV stigma and how religion can both help and hurt.”

Stigma, constantly in flux and never a single event, is relational and always functions in what we can think of as an ecosystem of history and ideology. Yet culturally, we live in a binary and dualistic context that increasingly feels absolutist—a way of thinking that traps us in a world of us and them, good and bad, love and hate, with little space for nuance.

“Yet here we are, in 2023, still talking about HIV and its stigma,” noted the Rev. Jape Mokgethi-Heath of the Chaplaincy of Malmo, Sweden, because “we have struggled to unlock the roots of stigma.” Instead, with the advent of antiretroviral treatment, “we have seen HIV [to some extent] go underground and become hidden [but we have yet to answer] how we could have allowed stigma to exist in the first place.”

I was asked to participate in the discussion, as my doctoral research focused on working toward a theory of HIV stigma reduction by looking to unlock the roots of stigma and adopting a reparative, trauma-informed and decolonial approach. In brief, I argued that we need to revisit the systemic structural conditions

that have resulted in the disease being so polarizing. We need to consider stigma not simply as a particular kind of (abhorrent) behaviour but as a manifestation of power that comes with incremental forms of violence—at times spectacular, but also, often, insidiously. By adopting a reparative approach when focused on the structural elements of HIV-related stigma, by intentionally foregrounding Indigenous knowledge, countering epistemic injustice, and thinking in terms of the long duration of stigma as a traumatic encounter, we can recognize stigma not only as behaviour enacted by individuals but as a practice embedded in complex social dynamics that are always linked to and shaped by history.

Even as the world, to some extent, remains focused on its responses to COVID-19 and is now dealing with a slew of coronavirus disease-related stigmatizing behaviours, it does not mean that we can dismiss HIV within the context of the latest pandemic. Despite some four decades of research, HIV remains a historical, political, social and cultural crisis that maintains a Velcro-like capacity to stigmatize and dehumanize people who live with or are affected by HIV. Let us work to engage faithfully in a radical form of political practice that speaks to our ethical obligations in responding compassionately to each other across our differences.



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# A Way Forward in Ministry

By the Rev. Jeffrey Crawford and Jen de Combe, Canadian Ministries

God is on the side of transformation. From the first words spoken to Abraham and Sarah to the call of the church today, the invitation has always been the same: go to the place where I am leading you. As central as this call is to our story of faith and our identity as the church, it can be really difficult to discern where we are being led. While this may feel like a unique challenge in the Covid-informed era, the reality is this has always been a challenge before the people of God. God meets us where we are and leads us to a new place.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada helps congregations take up this challenge by offering an opportunity to take part in the New Beginnings process, which is a way for congregations to work together to discern where God is leading. The goal is to come to a prayerful decision about a future direction of ministry and to develop a clear action plan.

Over the course of a year, congregations engaged in New Beginnings take part in four phases of discovery:

1. **Assessment** of the current ministry of the church, celebration of the way God has been present and is present with the congregation, and a realistic identification of potential future steps.
2. **Workshops** to help the congregation understand the changes in this era and why many elements of the current ministry structure no longer work.
3. **Small Group Meetings** to open the congregation to new ways of thinking about mission and to make a bold decision for future ministry.

4. **Coaching** to help implement a new vision for ministry.

Transformation is often a process of subtraction as much as it is a discovery of a new way forward. For each of the over 25 congregations within the PCC that have gone through this process, the results have been as unique as the congregations themselves. For some, the process will lead to letting go of current elements of ministry and to embracing a whole new direction. For others it might mean a prayerful acceptance that there isn't enough energy, or too few resources, to embrace a new way. For others still, it might lead to exciting partnerships that enable the congregation to deepen their community connections. Regardless of outcome, each congregation that has embarked on this process has emerged with a deeper understanding of their unique identity as a congregation, renewed clarity and a vision for future ministry.

There are many stories to celebrate that come to light from the New Beginnings process.

The process at Calvin-Goforth Presbyterian Church in Saskatoon, Sask., led them to pair with the Saskatoon Council on Aging to start the "GoForth Hub Club" for seniors. This club has enabled the congregation to develop strong community ties with local seniors.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Thunder Bay, Ont., is excitedly working at implementing their new ministry plan to partner with Indigenous peoples. This summer, the congregation worked with local Indigenous leaders to offer worship and create a safe space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to gather and form community. This is the first step on a much longer journey.



A leadership team at Nigerian Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., with their New Beginnings assessor, the Rev. Ken MacQuarrie.

The Toronto Nigerian Presbyterian Church is experiencing a renewed sense of hope as they create deeper ties with the Presbyterian Church in Nigeria and explore new ways of reaching out to the Nigerian population in Toronto.

While many congregations express a curiosity and desire to take part in New Beginnings, not all will be at a place where they have the time or resources to dedicate to such a fulsome process. Thankfully, however, this does not mean that they cannot engage in the process of discernment and transformation.

## How to engage in the work of transformation

Transformation and discernment rarely occur with a big leap. Rather, the process involves a series of small steps, where congregations listen and experiment. As change expert Susan Beaumont wrote, "Innovation happens not by following a map or script, but by responding in each moment to a fresh set of adjacent possibilities—the unique and novel outcomes that could be constructed from where we currently stand."

One of the ways to discover the set of "adjacent possibilities" is to ask ourselves what we are ready for. This question invites us to expand from existing programs into new forms of ministry. To describe this expansion, Beaumont uses the image of a zipper. Rather than jumping to the last rung, zippers are fastened tooth by tooth. The key is finding the next tooth. For example, a congregation wanting to embrace a full-fledged children's ministry might be tempted to hire a staff person and to create a program from scratch. This is a big leap and one that is often unsuccessful. A different approach is to find that first step toward building a children's ministry and start from there. Perhaps the first step is committing to pray regularly for the children in the

community or volunteering at the local elementary school to help children practice reading. The important thing is to continue to push forward after each new step is accomplished.

The zipper also invites congregations to take action and move. A zipper is zipped swiftly. This reminds congregations that just as important as finding the next step is the call to move into action. Transformation can only occur when a congregation decides on a step and takes it; and discernment is often the result of praying and reflecting on what happens when actions are taken.

Below are ideas for congregations to use to identify that next step and to move into action.

**Get curious:** Host an Appreciative Inquiry evening, where the congregation answers a series of questions to identify the ministries and events where they have experienced the most joy and fulfillment, to identify the existing strengths of the congregation and to celebrate their sense of God's presence in the life of the church. By engaging with these questions, you will discover what you love to do together and what you find most meaningful in the present moment. Once you've discovered these elements, brainstorm ways to enhance these areas of ministry. If you love to sing together, consider organizing a hymn sing or starting a pop-up choir. If you love to eat together, imagine ways that you can invite more people to the table to share in God's grace and nourishment. If you love to study scripture, why not host a special Bible study se-

ries in partnership with a neighbouring congregation?

**Explore potential partnerships:** Many congregations are unaware of who lives near the church and which organizations exist within the community. This exercise invites congregations to discover their neighbours. Spend time learning about your neighbourhood—who are your neighbours, what other churches are close, what groups operate near your church, what institutions are nearby? Once you've drawn up a list, brainstorm how you might partner with some of your neighbouring groups.

**Game idea:** Write the name of each potential partnership on a slip of paper. Take turns drawing the slips and, together as a group, brainstorm as many ideas as possible for how you might work together for the good of the neighbourhood. Once you've drawn up a list, spend time in prayer and see if you are feeling led or excited about any of the potential partnerships that have been named.

**Do something new:** Consider taking part in a 21-day challenge. This is an invitation to begin moving in a new direction before you have everything figured out. This is not about perfection, but forward movement. In this exercise, congregations name an area they want to expand in and then identify one action they can do in a period of 21 days to put it in motion. For example, your church has a desire to become more visible and welcoming to the community. Over a period of 21 days you can plant a new flower garden and paint your front door a welcoming colour. Remember, to celebrate your efforts once you have completed your 21-day goal!

The journey of transformation that God calls us to join in is not always about drastic change and upheaval, rather it is often about a series of seemingly small steps that in their total lead to a new beginning.

*If any of these ideas sparked interest, or if you would like resources on how to engage in one of these actions, please contact either Jen de Combe ([jdecombe@presbyterian.ca](mailto:jdecombe@presbyterian.ca)) or Jeffrey Crawford ([jcrawford@presbyterian.ca](mailto:jcrawford@presbyterian.ca)) in Canadian Ministries.*



Ash Moreau and Janine Desmoulin, who provided leadership at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Thunder Bay, Ont., during worship on National Indigenous Peoples Sunday, June 2023.

## The New Beginnings Process

In 2019, The Presbyterian Church in Canada partnered with the Hope Network for Missional Transformation to offer the New Beginnings process to congregations across the denomination.

To find out more about New Beginnings, contact Jen de Combe in Canadian Ministries at [jdecombe@presbyterian.ca](mailto:jdecombe@presbyterian.ca).

# Reimagining Church Properties

By Karen Plater, Stewardship, and Betty Kupeian, Presbyterian Church Building Corporation

For two days at the end of April 2023, Betty Kupeian, Chief Operating Officer of the Presbyterian Church Building Corporation (PCBC); Ainsley Chapman, Executive Director, Evangel Hall; Karen Plater, Associate Secretary, Stewardship, The Presbyterian Church in Canada; and the Rev. Dr. Tim Dickau, Missional Leadership Certificate Program, St. Andrew's Hall, B.C., joined a group of 30 people from across the country to reflect on how the use of church buildings and properties may be reimagined. The group was composed of urban planners, architects, denominational leaders, Indigenous Elders and non-profit housing developers from Presbyterian, United, Anglican, Christian Reformed, Baptist, Missionary Alliance and Pentecostal traditions.

Karen, Betty and Ainsley are part of a team that has been working together for the past three years to evaluate resources and agencies that have the potential to best support congregations and presbyteries as they discern best practices in the stewardship of the church buildings and properties under their care. The team includes staff and

volunteers from the Life and Mission, General Assembly Office, Church Architecture Committee, Financial Services, PCBC and ministries working in affordable housing (Evangel Hall).

If you are interested in participating in this conversation, please contact Karen Plater at [kplater@presbyterian.ca](mailto:kplater@presbyterian.ca). Watch for new resources and webinars on this subject coming this fall.

Fourteen Presbyterian congregations closed this past year. Beginnings and endings have long been a part of the history of the church. There is always something sad when a congregation's ministry ends. Our church history, however, is steeped in the tradition of being reformed and always reforming. This tradition was reflected in several reports to General Assembly highlighting congregational ministries that have adapted to their context while adopting fresh ways to share the good news by meeting community needs in changing times.

No one can deny that the church in Canada is going through a period of significant decline, where congregational closings exceed openings. We are not alone in these observations. At the end of April 2023, an ecumenical group of people concerned with these

closings gathered to see where God is at work today and to uncover possibilities for continuing God's mission in light of these challenges.

We are aware that in the past 10 years over 4,500 congregations across all denominations have closed. We have seen church properties sold to private individuals, businesses and developers, to be turned into private homes, condos, pubs, stores, cafés, galleries and theatres.

We have also seen the rapidly rising real estate values—in both the rental and ownership markets—which are resulting in an affordable-housing crisis across Canada and a loss of affordable spaces for community gatherings and programs serving acute and chronic social needs. We are also increasingly aware of the critical role played by land and churches in our colonial history.

Through table discussions, presentations and dialogues this ecumenical group explored several ideas to respond to our rapidly changing context. Ideas included using/converting congregational buildings/properties into spaces for affordable housing (subsidized apartments, rent geared to income, etc.), supported housing (for seniors or people with disabilities), community hubs, social en-



Photos from the event on how the use of church buildings and properties may be reimagined.



terprise spaces and other creative uses, all with a focus on environmental stewardship. Case studies were shared about congregations that have developed parking lots into a mixed social and affordable housing project, and others that have become community hubs (including space for community worship), and how others are using their properties to serve in healing and reconciliation.

We have heard that a cost accompanies these visions. The decision may be not to sell properties/buildings to the highest bidder, or not to sell them at all. (Proceeds of building and property sales are folded back into mission and ministry.) If the priority is affordable housing, such a project may impinge on the income needed to support a congregation's ministry. Building to the highest environmental standards is more expensive than traditional means.

Indeed, these costs are borne by the congregation (if it is continuing on), the presbytery and the denomination. And yet, we

are conscious that we are called to be good stewards of the properties and historic buildings we are given. And so we are seeking to discern how these assets may best serve the mission that God is already affecting in our world. In this regard, we were also challenged by Indigenous people who were present to consider and explore the role of land and buildings in healing and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples—and how to ensure that Indigenous needs, ideas and opinions are reflected in our decisions.

While recognizing that these are challenging discussions, we felt that we should risk the conversation as we stand firm in commitment to live our faith in action. The dialogue started at this conference continues to provide discussion points that support conversation at all levels of the PCC.

## What Does It Mean to be Stewards of Our Land?

By the Rev. Rebecca Jess, Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., and Vice President, Evangel Hall Mission Board of Directors

Land is important in the Bible. We hear a lot about it in the earliest books: promises from God around land, Israelites seeking land, the releasing of land at Jubilee, to name a few. Land is important. Land sustains, nurtures and grows us.

Land is what we live upon. It's where you take root. Raise children. Source food. Build community. Set up places of worship, education and health care.

Home is an equally important concept. Home can and should be a place of comfort, a place of safety, a place to eat and rest and

reflect. It's a place where family and friends are intended to care for and nurture one another. Unfortunately, while Canada is seen as a land of plenty, having a stable home isn't a reality for too many. Instead of solving the challenges of homelessness, it seems to be a growing problem in communities today.

Presbyterian churches across the country are big landholders. And as the landscape across our denomination is shifting and changing, questions around the buildings and the land that we hold are growing. As congregations begin to wonder about what to do with their land and buildings, especially when congregations have to find creative ways to stay open, it is also time to consider how those buildings connect to creat-

ing homes.

Churches are spiritual homes to many of us: welcoming places where we are safe to wonder and question, where we hold a sense of belonging, where we know love. While we don't need physical church buildings in order to house our spiritual needs, we tend to hold a strong emotional connection to them because they provided places for growth, belonging, love and spiritual journeys to happen.

So what happens when our congregations' physical spaces become more than we need?

It can be hard to imagine a new reality when the physical spaces (land and buildings) that have been spiritual homes no longer exist in the way we know them. How can we view the land our churches sit on as a part of God's vision for



society? How should we steward it so we create homes and community spaces so that others can safely experience God's abundance and joy?

Across the country we are experiencing a homelessness crisis. Thousands of people are without homes or are stuck in transitional housing because there aren't affordable market housing options. We need affordable housing that people can call home. What if more congregations thought about

also becoming places that offered shelter space, transitional housing, low income or market housing for individuals, seniors, families, refugees, those with disabilities?

Jesus tells us that the greatest commandment is to love God and neighbour as oneself.

If we value an affordable, comfortable and welcoming home in a good, safe neighbourhood, we should also want that for others. We have many neighbours who need that kind of warmth, safety and long-term security, so what are we doing to love them?

The blind, the lame, the sick, the thirsty, the desperate, the lonely—Jesus challenged them to believe what felt impossible. Are we willing to do what it takes to help all people find a home, even when it feels like an impossible task? Are we ready to think creatively and faithfully around the future of our land and buildings? With prayer and a renewed sense of God's vision, I pray that we can all find ourselves welcomed home with open arms.

# When Grief Prevents Imagining a New Future

By the Rev. Bob Smith, retired minister, Evangel Hall Mission Board of Directors

It is bound to come up quickly in the conversation at any gathering of church folk, whether in a formal setting of a Session or presbytery meeting, or maybe just a coffee shop: how ill-equipped we feel to find a new role for the church in the rapidly changing environment of our world. We face declining numbers of people coming to church and a changing community in which we minister. We have questions of financial viability, and perhaps a building that may or may not effectively serve our congregation's needs, let alone the community around

us. Many of us have seen once robust and active congregations reduced to the point where their future existence is threatened, in the short span of our lifetimes.

Congregations are faced with difficult questions, as they often have been. Where is God calling us? What is the work for which the Holy Spirit is equipping us today? What are the most pressing needs in the community around us, and how might we respond to them in faith? It takes courage to address them, but these conversations will help us to reshape and refine our ministry and what we offer to the community beyond us.

This process takes courage because it brings change and will perhaps take us in fundamentally

new directions. We can no longer do things the way we have always done things. A reframed future brings us face to face with folk who are different. Our routines have to change, spaces will be shared and resources will be redirected. Even our buildings have to be re-evaluated as we look for a new vision for our future. What do we need to let go of to make the ministry to which God is calling us both useful and sustainable?

Change is difficult. Significant change involves grief. Grief is a natural reaction to losing something that we have loved and cherished, and we need to acknowledge that grief, but we can't let grief prevent us from stepping out in new directions. The pain



of what we leave behind can in fact be a sacred thing. When we honour the work and faithfulness of those in the past, and lift up and celebrate their accomplishments, they become a foundation on which we can build a work of faith relevant for today that will continue even beyond us. And as we are inspired by the vision, courage and hard work that drove them, we can give ourselves to the new journey that lies before us as we seek to build a ministry

of presence in our communities.

Letting go of things from our past—whether traditions, expressions of worship and even our buildings—is not a failure, but rather a recognition that our needs have changed in response to the world around us. What has not changed is our calling to be faithful to the God who calls us to be a community of faith together; and to declare to the community around us the good news of God's love.

# More Than Just Housing, We Need to Build Community

By Ainsley Chapman, Executive Director, Evangel Hall Mission

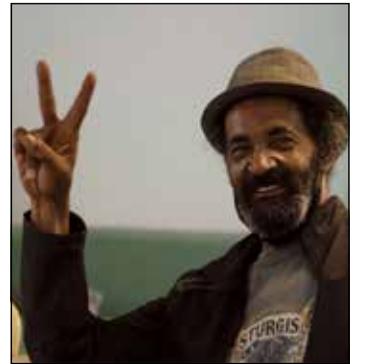
As more and more church properties are being sold to developers and private owners for housing or businesses, churches across the country, in big cities and in small rural communities and of all denominations, have started important conversations about the future of their church land and buildings. One of those conversations is the potential of redeveloping church land to help provide affordable housing to help slow the housing crisis, even if it means there are fewer financial resources made from the property.

This is an exciting time to be

dreaming and planning for the future of our neighbourhoods and considering the legacy we want our congregations to leave in the years to come. As we dream of what might happen with these important church resources, we want to be sure that we are investing in community.

Throughout history, churches have helped build community, not only by offering outreach ministries and services to vulnerable people themselves, but also by offering physical spaces for free and/or at affordable costs for other agencies offering activities vital to a community's health. Affordable spaces are needed by local community groups and

public health agencies to provide programs like addiction treatment and support groups, grief groups, vaccination clinics, food banks and health education programs. These are places where daycares can offer affordable and safe care close to home. They are places where newcomers can take English classes and kids can access after-school tutoring. They are spaces that can be rented at affordable rates to small business owners who offer classes in music, dance, yoga and fitness, who rent our kitchens for community cooking and nutrition activities, or even to make food that they sell to cafés or affordable meal programs. They are places where we



Residents at Evangel Hall Mission (ehm) in Toronto, Ont.

can encourage everyone to vote by offering polling sites close to home.

In any redevelopment plans for a church property, whether for housing-for-profit or building affordable housing, we need to consider what the community loses, if those affordable and accessible spaces are lost.

The push to build as much as we can, as quickly as we can, fuelled in part by developers maximizing profits, means that as community spaces have been converted to houses, condos or rental units, communities have been losing affordable community spaces at a rapid pace. Places renting spaces for charities' daycares and other community-centred programs are being evicted, and replacement space is becoming harder to find. Groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and agencies that offer health education are finding they must secure space further and further away from the people they are serving. It's not only charities: small business owners are struggling to find affordable spaces to

build their enterprises, and risk losing all they've worked to build. Many of these businesses are owned by women who built their companies around the flexibility it offers to them as caregivers, or who are working to meet niche needs in the community.

As we dream of a new future for our communities, we also need to consider spaces we have lost in the community in the last decade. What do we risk losing when new development projects don't include spaces that can be used by the community? Governments and private developers can put up four walls and a roof, but it takes vision, spirit, imagination, bravery, humility, partnerships and heart to build a community. While affordable homes are needed, community spaces where healing and connections are made also must be considered. Community spaces build strong communities, and strong communities prevent homelessness. And building in a way that creates and strengthens community is what is going to create a powerful legacy that will last for generations.

## About Evangel Hall Mission

Evangel Hall Mission (ehm) is a ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, established in 1913 in downtown Toronto. From its beginnings as a small soup kitchen, its social programs have grown from meeting the daily needs of the homeless to providing housing to over 165 formerly homeless adults and children. While advocating to reduce homelessness in Toronto and beyond, ehm is equipping ministers and lay leaders to consider the legacy their churches can leave as they dream about a new future for their community.

To learn more about ehm's housing advocacy and what to think about when planning a new development, contact Ainsley Chapman, Executive Director, at [ainsley.chapman@evangelhall.ca](mailto:ainsley.chapman@evangelhall.ca) or 416-504-3563.

# Confession Regarding Racism within the PCC

By PCC national office staff

The 2023 General Assembly adopted a confession before God, fellow siblings in Christ and in the community of the church, confessing the harm caused by racism in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Originally prepared by the Special Committee re. Listening, Confession and Association, the confession was named as part of a process in the continuing conversion of the church into the community of Christ which the church is called to be. Members of the denomination are encouraged to work individually and as congregations and courts of the church to live out this confession so that harm caused by racism does not continue.

The confession is addressed to God and also to each other in the presence of the whole church. It acknowledges sin the church has committed, which runs contrary to God's desire. God desires that people live with and treat each other with love and care, but racism is a denial of the love God desires for all people. This confession then calls the church to confess racial bias; turn from the sins of racism, cultural arrogance and spurning the Spirit; seek forgiveness from God and those who have been harmed; and turn from harm to empathy.

Through the report of the Special Committee re. Listening, Confession and Association, the Assembly received information about how the Special Committee continued, through 2022 and into 2023, to listen to stories from both those who had been welcomed by the church and those who had not been welcomed. Resources to assist in learning about actions the church has taken to address racism, as well as resources the church has created to learn more can also be found on the Anti-Racism web page of the PCC's Social Action Hub at [presbyterian.ca/justice/social-action/anti-racism](http://presbyterian.ca/justice/social-action/anti-racism).

The full confession was read during the Assembly. Additionally, a recommendation was adopted that the General Assembly Office coordinate a service of repentance to be held before the end of 2023 at which the confession can be presented in the context

of worship with members of the multi-racial community of the PCC present. Presbyteries were encouraged to coordinate services of repentance within their bounds in which the Confession can be presented in the context of worship. The Life and Mission Agency was also directed by the Assembly to provide documents to accompany the Confession, in order to deepen the church's understanding of the concept of race and the role its members share in the important work of anti-racism.

## The full text of the Confession

Reading and responding to this confession cannot be done with an unredeemed heart, still filled with prejudice, judgement and self-righteousness. To read and understand this document is going to require a transformed version of ourselves, cleansed and renewed by Jesus Christ. Racism is deeply rooted in Canadian culture. That racism has infected the church in Canada, including The Presbyterian Church in Canada, its congregations and people. Racism is to regard our own race as superior to other races, leading to actions and attitudes of prejudice, discrimination or antagonism against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized. These minority and marginalized communities become racialized by the majority or dominant group who judge those they have racialized through particular pre-determined criteria. Colonialism, rooted again in the assumption that one's race and culture is superior to others, gave permission to the colonizers to subvert the colonized peoples, denigrating their views, experiences, and expressions of worship. While the church has said it rejects racism and colonialism, the tendrils run deep and the church desires to be changed by the power of the Holy Spirit. This confession is not the final word, but rather is part of a process in the continuing conversion of the church into the community who bears witness to the Lamb and to the one who sits on

the throne of heaven, the Triune God of grace.

Before God, our fellow siblings in Christ, and in the community of the church,

We confess we have not been the church we have been called to be,

for we have failed to live into your desire "to unite all people in Jesus Christ" (*Living Faith* 7.1.2).

In our cultural blindness we have judged people by the colour of their skin instead of recognizing them as a fellow child of God. We have not humbly listened to those of other races and cultures, in our pride assuming the supremacy of our race and culture. We have been shaped by the racist values of the dominant culture, rather than being transformed by the gospel vision of persons "from all nations, tribes and peoples and languages" gathered in praise and worship of the Triune God of grace. (Revelation 7:9)

We confess our racial bias.

We turn from our sin of racism and seek to live into your vision.

In our ministry we have not em-



braced the spiritual gifts brought to The Presbyterian Church in Canada by persons "from all nations, tribes and peoples and languages," instead we have acted as gatekeepers of the gifts of Spirit. In our arrogance we have elevated persons of the dominant culture, overlooking those of other races, languages and cultures. Our words and actions have told people of some other races that despite their spiritual gifts and their qualifications they can serve the church in some tasks, but that they are "not good enough" to really belong, "not good enough" to be allowed to lead. We have treated some congregations of the Christian community as outsiders, as tenants, marginalizing them, rather than recognizing them as members together with us in the body of Christ.

We confess our racial bias.

We turn from our sin of spurning the Spirit and seek to live into your vision.

In our Assemblies, synods, and presbyteries we are consumed by doing the business of the church, rather than living out the gospel's call, such as showing

hospitality to the outsider, offering sympathy and empathy to the alienated among us and protecting the stranger. We have placed our culture's way of decision making above the patterns used by other cultures represented in our congregations. In the process we have blocked the full flourishing of people of every tribe and language and race within the life of the church.

We confess our racial bias.

We turn from our sin of cultural arrogance and seek to live into your vision.

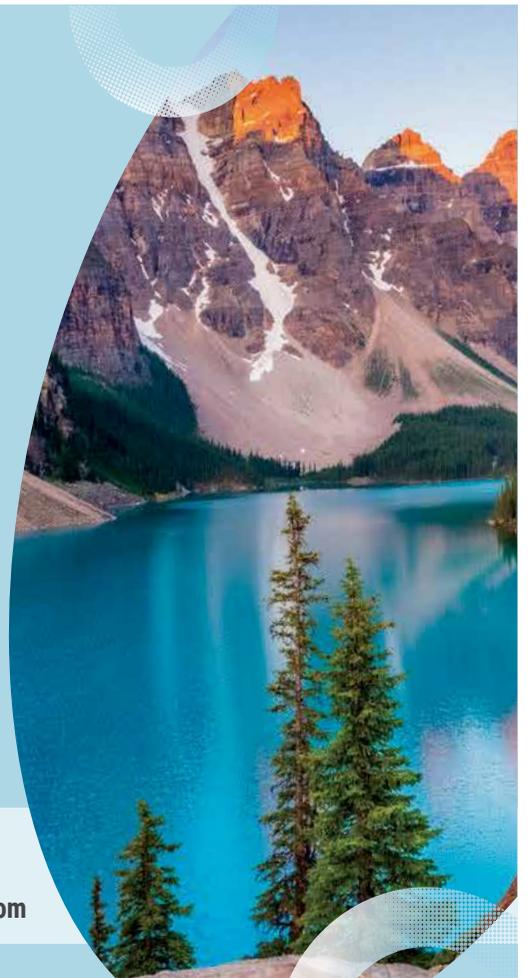
May the Holy Spirit transform us. Holy Spirit, move us beyond the limitations of accommodation and co-existence into the wonder of engagement and empathy. Teach us to die to our sin of racism, so that with the people of every ethnicity and language we can be drawn beyond the divisions of race into the reign of Jesus Christ.

Then together with the great multitude that is beyond number, we shall sing, "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to God forever and ever." (Revelation 7:12)

## THE PRESBYTERY OF CALGARY-MACLEOD IS SEARCHING FOR A GENERAL PRESBYTER

This part-time position will act as a support and resource to the 14 congregations in the presbytery, will respond to emergent situations with the support of presbytery committees, and will encourage stronger relationships among the leaders within the presbytery. The ideal candidate may be clergy, ruling elder or layperson, will have a university degree relevant to the skills needed, a strong faith, and a sense of pastoral care.

Learn more at [presbyterian.ca/calgary-presbyter](http://presbyterian.ca/calgary-presbyter)  
 Interested candidates should contact Sandra Cameron Evans at [sandracameronevans@gmail.com](mailto:sandracameronevans@gmail.com)



# Why It's Vital to Claim Your Church on Google Maps

By Jim MacDonald, Stewardship and Planned Giving

Have you ever tried searching for your church on Google Maps? If you see a message that says "Claim this business," it means your church hasn't taken control of its listing yet. This simple step is crucial because it opens up an amazing opportunity for free advertising within your community. Let's explore why each church Session should "claim this business" on Google Maps.

## Establishing a strong online presence

Claiming your church on Google Maps is a fundamental step in establishing a strong online presence. It allows you to connect with people precisely at the moment they are actively looking for a church.

1. **Get Found Easily:** When a Session claims their church on Google Maps, you boost the chances of people discovering your church. Your listing will rank higher in local search results, making it easier for potential visitors to find you.
2. **Ensure Accurate Information:** Taking ownership of your listing allows you to keep essential details like

your church's hours of operation up to date. This way, people searching for your church will get accurate information, leading to a better experience.

3. **Engage with Your Community:** When people leave comments or reviews about your church, you want to be able to respond and connect with them. By claiming your listing, you can engage with those who show interest or share their experiences.
4. **Gain Valuable Insights:** Claiming your church on Google Maps gives you access to valuable data. You'll be able to see how visitors locate your church on both Google.com and Google Maps. This knowledge can help you better understand your audience and adapt your outreach efforts.
5. **Mobile-Friendly Optimization:** In today's digital age, many people use their smartphones to navigate while driving. By claiming your listing, you ensure that your church's information is optimized for mobile users on the go.

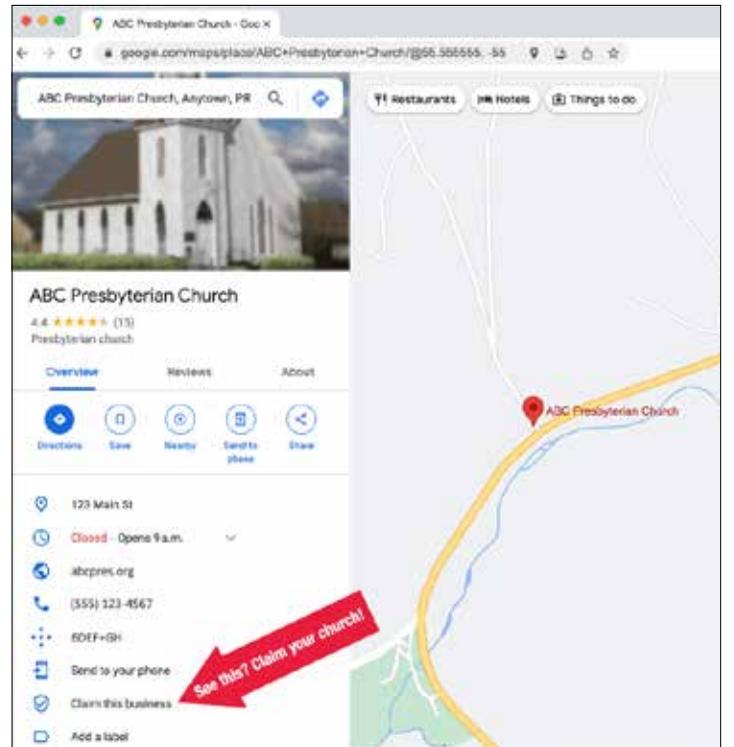
## Getting started

To claim your church's business

on Google Maps, you'll need a Google account. Consider creating a dedicated Google account for your church to manage the listing efficiently. It's crucial to avoid using personal accounts of church members for this purpose, as it could lead to loss of control over the listing if they discontinue their involvement with the church.

Once you're ready to begin, you'll be prompted to verify important details about your church, such as its name, address, phone number and website URL. You'll also be asked to select the business category, which will usually be "Place of Worship." Google Maps asks you to provide hours of operation for every day of the week, though it's not mandatory. Some churches choose to show their weekly hours to avoid the perception of being "closed" every day except Sunday. However, if displaying hours might confuse users, it's perfectly fine to skip this step. Still, sharing worship times on Sundays can be helpful for visitors.

To make your changes effective, you'll need a verification code. If your church's phone number is already known to Google Maps, Google offers two verification options: telephone or text. However, most churches opt to receive a postcard sent by



Look for the "Claim this business" button on your church's Google Maps listing.

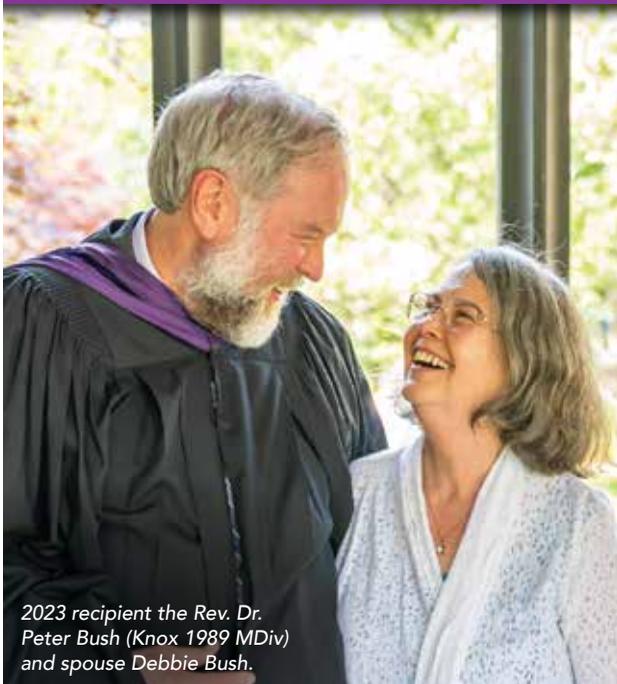
Canada Post, which typically arrives within 14 days. Opting for the postcard method ensures that the updates are being made by someone associated with the church. Once you receive the verification code, sign into your church's Google account, find your church's listing on Google Maps, and enter the code to confirm your changes. Once confirmed, your updates

will be published, and you'll gain full control of your listing.

By taking control of your church's listing on Google Maps, you open doors to greater visibility, community engagement and growth. Don't miss out on this wonderful opportunity to connect with more people in your neighbourhood! Embrace the power of Google Maps and let it help your church thrive in the digital world.

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## Moderator Signs Letter in Support of LGBTQI+ People Worldwide

In July, the moderator, the Rev. Mary Fontaine, signed an ecumenical letter to the government together with the Anglican Church of Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the United Church of Canada. The letter expressed support for the Government of Canada's efforts to stand with the LGBTQI+ community in Uganda and around the world, and its call on the Government of Uganda to revoke the 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act.

Read all letters to the government on The Presbyterian Church in Canada website at [presbyterian.ca/letters](http://presbyterian.ca/letters).



The Presbyterian Church in Canada

### Sunday Worship Planners

Weekly planners include scripture readings, music suggestions, prayers, a reflection and Mission Moment.

To download or subscribe: [presbyterian.ca/worship](http://presbyterian.ca/worship)

# Reflections from Naked & Unashamed

## A Candid Conversation about Sexuality



A seminar discussing sexuality was held at University Community Church in Windsor, Ont.



By Chad Rollo, elder and event organizer, University Community Church in Windsor, Ont.

On Saturday, March 25, 2023, University Community Church (UCC) in Windsor, Ont., hosted its very first seminar on sexuality. The purpose of this seminar was to have open dialogue about sex and sex education. Church teachings about sex have historically been limited, leading many churchgoers to experience harm, shame and pain related to their sexuality due to a lack of education and awareness about healthy relationships and safer sex. Even in secular society, there are few spaces where we feel comfortable talking openly about sex.

As a congregation, we felt it was important to create a safe space to have an open and honest discussion with members of the church and the wider community about sexuality and sex education—including our perceptions, knowledge, experiences, identities, worries, hopes, expectations and questions.

The seminar was designed around the belief that sex is not a dirty word, and that treating sexuality as a taboo topic prevents us from having important conversations. Our hope was to dispel some of the discomfort, shame and fear that surrounds discourse about sexuality and to

generate curiosity and life-giving ways of thinking about the realities that humans face as sexual beings. At UCC, we are trying to make a judgement-free space for those who have felt marginalized or excluded by the church, where open and honest conversations can happen.

Local organizations were invited to participate, giving presence to available supports and resources in our community, including the Windsor-Essex Health Unit, Positive Pathways, Trans Wellness and the Windsor-Essex Mental Health Association.

In hosting this session and inviting community partners, we expressed our desire to offer care and cultivate standing partnerships in the community to promote healthy and safe sex, whether that be in or out of romantic relationships, and acknowledge the various perspectives on sexual ethics and spirituality. Anyone was welcome to attend, regardless of their beliefs or background. Our goal was not to have all the answers around sex and sexuality, but rather have a safe space to

provide love, support, resources and shared learning.

The day opened with candid sharing from four panelists and a moderator. Each panelist responded to the same three questions, offering meaningful insights, experiences and lessons based on their unique backgrounds, perspectives and stories:

1. What was your sex education experience growing up like? (church, school, home)
2. What were your expectations of sex? How did that compare to your actual experience?
3. What would you want the next generation to understand about sex and sex education?

Following the panel presentation, participants were invited to visit focused table talks, facilitated by experts in: Sexual Health & Education, Ethics & Spirituality, and Emotional & Relational Health. A nurse, who is a member of University Community Church, brought resources and materials for the first table and answered questions about sexual health. The Rev. Shalini Sankarlal and Dr. Wendy VanderWal Martin facilitated another table for story sharing and questions about ethics and spirituality. The emotional and relational health table was hosted by two psychotherapists who presented information and resources, including a robust library of books, and facilitated discussion. A fourth table was set up to allow people to reflect

on and express their thoughts and emotions by colouring, drawing or journaling.

After lunch, we had the honour of listening to a keynote presentation by Dr. Wendy VanderWal Martin on sexual ethics. Wendy lives in St. Stephen, N.B., where she serves a three-point Presbyterian charge. She served as Executive Director of Generous Space Ministries for 20 years, where she developed the concept of Centred Set Sexual Ethics. Wendy's passion for cultivating spaces where diverse people can connect and flourish was evident, and she approached dialogue with compassion and thoughtful contemplation of the dignity of each person and their unique lived experiences.

We ended our day with a “fish-bowl” question and response period, where participants were welcome to submit anonymous questions, and the experts and panelists offered thoughtful reflections, exploring possible viewpoints and possibilities, and unpacking some of the stigmas of sexuality. Participants responded to and engaged in sex education and awareness that was free of judgement, affirming and appreciative of the gifts brought forward by our different identities, experiences and learning.

The planning team invited participants to fill out a feedback survey about their experience of the event. While many expressed that having open conversations about sex in a church setting felt vulnerable or brought up challenging emotions, participants also shared that it felt healing to have these conversations in a judgement-free space. Overall, we heard that members of the community were inspired to continue asking questions and learning together.

Following the success of this first candid conversation about sexuality, the positive outcomes suggest that this seminar may not be the last of its kind to be hosted at UCC!

# James Waddell Becomes Interim CFO



This spring, the national office was pleased to welcome James Waddell, elder at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., as Interim Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Treasurer of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Oliver Ng, the previous CFO, retired on June 30.

James is a Chartered Professional Accountant and recently retired from TMX Group Limited in Toronto. While at TMX, James was the Chief Risk Officer from 2003 to 2012 and the Chief Internal Auditor until 2023. The church is very fortunate to be the beneficiary of James's extensive experience with audits, finance coordination, risk management, implementing accountability frameworks, process remediation and governance.

We are very grateful to James for taking on this new role, to the finance department staff for their service, and to everyone for welcoming James and supporting him in the important work he has taken up in the church.

### Looking for assistance with hosting an event about gender or sexuality?

Carragh Erhardt, Program Coordinator, Sexuality and Inclusion, is available to offer advice to groups in The Presbyterian Church in Canada about hosting educational and community-building opportunities related to gender, sexuality and LGBTQI+ inclusion. Contact Carragh at [cerhardt@presbyterian.ca](mailto:cerhardt@presbyterian.ca) or 1-800-619-7301 ext. 278.

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# Former Moderator Visits Prince Edward Island



The Rev. Torrey Griffiths, Camp Convener; Chloe Hamilton, Camp Director; and the Rev. Dr. Bob Faris.

By John Barrett, Clerk of Session,  
Zion Presbyterian Church in  
Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Zion Presbyterian Church in Charlottetown, P.E.I., was pleased when their invitation was accepted by then-moderator of the PCC, the Rev. Dr. Robert (Bob) Faris, to visit Zion on Sunday, May 28, 2023. Bob joined the congregation for their 176th anniversary service and provided the congregation with the morning's sermon. A special highlight of the service was the 2022 moderator's award presentation to church member and elder Scott MacDonald, who received the Committee on History prize for his congregational history of Zion Church.

In attendance that morning was Glen Davis, Moderator of the 126th General Assembly, as Glen was in town as part of the Vancouver Orpheus Men's Choir Atlantic Tour that performed on the evening of Anniversary Sunday at Zion. In addition to Glen, the Rev. Dr. Gordon Matheson, former lead minister of Zion, was able to attend this special service. A post-service luncheon included the Rev. Dr. Doug Rollwage, Moderator of the 142nd General Assembly.

A very busy schedule was planned for Bob during his time on Prince Edward Island, including meetings and visits to Camp Keir (the P.E.I. Presbytery's camp), Wellspring Presbyterian Church, the Kirk of St. James, Summer-

side Presbyterian Church, St. John's Belfast, St. Mark's Presbyterian Church and the New London Presbyterian Church (where famed author Lucy Maud Montgomery once worshipped).

A highlight for Bob was the opportunity to visit Jean and Jim Farris. Jim, who passed away at age 100, had been a professor of Bob's in his early college years. Following that visit, Bob also visited with the Rev. Dr. John Cameron, Moderator of the 117th General Assembly, and his wife, Anne. During John's year as moderator, the Camerons had visited Bob while he was serving in Mozambique.

In the spirit of learning and understanding, Bob had the opportunity to meet with Chief Darlene Bernard, Chief of the Lennox Island First Nation. It was enlightening to hear the emphasis she placed on language training for the regino's Mi'kmaq people.

Completing a busy three-day visit, Bob was able to attend a meeting of the P.E.I. Presbytery's Ministry Committee, when revisions to their standing orders were discussed.

It's always a special occasion for members of the P.E.I. Presbytery to meet and spend time with a moderator of the PCC. Much knowledge is exchanged and new things are learned through these interactions. We are most grateful for the time that Bob was able to spend on our island.



The Rev. Dr. Robert (Bob) Faris, the Rev. Will Henbest and Scott MacDonald.



Jean Farris, the Rev. Dr. Bob Faris and the late Rev. Dr. Jim Farris.



Chief Darlene Bernard and the Rev. Dr. Bob Faris.



Anne Cameron, the Rev. Dr. Bob Faris and the Rev. Dr. John Cameron.



The Rev. Dr. Glen Davis, the Rev. Dr. Gordon Matheson, the Rev. Dr. Bob Faris and the Rev. Will Henbest.

# Finding Hope Through Song

By Siân Thomas, The Gathering  
Place Presbyterian Church in Port  
Colborne, Ont.

In the PCC hymn book, you will find almost 40 hymns with "sing," "singing," or "song" in their first lines; more if you comb through all the verses. Music and verse take us back to our very beginnings.

The Bible is full of singing and songs; entire books, or parts of

books, are given in verse. The Psalms are all poetic praise and then there is the Song of Moses, of Miriam, of Deborah, of Judah, the Songs of Solomon. In 2 Samuel we hear that David spoke the words of a song to the Lord. In the New Testament, there is the Song of Mary.

And God sings, too. Zephaniah 3 (in verse) says, "God will rejoice over you with singing."



And we were created in God's own image. Music and poetry are in our DNA.

In the New Testament we are

told to be "filled with the Holy Spirit" and to "sing." What happens when we're filled with the Spirit, or when we are filled with

the breath of God? We speak to one another "in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, giving thanks for all things."

The Ancients were no fools. They knew that teaching was one thing; getting people to remember was another. Poetry and music were essential tools in passing on wisdom.

Rhythmic words and musical notes? They carry. Imagine a crowded market before electricity and loudspeakers. To be heard, you would speak in a strong, high voice, and heavy rhythm. The old town criers, ballad singers and itinerant preachers knew this.

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# Recovery and Renewal at St. Andrew's, Toronto



Attendees at our first women's social gathering.

*By Judy Neal, ruling elder, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, King Street in Toronto, Ont.*

*Faith without action is just spinnin'—no traction.*  
—William Prince, Old Souls

As with most churches, the COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church on King Street in Toronto. Our nearly 200-year history is punctuated with stories of trials, including several existential crises and the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic. Each time, our unwavering faith and dedication have been our compass, guiding us not only to survive but to flourish. The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception.

With hope based on our historic resilience, last fall our Growth and Innovation Ministry encouraged us to restart in-person programs that had closed or moved online during the pandemic, and to create new programs to meet

pandemic-generated needs. The results have been very encouraging. Attendance at our Sunday morning worship services has rebounded quite well. The demographics have shifted somewhat, though. Many long-time members, now elderly, still choose to attend worship online. We are grateful to be able to continue to offer online services, which attract about 150 viewers each week. Others discovered us online and now worship with us in person. We recently received nine new professing members and are elated by the inclusivity and diversity among them. Our church school, while still quite modest, has grown considerably.

Our Better English Café, a program that offers newcomers to Canada opportunities to practice useful everyday conversational English, has also rebounded well. We welcomed almost 2,800 attendees over the year, with weekly attendance at the end of the season exceeding 115 peo-

ple representing more than 40 mother-tongue languages. We closed the season with a Canada Day BBQ that was well attended. Lesley, a newly minted Canadian citizen and wife to senior minister the Rev. Will Ingram, cut the Canada Day cake.

This year we embarked on two exciting new initiatives. SingTO is a choir that welcomed about 40 singers from the downtown Toronto community. Their first year was a big success, and the program will continue in the fall. Our Fellowship and Pastoral Care Ministry offered women in the congregation an opportunity to attend a Saturday afternoon "Social." Over 30 women attended and there's a great deal of enthusiasm for future gatherings. The goal is to foster deep, mutually supportive relationships. We're considering other special-focus opportunities as well.

Our large Out of the Cold program, which serves around 300 suppers each week during



Music Director Dan Bickle and the SingTO Choir at their debut performance.



New members received at St. Andrew's in May 2023.



The Better English Café.

the cold months and about 75 breakfasts weekly year-round, still serves take-out meals, but we hope to return to indoor table service soon. SAGA (formerly the St. Andrew's Gay Association) has resumed its monthly fellowship gatherings and attendance is nearly back to normal. Our vibrant and thought-provoking Heart of the City Speaker Series has also resumed meeting in person and draws about 40-45 attendees.

Our weekly Friday Noontime Music Recitals also returned, attracting about 125 music lovers.

The pandemic fast-tracked our transition to online and digital platforms. As we continue to learn from this experience, we are exploring strategies to connect with younger people through social media.

We now have many reasons to believe that a thriving future is on the horizon!

Continued from page 12

People came, and they listened. Acts 16 describes a story where Paul and Silas end up in prison. The prison was part of underground tunnels. Paul and Silas were put with the murderers in earthquake country. What did they do? They prayed, they sang. And the other prisoners listened.

In Wales, from 1810 to 1960, the percentage of Welsh speakers fell by 70%—a direct result

of government policy and commercial interests. Some protested these changes. At one demonstration, students chained themselves to the parliament building railings. Security guards cut them loose and hauled them off to prison until their arraignment the next day. Picture these prisons: early Victorian, stone-built, rings of steel walkways, cells with iron doors. What did the students do?

They sang to each other. All night.

The next morning, as they left, the desk sergeant remarked, "If it were up to me, I wouldn't release you." He explained, "In all my years in the prison service, last night was the first night when things were calm."

Poetry and song find the gaps between prison bars. They remind you that there is joy and hope even at the darkest times.

At Paul and Silas's prison in Philippi, prisoners were given a message of hope through prayer and song in what should have been the most hopeless of places.

God sings. We sing because we are created in God's image. We sing to remember important truths. We sing to commune with God, and with our neighbour. We sing to reach out to anyone who will listen. We sing because...



# Finding Belonging, One Recipe at a Time

*By Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta.*

Every other Friday, you'll be greeted with the smell of home cooking at Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta. It might be the rich scent of saffron rice, a traditional soup or delicious stir fry. Since January, VAPC has been hosting "Grandma's Kitchen."

The program, run by the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, provides a place of belonging for immigrant women over the age of 50.

Older women who have immigrated sometimes find themselves particularly vulnerable to isolation and marginalization. Their skills and experiences can be underval-

ued and, in a new cultural context, sometimes with limited English, they can find themselves alone, disconnected and unappreciated.

According to CIWA's counsellor and group facilitator at VAPC, Yao Li, Grandma's Kitchen is "a chance for immigrant women over 50 to come out, share cooking skills, counter loneliness, and build their self-esteem." In addition to sharing and preparing recipes, the women learn traditions from each other's cultures, have a chance to practice their English, make new friends and get information on community support with a focus on healthy living and adjusting to life in Canada.

"It's a natural community partnership for us," said the Rev. Greg

Smith. "VAPC has always had a special relationship with those who are new to Canada. Many of our founding and earliest members were themselves first-generation Canadians."

The two largest cultural groups in the program at VAPC are currently from the Chinese and Iranian communities. Although participants find support from those in their own community, they also share and learn together. "It is empowering," said Li. "Even if some participants can't speak English well, they can come to the kitchen and learn from each other. They can share a recipe, teach a skill or learn a dance... when you're dancing with friends, you don't need a language to communicate."



Participants of "Grandma's Kitchen" at Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church.

## Two West Vancouver Churches Sharing Summer Worship

*By Jean Lawrence, West Vancouver Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, B.C.*

One Spring morning in 2016, I had a coffee date at our local Delany's Coffee House in West Vancouver with our West Vancouver Presbyterian Church (WVPC) Stated Supply minister, the Rev. Dr. Glenn Inglis, and the St. David's United Church minister, the Rev. Dr. Michael Caveney. Michael and Glenn knew each other from their Ontario days, when Michael was still a Presbyterian minister.

The general conversation segued to the topic of ecumenical ministry, and congregations worshipping together, particularly in the summer (remembering that it

"used" to be done, especially in small towns across the country, including Neepawa, Man., where I had worshipped the previous summer—in the Presbyterian church with the United minister at the pulpit).

As the makeup of our two congregations was (and still is) very similar, we agreed that we should give it a try. And with the approval of our Session and the St. David's Board, it was decided that April 17, 2016, would be a "pulpit exchange" Sunday to give each congregation a chance to meet the other church's minister. It was well received, and in July and August that year, our "Summer Joint Services" (to quote the March 21, 2016, Session minutes) be-

gan. That first Sunday in July, at WVPC, Michael Caveney warmly welcomed everyone, wearing red for Canada Day. It was a bit like a first, awkward date for some at that first WVPC service, but I embraced the innovation immediately, seeing people from St. David's that I knew but had no idea that it was their church. There was lots of mingling at our after-church coffee time, and then again in August at St. David's, with Glenn at their pulpit, it was another resounding success.

Some of our people thought we should be worshipping with another Presbyterian church, instead. However, the closest one is in North Vancouver, and it is theologically more conservative than us. Then there is also West Vancouver United Church (where the Rev. Dr. Ross Lockhart was minister before joining The Presbyterian Church in Canada), but it is a large, more formal church; whereas St. David's and West Vancouver Presbyterian with their small congregations were a good fit immediately.

Thus, the summer of shared worship continued, and about a year or so later, we also started to worship together during Holy Week—Maundy Thursday at one church, Good Friday at the other. Then Covid came along and threatened to unsettle our union,



Oscar Sieber and Susie Alexander at an ecumenical service. Oscar is a member of the St. David's United Church choir. He took part in the "Pop-Up" choir this summer. Susie is a long-time member of WVPC and a committed volunteer leader.

but our combined worship continued on YouTube, instead. After Covid, we were all so happy to be back together again in-person, renewing our friendships.

Both Michael and Glenn have moved on, but the new ministers of both congregations immediately embraced the partnership. This July at WVPC, each week the scripture reader is a St. David's member, and in August at St. David's, it will be WVPC's reading the scripture. Our music director, Kelly Nobles, has organized a "Pop-Up" choir for our July 30 service, with members from both choirs, but also open to non-regular choir members. An indoor picnic will follow with

both congregations bringing salads and sweets to supplement the barbecued hamburgers. One of our WVPC members, Randy Cunningham, leads a band called "Definitely Not the Beatles," so there will be dancing, too!

St. David's United has a new minister, the Rev. Philip Francis. WVPC's pulpit is currently vacant. When the Rev. Wolody Sosnowsky, our interim moderator and worship leader most weeks, was on vacation, we enjoyed the worship leadership of Shirley Carleton, a recent Vancouver School of Theology graduate, who also embraced the wonderful custom of these two West Vancouver Churches.



Gordon Munro, Board of Managers Chair of WVPC getting envelopes out of a shared plate along with Helen Greidanus, Finance Team Member of St. David's.



The "Pop-Up" choir at West Vancouver Presbyterian Church.

# Presbytery of Montreal Cooperates in Local Mission

*By the Rev. Bartholomew Alexander, Georgetown Presbyterian Church in Howick, Que.*

The Presbytery of Montreal has a part-time mission promoter to aid congregations in engaging their neighbourhoods in local mission. Exploring needs in their communities, and the skills of their members, congregations can imagine possibilities for new mission projects, as well as community groups to potentially partner with. The mission promoter also helps equip congregations by organizing workshops and training sessions.

Occasionally, the mission promoter seeks volunteers from congregations across the presbytery to cooperate on a short-term project. One year, a cultural group in Montreal provided names of single mothers who needed help moving to new apartments. July 1 is known as Moving Day in Montreal, as many leases expire on Canada Day. A Canada Day move is much more expensive than moving on other days due to the high demand for trucks and movers. Over two days, volunteers from several churches in the presbytery moved five single mothers and their children to new homes.

This year, volunteers from Côte-des-Neiges Presbyterian Church, Georgetown Presbyterian Church, St. Edward's Presbyterian Church Beauharnois, and the Church of Saint Andrew and Saint Paul, gathered together to move a married couple to a new apartment. It was indeed a case of many hands making light work. All the volunteers left with feelings of accomplishment, having demonstrated Christ's love for people in a tangible way.

Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats helps us to imagine mission in our communities. May we continue to serve, remember-



Photos from a recent mission project by the Presbytery of Montreal.

ing the King's words: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."



# Knox Flos PC Celebrates 145 Years

*By the Rev. Thomas Mason, Knox Flos Presbyterian Church in Elmvale, Ont.*

On Sunday, June 4, over 85 people crammed into the pews at Knox Flos Presbyterian Church in Elmvale, Ont., to commemorate the church's 145th anniversary, recognizing 145 years of Christian faith and witness in the community.

It was a truly wonderful event, where joyful voices sang hymns and the Rev. Jim Young preached an inspiring message, that "God is not finished with us yet." Prayers of gratitude and thankfulness to God were offered for all the blessings that have been received in the past, in the present and for the future that is to come.

Hymns of praise were led by



Karen Parnell from St. John's United Church, accompanied by Elmvale Presbyterian's musical director, Ruth Currie.

The Knox congregation, the Rev. Tom Mason and the Rev. Jim Young also blessed and dedicated the new stairlift to the glory of

God, which will allow access to the sanctuary for the congregation's needs for the future. Thank you to the many people who gave so generously toward this project.

Five present and former Presbyterian ministers from the charge attended the service: the Rev. Jim Young, the Rev. Lois Lyons, the Rev. Margaret Robertson, the Rev. Paul Sakasov and the current minister, the Rev. Tom Mason.

A special thanks goes out to the Rev. Young and his wife, Anne, for their participation and presence.

Elders Sandy Conn, Elaine Tubman and Larry Huth, and all of the members of the congregation, would also like to thank the members of Elmvale Presbyterian and all the visitors who took part in the service.

Many memories were shared—of weddings, baptisms and family services. The whole building seemed to come alive during the service.

The many members who had come before must have been looking down at us smiling, through joyful worship and at the fellowship lunch with the incredible home-baked pies, which were enjoyed and shared with much laughter and pleasure by all.

God has indeed blessed the people of Knox Flos Presbyterian Church!

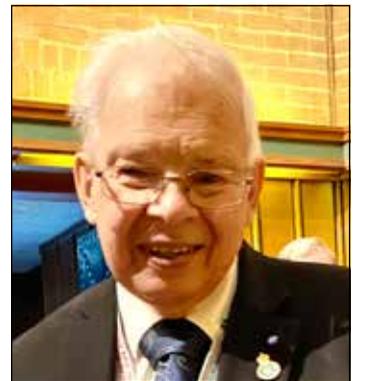


# Organist Retires in Stratford After 63 Years

*By the Rev. Mark Wolfe, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Stratford, Ont.*

Sunday, June 25, 2023, marked the end of an era at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Stratford, Ont., for, after 63 years of faithful service, Earl Clark retired as Organist and Choir Director. By conservative estimate, Earl has played at over 3,000 services of worship, and with his work in the public school system, as well as the Kiwanis Music Festival, Earl is a musical legend in the Stratford area.

On July 5, he was honoured with the Distinguished Service Award from the Royal Canadian College of Organists in a ceremony at St. Thomas' Anglican Church in Toronto: a fitting tribute to a long and dedicated career.



Earl Clark.

As one chapter ends, a new one begins, and St. Andrew's is delighted to welcome Gord Allgeier as Organist and Choir Director. Gord hails from the Kitchener area and is an accomplished and long-serving Organist and Choirmaster with many years of experience in both United and Presbyterian churches.

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# The Positivity Mural Missional Project in Calgary

By Dr. Heather Bryant, Clerk of Session, Westminster Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta.

How do you create a positive relationship with neighbours and bring a gift to the community at the same time? Over the past year, Westminster Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., and the middle school next door (Tom Baines School, grades 6 through 9) have worked together to do just that. Through collaboration with other partners and some community outreach, we've created a conversation piece that brings forward the themes of positivity, community and inclusion.

The first seed for this was planted when several Westminster members attended the certificate course in missional leadership through the Vancouver School of Theology. During the sessions, we learned of churches that had used their church property to reach out to their neighbourhoods. It was also clear that the strongest projects came when the community was consulted and worked with the church on a project, rather than a church just deciding on its own what projects were needed.

We were fortunate that we could build on a 2022 community consultation that the Edgemont Community Association carried out in collaboration with students

from the Urban Studies/tactical urbanism program at the University of Calgary. It had suggested that more community art would be appreciated. Two other needs were identified, and as the association decided to prioritize work on fellowship around a community ravine space, we decided that perhaps we could work to bring the community art idea to life.

Knowing that our post-and-rail fence around the parking lot, which abuts a major traffic route in the community, was not an asset to the community aesthetic, we developed the idea of a new fence around the property that could become the canvas for a beautiful community mural. And because we were next door to Tom Baines School, we wondered if the students would welcome an opportunity to share their art in a very public way. So last June, Heather Bryant, an elder at Westminster, approached Lily Chow, the art teacher at Tom Baines School, to see whether she and her students would want to team up on creating a mural that expressed the key values of positivity, community and inclusion. The answer was yes—and the project was born.

Over the next few months, we developed a proposal to the Calgary Foundation to support a portion of the cost. As we developed

our timelines, it became clear that we'd need to put the posts in before the winter so that the fence could be completed and ready for painting in May. As we didn't know whether we'd receive funding in the early fall, we took the idea to Session to see whether they'd be willing to take the risk of putting posts in without knowing how much support we'd receive to complete the fence, if any. This led to a commitment from the Randy Jaggard fund, a memorial fund in memory of a Westminster man who loved youth, community and building projects, as the family thought this project would be a perfect match for his interests. This allowed us to move forward without knowing whether the grant application was successful; when we learned that it was, we knew we could complete the fence without a challenge to the regular church budget.

In the fall, the school and Westminster engaged the students in the project and planned how to allow for community and church input on the proposed designs. The students submitted 18 designs for fence panels that were then posted in our narthex in early April, along with descriptions of what they represented. Many of us were touched by how deeply the students understood the theme and tried to bring it to life.



Photos of the Positivity Mural at Westminster Presbyterian Church.

We hosted two parking lot events in May to involve the community in celebrating the work. In early May, students and folks from Westminster painted the fence background white so it could be the "canvas" for their designs, while others from Westminster prepared a hot dog lunch for them and anyone else from the community. And on a Saturday late in May, 47 students gave up a weekend day to paint their mural designs, as people from the community came by to cheer them on and have a burger, again prepared by our team, in the parking lot.

The result has been positive. We see many people, including daycare students, come by to look at the colourful designs. We've posted the students' descrip-



tions of their designs, along with photos of the panels ([wpchurch.net/collections/positivity-mural](http://wpchurch.net/collections/positivity-mural)) so that everyone can understand their messages. And once it was done, both CBC and the *Calgary Herald* came out to interview students and talk about the mural. While the kids made the front page of the *Herald*, we were even happier with the headline that accompanied the online article: "Everyone is Welcome, Everyone is Loved." What better message for youth—or a church—to send out to their community?

## Earth Art Message



By Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta.

Sunday school art can carry a message! An art piece made by the children at Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., now hangs in the sanctuary and

conveys an ongoing message about our environmental crisis. The piece was part of a Sunday school project designed for the church's Earth Sunday service. It is made entirely from garbage and recycling. Carefully put together by the elementary age kids in the

Sunday school, the project came from an idea by interim Faith Education Coordinator, Jo Colgan. With the support of the Rev. Greg Smith, the kids worked on their creation in the weeks leading up to the service.

The art was part of a lesson about biblical outsiders. During the lesson, the kids learned about "outsider art": art that is made by people who are "outsiders" in the world of professional art. Learning about outsider artists using scraps of material in their artwork was the inspiration to make an Earth-themed piece of art using garbage and recycling.

The final creation, titled "Our



Planet," was used as a backdrop to a video prayer, narrated by the children, which opened the Earth Sunday service. The fin-

ished piece now hangs in VAPC's sanctuary, continuing to carry its message to those attending and watching each week.

# Marking 168 Years at Brookfield PC, P.E.I.



Rob Griffiths presented a Lifetime Membership award from the AMS to Gladys MacPhee.



Jean MacRae also received an award for Lifetime Membership from the AMS.



The AMS Lifetime Membership award went to Elizabeth MacLeod posthumously.



Brookfield Presbyterian Church in P.E.I.

By Joy MacIntyre

On July 16, 2023, an anniversary service was held at Brookfield Presbyterian Church, P.E.I., in celebration of the 168th anniversary of the establishment of the congregation and the 128th anniversary of our church building. This celebration was scheduled for 2020, but

had to be postponed due to Covid.

A large crowd attended, even though the evening was very warm. The guest speaker was the Rev. Steven Stead, who delivered a wonderful message noting God must be at work in order for a congregation to be still in existence after 168 years. The Rev. Brad Blakey, P.E.I. Presbytery mod-

erator, brought greetings from the presbytery and noted his grandfather had been a minister in the Brookfield Charge.

Special music selections were performed by the Summerside Presbyterian Church Choir, accompanied by Dean Perry, who also led the congregational hymns. Also during the evening, Rob

Griffiths, president of the Atlantic Mission Society (AMS), presented Lifetime Memberships to four AMS members. Two of the recipients who were able to be present were Gladys MacPhee and Jean MacRae. Absent was Dulcinea Andrews. Members of the family of Elizabeth MacLeod accepted her award posthumously. A short

history of the Brookfield AMS was presented, noting the group had begun 113 years ago with four members and would close this fall with four members. Over the years, there have been as many as 29 members.

After the service, a time of fellowship and refreshments was enjoyed.

# Lucknow PC Celebrates 150 Years of Worship



Lucknow Presbyterian Church choir director, Norma Raynard, played the organ for the 150th celebrations. PHOTO CREDITS: PAT LIVINGSTON

By Pat Livingston, Lucknow Presbyterian Church in Lucknow, Ont.

It was a great day for being alive on May 28, 2023, when former and current members of Lucknow Presbyterian Church in Lucknow, Ont., were joined by former ministers and guests from area churches to mark the occasion of 150 years of worship. The morning

commemoration was kicked off with Dianne Hawthorne and Norma Raynard leading a hymn sing.

About 90 people shared in the celebration led by the Rev. Theresa McDonald-Lee, executive director at Camp Kintail, as she delivered an interactive congregational message: Story of the First Church. The Kingsbridge Quartet, consisting of Marianne Hogan, Diane Lalonde, Terrie VanOsch and Laurie Dalton, shared their musical gifts with four hymns that suitably reflected the occasion. Choir director Norma Raynard played the organ with pianist Laurie Dalton accompanying her, as the congregation raised their voices to sing *Great is thy faithfulness, I am the church! You are the church!*, and *O God, our help in ages past*.

Former ministers, the Rev. Paul Sakasov, now living in Barrie, and the Rev. Peggy Kinsman of Wingham, brought greetings in person. Former minister the Rev. David



Former ministers the Rev. Paul Sakasov and the Rev. Peggy Kinsman are shown with the Rev. Theresa McDonald-Lee who led an interactive congregational message.

Chung and student minister Nick Metivier offered their blessings and congratulations via email. The Rev. Chung and his wife, Vonnie, now live in New Brunswick and Nick is living in Quebec with his wife, the Rev. Charmila Ireland, and baby son, Nathaniel. The Rev. Ed Hoekstra, interim moderator for Lucknow and South Kinloss Presbyterian Churches, also sent greetings from Owen Sound, where he is the minister at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

Many displays of present and past church activities could be



A sumptuous buffet was shared by those attending the 150th anniversary.

viewed in the Gathering Hall. Following the service, a buffet feast was enjoyed, along with a time of renewing acquaintances.

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# Reviving a Spirited Military Tradition

By Eva Barnes, Church Museum Curator, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Kingston, Ont.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Kingston, Ont., shares a special historical bond with the Royal Military College (RMC) of Canada that dates back to 1882. "Copper Sunday" was celebrated at the church every May before graduation for over 130 years and discontinued only recently.

Once upon a time, everyone connected to the military college was required to be present at Sunday worship services in town during the school year. On the last Sunday of the academic term, hundreds of officer cadets would assemble on campus shortly after sunrise attired in their distinctively fine scarlet and black formal dress uniforms. A fastidious inspection of "the troops" was followed by a silently precise ceremonial parade. Kilted Scottish drummers led the marchers across the Cataraqui River Bridge and causeway, winding past Fort Frontenac and ending in front of

the formidably pillared limestone portico of Kingston's City Hall.

The parade commander summoned the mayor from his chambers with a very loud, slow and somber knock upon the great front doors. Upon emerging, wearing his formal chain of office, the mayor welcomed and addressed the officer cadets, who were standing in meticulous rows at perfect attention. The mayor offered his congratulations and best wishes on behalf of the citizens of Kingston as graduation day approached.

The company was then dismissed to enjoy hearty breakfasts before attending church services at St. Andrew's (Presbyterian), St. George's (Anglican), St. Mark's (Anglican) and St. Mary's (Catholic).

To draw further attention to their soon-to-happen departures from Kingston, some mischievous officer cadets in 1882 agreed to carry large quantities of copper pennies under their tunics inside black military-issued socks. When collection plates were passed to

the back pews, where the scarlet-coated RMC students were seated together at various worship services, churchgoers were suddenly startled by the loudly cacophonous and repeating din of cascading metal hitting metal.

The initial shock among the congregants turned into such warm farewell applause and good cheer that the custom became an instant Kingston church tradition, continued with much anticipation year after year.

Alas, in a changing world, it was recently deemed expedient to discontinue the Copper Sunday tradition. The Canadian mint started to phase out the circulation of copper pennies in 2013. More significantly, public institutions became increasingly mindful of the implications of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Officer cadets could no longer be expected to attend church services, not even to uphold a longstanding graduation custom. Copper Sunday gradually fell from favour.

This past year, St. Andrew's has been encouraged by the regular presence of three RMC Officer Cadets at Sunday morning services. They were drawn to the almost forgotten story behind Copper Sunday, a 19th century custom that had become dormant during the past decade.

Thanks to the interest and enthusiastically creative initiative of Officer Cadets Kenny Hammond, Charles Howie and Eric McCracken, the St. Andrew's congregation has enjoyed, once again, a wonderfully spirited glimpse into this historic church-and-college tradition from days gone by.

Two masterful RMC pipers led a procession through the sanctuary



A silent red line of RMC officer cadets approaching Kingston's City Hall on Copper Sunday, 2011.

to the front pew at the beginning of the service. Guest minister, the Rev. Dr. Paul Kern, and Music Director John Hall collaborated with the students to create an especially memorable and unique service around a military theme. The hauntingly moving sound of a lone bagpipe and the majestic St. Andrew's organ performing together reminded the congregation of the distant Scottish roots of their much-loved Presbyterian kirk.

A new church tradition was also created along the way. Two officer cadets carved their names into the back of the pew where Billy Bishop, a restless RMC student and later to be World War I flying ace, had left his own signature during a particularly long sermon over a century ago.

Indoor photos were taken after the service under the beautiful RMC memorial stained-glass window, which was dedicated in December 1919 by Brigadier General Pierson, the Commandant of the school at that time. Sunlight streaming through the window highlights the enduring motto for the graduates: "Truth. Duty. Valour."

Outdoor pictures were also taken for the church museum at the cannon located on the front lawn. This unexpected relic from the Siege of Derry in Ireland in 1688 was gifted in the 1860s to the Warden of St. Andrew's, William Shannon, an ardent Protestant Orangeman.

The present-day congregation has been uplifted by the congenial



Officer Cadet Eric McCracken continues an official name-carving tradition as St. Andrew's Music Director John Hall presides.

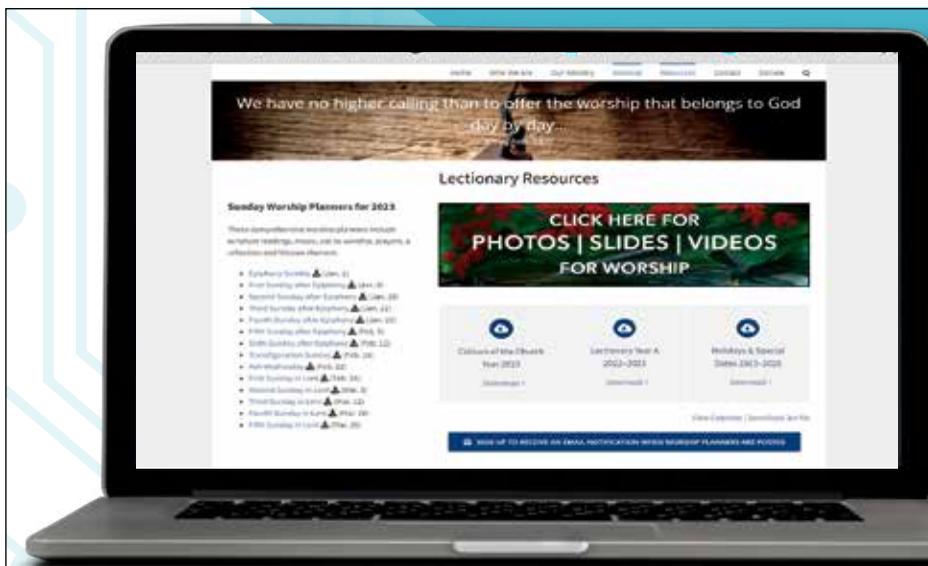


The memorial stained-glass window in St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Kingston, Ont., was dedicated by the RMC of Canada in 1919.

revival of this colourfully memorable heritage celebration. There are hopes that this special historical gift of engagement from the RMC officer cadets might inspire some others from the military college to continue the unique traditions of Copper Sunday into 2024.



Pictured (left to right) are RMC pipers Charles Howie and Eric McCracken, the Rev. Dr. Paul Kern with two RMC officer cadets and Eva Barnes, church museum curator, May 2023.



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The church school at First Presbyterian Church in Brockville, Ont., took part in the PWS&D Sunday School Challenge this June. The children chose several items from the Gifts of Change catalogue and fundraised toward their goal of \$150 by selling handmade heart-shaped refrigerator magnets during coffee hour. They reached their target, which was then matched by a generous member of the congregation, for a total of \$303! Many thanks to Denise Kent and Janet and Francis LeBrun, church school teachers, and our church school children for their hard work and compassion for vulnerable people around the world. Learn more about Gifts of Change at [presbyterian.ca/gifts-of-change](http://presbyterian.ca/gifts-of-change).



On May 28, First Presbyterian Church in Brockville, Ont., welcomed the chair of the Brockville & Area Food Bank to worship. In response to her message, the congregation ran a Food Drive for the month of June to support the Food Bank's Snack Pack program. The program assists families by providing healthy snack items for children, and is especially important in the summer when school nutrition programs are not available for low-income families. The congregation collected several large boxes of Snack Pack items, and also made a financial donation designated for the program. First Presbyterian is thankful for everyone's generosity and to be able to help those in need in the community.



"Wanna Dance?" This question and the above picture decorated the top of a poster inviting neighbours to join West Vancouver Presbyterians for dance lessons once a month on Saturday afternoons. The Rev. Wolody Sosnowsky, interim moderator, is pictured dancing with Heather Dunn, a congregant who is a competitive ballroom dancer. At the initial event in May, Heather led 30 participants in a foxtrot lesson. Half attended in response to the poster, half were WVPC congregants. In June, she taught East Coast Swing. In the fall and winter months, dances will be from different cultures: Scottish, Persian, African. By opening the Lower Hall in this way, the congregation hopes to spread the Christian message of joy and togetherness—remembering the "Lord of the Dance."



First Presbyterian Church in Pictou, N.S., recently celebrated school graduates from the First Church family. Pictured (left to right) are co-Clerk of Session Vicki Campbell, graduate Molly Rowan, Interim Moderator the Rev. Susan Smith, graduate Zachary MacInnis, and co-Clerk of Session David Munro. Both Molly and Zachary graduated from Northumberland Regional High School. Also celebrated were Klorissa Farnsworth, Bachelor of Music Therapy with Honours (Acadia University, Wolfville); Riley Boulter, Bachelor of Human Kinesiology (Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, N.L.); Maddie Langille, Continuing Care Assistant Diploma with Honours (Nova Scotia Community College, Digby); and Myles Farnsworth, Electro-Mechanical Technician Diploma with Honours (Nova Scotia Community College, Stellarton).



Burns Presbyterian Church in Milverton, Ont., served 300 people at their annual Drive Thru 1/2 BBQ Chicken Dinner. Members ranging in ages from eight to 88 assisted with food prep and serving the meals. Proceeds are being directed to mission projects.



The 2023 Camping Staff at Camp MacLeod held a Commissioning Service at Union Presbyterian Church in Albert Bridge, N.S. The Rev. Peter MacDonald, convener of the Camp MacLeod Committee, led the worship service focusing on the words of Mark 12:6–8: individually we are members of one body. Camp MacLeod is owned and operated by the Presbytery of Cape Breton.



On Saturday, June 3, Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., hosted a Community Art Show & Sale.



Sunday, May 28, was a very special day at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Orillia, Ont. The congregation welcomed two new elders, eight new members and held the annual Memorial Flower Planting Day.



Some members from the congregation at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Lethbridge, Alta., distributed empty food bags, and in return received over 200 filled bags for "Target Hunger," a city-wide food bank initiative to fill their shelves.



St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Fergus, Ont., participated in Fergus Medieval Faire in July. A water station was set up, where drinks were provided to the thirsty. The Rev. Peter Bush and Caleb Teichroeb dressed as monks from the fictional monastery of Fergus-on-the-Water. Over 800 people were served, and several commented that it was appropriate that monks were serving people's needs with cups of cold water.

Pictured are Robbie MacInnis (far right) and his son, Aaron (next to his dad), from First Presbyterian Church in Pictou, N.S., piping by the waters of Ullapool, Scotland. The pair from Pictou County travelled to Scotland to commemorate the departure of the ship Hector from Ullapool 250 years ago, bringing Scottish settlers to Pictou in September of that year. Celebrations will take place in Pictou, "the Birthplace of New Scotland," in September.



This picture is of the first meeting of faith leaders of York Region, hosted by York Regional Police Diversity Equity & Inclusion Bureau. This new Inter-Faith Harmony Initiative hopes to bring faith leaders together in open dialogue, sharing their faith and beliefs. Held on Wednesday, June 28, 2023, at the Community Safety Village in Stouffville, Ont., the Rev. Robert Hayashi attended and was accompanied by Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church Clerk of Session, Susan Falla-Johnson.



Caledonia Presbyterian Church in Caledonia, Ont., hosted a textile recycling drive this past spring in combination with an e-waste recycling drive, and managed to divert over 8,000 pounds (4 tons) of waste from the landfills. What a great morning of community support!



Blair Presbyterian Church, Garden of Eden, in New Glasgow, N.S., recently marked the 90th birthday of two of their faithful members. Pictured is Theresa Fraser with supply minister, the Rev. Michael Crichton. In the second photo is Margaret (Peggy) Wood.



The June meeting of the Niagara Presbytery fell on Wednesday, June 21, which was National Indigenous Peoples Day. A small group of Elders and the Rev. Anita Van Nest from Stamford Presbyterian Church in Niagara Falls planned a special service with drumming. It included a call to worship from the Mi'kmaq people and concluded with a Blessing to the Four Winds. The congregation asked to include these wonderful traditions again in the following Sunday morning worship as well. Drummers are the Rev. Anita Van Nest, Elder Leila Paugh and Elder Robin McBurney. Readers are Allison and Haley.



Lochwinnoch Presbyterian Church in Lochwinnoch, Ont., held a Pop-Up Strawberry Shortcake Social. The event included focused conversations in small groups, music and strawberry desserts.



Heroes of Faith was the theme of Vacation Bible School this July at St. George's and St. David's Presbyterian Churches in River John and Toney River, N.S. The "Bible Heroes" discussed included Noah and the Ark, David and Goliath, Daniel in the Lion's Den, Queen Esther and Jesus—the greatest Bible hero. Pictured are Vacation Bible School attendees and helpers, and story time activities.



During the pandemic, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Cobden, Ont., began meeting for worship outdoors in the summer months. The park is next door to the church and provided a good venue. The congregation liked it so much they have continued to worship outdoors post-pandemic on Sundays during the summer when the weather is cooperative. Each Sunday, special music is included. Pictured playing guitar (above) are Dale and Ryan Yuke. Dennis Nieman and Murray Olmstead are in the second photo.



On June 18, Bethel Presbyterian Church in Pictou, N.S., held a "Grand Celebration Service" to honour 150 years of ministry in Pictou Landing. The service was led by the Rev. Karla Wubbenhorst and was followed by a barbecue lunch. Pictured top left are Bill and Isabel MacPherson. Above is a group picture on the front steps of Bethel Presbyterian Church. In the photo to the left are Sam Graham with Dorothy Chisolm, Clara Mackenzie and Kathy Graham cutting the Grand Celebration Cake. The Rev. Karla Wubbenhorst is pictured standing with the Anniversary sign; the Roper family (right) is enjoying lunch at the children's table.



A variety of activities were recently held at Point Edward Presbyterian Church in Sarnia, Ont., including Big Hat Day, Loud Shirt Day, a celebration of mothers, a celebration of fathers, a 90th birthday celebration for June Tracey, a new member celebration for Gord Hutchinson, and a 121st anniversary celebration!



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The congregation of First Presbyterian Church in North Pelham, Ont., recognized and thanked Roger and Nancy Miller for their years of dedicated service to the congregation. Roger Miller served as Clerk of Session for 15 years, and Nancy Miller served as treasurer for over 20 years. Both recently retired from their roles. A special presentation was made during the worship service to recognize their contributions.



Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont., was honoured to receive pulpit falls as a legacy gift from St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Belleville, Ont. A dedication service was held on Sunday, Feb. 12. Pictured (left to right) are RHPC Clerk of Session Susan Falla-Johnson, the Rev. Robert Hayashi and Beth Stanbury, elder and chair of the Worship & Music Committee and Stewardship Committee.



On July 1, 2023, the pastoral charge of Rockway and First Presbyterian Church in North Pelham, Ont., was excited to welcome their new minister, the Rev. Jacob (Ju-Hang) Lee.



The Presbytery of Hamilton recently donated \$42,000 to support Norfolk Haldimand Community Hospice. The hospice provides services like palliative care education, family and caregiver support, and bereavement programs. The hospice was recommended as a recipient for the donation by the congregation of the former Knox Presbyterian Church in Port Dover, Ont. Pictured are the Rev. Lois Whitwell (left) and the Rev. Janice Doyle (right), with Tracey Webster from Norfolk Haldimand Community Hospice (centre). PHOTO CREDIT: ANITA PRIESTLY.



The Women's Missionary Society at Knox Presbyterian Church in Tiverton, Ont., held a special 125th anniversary service on May 28 with guest speaker Carol Mackowski of St. Andrew's WMS in Owen Sound. Carol spoke of the history of Knox's WMS and their many years of service to support the mission work of the PCC. Pictured left to right are members Linda Blackett, Gerda Roppel, Rosemary Grover, speaker Carol Mackowski, Islay Eby and Eleanor Thompson.



On June 25, a joint service was held at Little Narrows Presbyterian Church with St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Whycomagh, N.S., to celebrate Camp MacLeod, the Presbyterian camp on the beautiful Mira River in Albert Bridge. The materials on the table represented the bonfire (a space heater) and items that connect us to camp. Everyone gathered around the "bonfire" in the church and sang "Kum Bah Yah" to conclude the service. The congregations have provided much needed food and financial support for Camp MacLeod.



First Presbyterian Church in Pictou, N.S., recently celebrated its 237th Anniversary. A time of fellowship followed the service, with the anniversary cake being cut by guest speaker the Rev. Barbara Fotheringham, the Rev. Susan Smith, Interim Moderator and Vicki Campbell, the Co-Clerk of Session, pictured here. First Church will be taking part in celebrations later in the year honouring the arrival of settlers on the ship Hector from Scotland to Pictou, "The Birthplace of New Scotland," 250 years ago.



King Presbyterian Church in New Minas, N.S., held two "Geddie Spaghetti" lunches following worship on June 11 and 25. A total of \$1,035, raised through free-will donations, was donated to help with Camp Geddie's operational expenses. The photos were taken at the June 11 event.



On Sunday, June 4, Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., served dinner at Evangel Hall Mission.



The Rev. Lydia Bae, minister at Langley Presbyterian Church in Fort Langley, B.C., was inducted by Westminster Presbytery in May 2023. Two new ruling elders, Nancy Hantke and Graeme Kennedy, were inducted in June 2023. Nancy was ordained and Graeme was admitted to the Session.



Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., held their annual Celebration Sunday in June, to celebrate the year in faith education. But the day was a celebration x 4 for one family at the church. All four children in the Arthur family—Yolanda (age 9), Bill (8), Gracin (3) and Marilyn (19 months)—were baptized during the service, led by the Rev. Greg Smith. The family is originally from Ghana, but live in Calgary now and attend VAPC, where the kids are regular participants in Sunday school. Parents Philip and Grace thought that celebrating their children's baptisms in this way would have a special meaning for the family and it truly was a joyful and sacred celebration!



Knox Presbyterian Church in Bobcaygeon, Ont., had a "Sundae Sunday" on July 23. Scoopers of our hometown Kawartha Dairy ice cream, with lots of trimmings, were: Marjan Hoorn, Peter Hoorn and George Coene. We had a good crowd to enjoy the summer treat! PHOTO CREDIT: MYRA COENE

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Some members of the Burning Bush Auxiliary of the Atlantic Mission Society took a trip to the Millbrook Cultural & Heritage Center in Millbrook, N.S., to learn more about Mi'kmaq people and efforts toward Truth & Reconciliation. The group thoroughly enjoyed the exhibits and the media presentation. Pictured (left to right) are Anna Rushton, Joni Roper, Mary Condon, Ruth Hopkins, Kathy Graham, Linda Sangster and Robin Langille.



Last August, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in New Gairloch, N.S., (part of Hopewell Pastoral Charge) celebrated their 200th Anniversary. David Sutherland, whose ancestors attended the church, was the guest speaker and Little Harbour Presbyterian Church choir were the guest singers. This year, the congregation is celebrating on August 20 with the Rev. Charles McPherson as guest speaker. Pictured above is the historic church. Also pictured is Mary Maclean, who turned 100 in August last year and who had been baptized in the church 100 years ago.



St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Whycocomagh, N.S., sponsored several events as part of the community's Whycocomagh Summer Festival from July 10 to 16, 2023. A "Lunchtime Ceilidh," silent auction and pancake breakfast were very successful and well attended. The events not only served as fundraising projects for the church but also as a means of Christian fellowship with the community. Outdoor worship services during the month of July were also very popular.



On Sunday, June 25, members of Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., joined a presbytery-wide initiative to take part in the Toronto Pride Parade.



# A Mission Partnership Spanning Five Decades



The new classroom blocks in Malawi, now in use, with students and teachers outside during a break.

By Anne Saunders, former Life & Mission Agency employee and member of the Cutting Edge of Mission Committee, and Alex Bruce, elder at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Dartmouth, N.S.

In the mid-1970s, we were CUSO (Canadian University Service Overseas) volunteers with our spouses in Malawi. Back then, Malawi exported maize to neighbouring countries. It hadn't yet experienced the HIV and AIDS pandemic, climate change droughts and flooding, or COVID-19. And we had yet to learn about The Presbyterian Church in Canada's mission work in Malawi. While there, however, we did become aware of CCAP churches—part of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, begun in the late 19th century with Dr. David Livingstone.

But we did not know that the PCC and CCAP's Blantyre Synod partnership was in its early stages. The Rev. Brian Crosby, the first PCC-appointed mission staff, arrived with his wife, Elizabeth, in 1969, to serve in youth ministry, working with local leaders to strengthen the ministry of the Likhubula House Youth Centre. We met Brian Crosby during our volunteer orientation at this facility. After the Crosbys, the Rev. Charles Scott and his wife,

Sharon, arrived in the mid-1970s. Charles served as assistant pastor at the cathedral-like St. Michael and All Angels Church in Blantyre, where we attended a friend's wedding.

The PCC—Blantyre Synod partnership has always had a training component. In the early years it provided opportunities for Malawian church leaders to attend Canadian Presbyterian theological colleges. It also provided many Canadian Presbyterians with opportunities to grow in faith and expand their worldview, serving in various roles and participating in study tours. Currently, PCC mission staff the Rev. Dr. Blair Bertrand serves at the Zomba Theological University, while the Rev. Joel Sherbino serves in Prison Ministry.

When Blantyre Synod's general secretary, the Rev. Dr. Billy Gama, visited the PCC national office last September, he spoke of the Synod's concerns related to youth, climate change, theological education and pastors' salaries. Blantyre Synod covers Malawi's Southern Region and has over 1.2 million members. There are 185 ordained ministers serving over 600 churches and 700 prayer houses. There are also 274 public primary schools, many struggling to provide an adequate learning environment.

Since 1994, when free primary school education was introduced, Malawi's primary schools have generally been overcrowded, understaffed and under-resourced. Imagine a six-year-old child sitting shoulder to shoulder on a classroom floor with 99 other children, with one teacher and one worn out blackboard? This was the situation at Misanjo Primary School. Our long-time Malawian friend, Dr. Zipangani Vokhiwa, now a science professor in the U.S., had begun his schooling at Misanjo. He despaired to learn of the overcrowding. How could parents hope for a better future for their children? For equal opportunities for their daughters and their sons? It's known that with inadequate schooling in Malawi there is greater risk of child marriage, teen pregnancy and gender-based violence.

Today, Dr. Vokhiwa is giving back to Malawi. As a Fulbright Scholar Award recipient, he is in Malawi this year assisting Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST) with the development of a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) Centre. In addition, following his consultations last year with the Misanjo CCAP pastor, the PTA Committee, local chiefs and the school headmaster, the Misanjo Primary School Rehabilitation Project team was formed. Contractors were hired and building



The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) minister, the school headmaster and the chair of the school parents' committee standing in front of one of two new classroom blocks when it was under construction.

began on two school blocks with two classrooms in each. The total cost would be \$35,000 (U.S.). Initial funding came from Dr. Vokhiwa's own savings and fundraising efforts. But in fall 2022, as the walls for the classroom blocks were near completion, Dr. Vokhiwa told us that additional funds were needed for the roofs, outside gutters, drainage and interior plastering.

We wondered if we could help support this project ourselves and by raising money through The Presbyterian Church in Canada. After communication with Life & Mission General Secretary, the Rev. Ian Ross-McDonald, who also discussed the project with the Rev. Gama, a donation of \$4,325 (U.S.) was sent to Blantyre Synod. By February 2023, the roofs were on! While still dreaming of 160 student desks (costing \$7,700 U.S.) and eventually a library (costing \$8,000 U.S.), the community was very grateful and hoped to have stu-

dents in the classrooms by April.

Then on March 13, Cyclone Freddy hit Blantyre Synod. In early April Dr. Vokhiwa wrote, "Many Malawians, over 1,000, died...homes, bridges and roads washed away. Relief campuses were set up for displaced families with support from local army, teachers and citizens... Currently the Southern Region is in recovery mode... I drove to my home village and the Misanjo school blocks that we are constructing are intact—thank God!"

Blantyre Synod is participating in this relief effort. As its partner, the PCC is helping. Let us all pray for Malawians. And if you can offer financial support, designate your donations to PWS&D's "Relief for Tropical Cyclone Freddy" or to International Ministries for "Blantyre Synod" or for "Misanjo Primary School Rehabilitation Project."

For more information contact Lily Ko at [lko@presbyterian.ca](mailto:lko@presbyterian.ca) or call 1-800-619-7301 ext. 254.

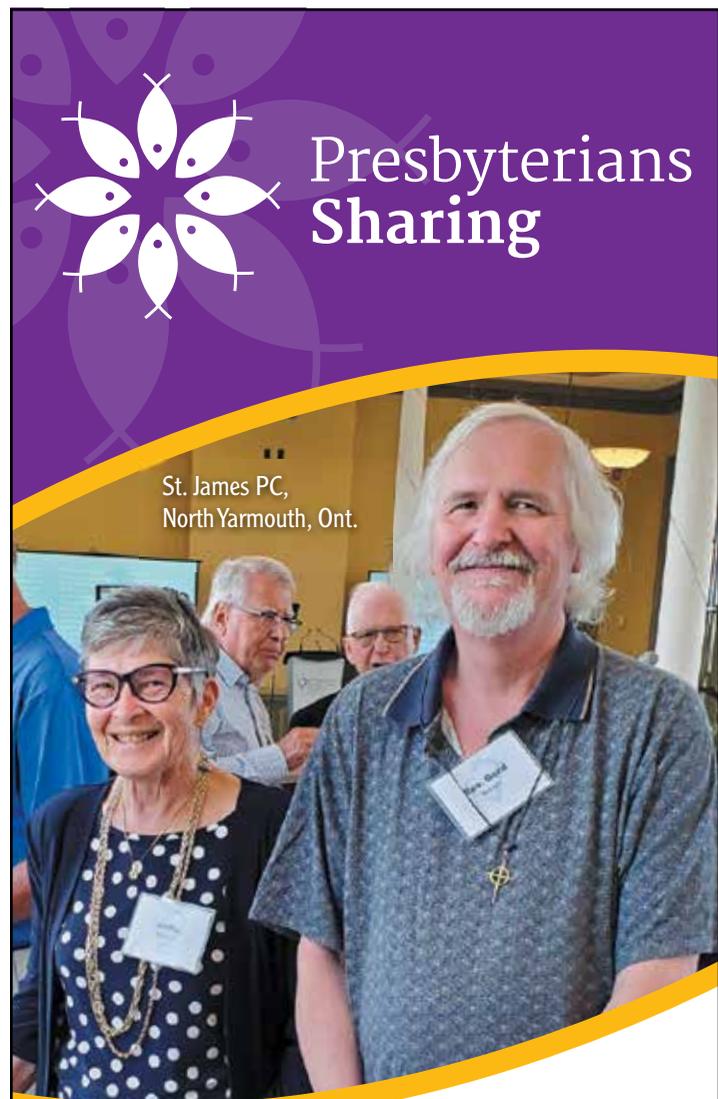
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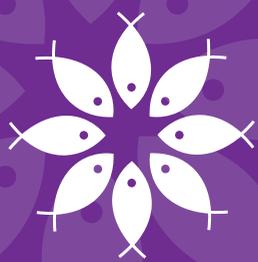
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# The First Female Palestinian Pastor



Sally Azar, the first female Palestinian pastor.

By Damaris Dilling,  
Communications Specialist,  
Department of Service to  
Palestinian Refugees of the Middle  
East Council of Churches

On January 22, 2023, Sally Azar was ordained as a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, making her the first female Palestinian pastor. In 2006, the Evangelical Church had laid the foundation for this by deciding that women could also be ordained.

Prior to this announcement, I arrived at the German Redeemer Church in the Old City of Jerusalem, where I arranged to meet Sally for an interview. I could feel the hustle and bustle and the special atmosphere inherent in the days before this significant ceremony. A journalist from the German television channel ARD took a few photos of Sally and her father, Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar. The liturgy for Sunday needed to be finalized, and the first guests from Germany had already arrived and wanted to have a few words with Sally. After a brief chat with Bishop Azar, Sally took me to the church café. We ordered two large cappuccinos and sat down in a quiet corner of the open courtyard of the old sanctuary. Despite the tension, Sally seemed relaxed and took time to answer my questions.

Sally grew up in the church because her father was a pastor and is the bishop now. It is a second home for her. She attended children's services and youth events here, and it was here that the decision matured in her to become a pastor herself. It was always clear to her that she wanted to work in a church context and with people. And many people around her rec-

ognized the potential of a pastor in her early on. But it was important for her to make the decision of her profession alone, regardless of other people's opinions, and to have a wholehearted yes, not only to this profession, but to this calling. That is why it took her a while to decide for herself that she wanted to become a pastor. Her father was always a role model but he never interfered; he let her go her own way and make her own decisions. In the meantime, she was sure that becoming a pastor was her true calling.

Sally studied theology in Lebanon and in Germany. Nevertheless, it was always clear to her that she wanted to come back to her home country after her studies. Even though she felt very welcome and comfortable in the church in Germany, she felt at home in Jerusalem. Working with young people is particularly important to her here in the Middle East conflict: "Young people grow up here with walls and checkpoints. They know nothing else and think that this is the norm. I also grew up thinking that borders and checkpoints are commonplace. Only when I travelled to other countries did I realize that this is not everyday life in many parts of the world. I enjoyed this freedom very much and asked myself why this is not the case in my home country. Especially under occupation, young people need a place to recharge."

Sally wants to do her best to help Palestinian Christians breathe a sigh of relief and create a home for themselves, even in these difficult times. She will be working in the Jerusalem and Beit Sahur communities, and she is looking forward to connecting the English church in Jerusalem with the Arab assemblies and building projects.

Of course, she feels the specialness of being the first Palestinian woman pastor to be ordained and thus also to be able to make a bit of history. But this circumstance is not so important to her personally; she is much more touched by the joy of her fellow

people in the communities and society about this fact, coupled with the great cordiality and warm welcome that is shown to her.

In 2006, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod decided that women could also be ordained. However, it took some time for society to accept this step. The communities were prepared for this by the establishment of the Women's Desk since 2008, where the equality of women and men in the church and society was addressed. Sally commented that it was mainly the women in the churches who were against a female pastor, not necessarily the men. Now, the time has come and the church is pleased to announce that the first Palestinian woman pastor has been ordained. Not only as a woman pastor, but also as someone who is still young, there will be many challenges for her. But she is experiencing a lot of support from the church leadership. Sally assumes that the first years will be apprenticeship years, where she will also make mistakes. She fervently hopes that people will then associate these mistakes more with her as a person and less with her as a female pastor. One of her first ecumenical projects, for example, was the World Day of Prayer at the beginning of March, in which women from every church participated.

In general, there are four ordained women in the Middle East in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land—one in Syria and three in Lebanon. The first Syrian pastor is a close friend of Sally's. They studied together in Lebanon, and she is also Sally's mentor. Everything Sally brings with her now as a pastor is from her.

Sally smiled at me. She said she feels well equipped with, among other things, a strong international network at her back.

I am convinced that Sally will become a wonderful pastor. With her warm manner she will take the hearts of the members of the church by storm and will become a great enrichment for the Christian Palestinian community.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is a long-time partner of the Middle East Council of Churches, and we celebrate this announcement.

**PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT**



Severe weather events caused by the climate emergency, like Cyclone Freddy in Malawi, devastates homes and livelihoods.

By Guy Smagge, PWS&D Director

God has provided us with a beautiful and bountiful planet and we all have been called to care for it, just like we care for our homes, our gardens, our lawns and our loved ones. Several systems need to be in place for human life to be possible on Earth: the water cycle, clean air and livable temperatures, for example.

These systems are interlinked and defy all human-made borders. We have seen how forest fires in Canada have sent smoke to Washington, D.C., New York City and as far as Europe. We see how plastics originating from various parts of the world end up forming huge islands of garbage in the oceans.

When looking at the human tragedy linked to the climate emergency, we see how water cycles have been disturbed by the excessive use of fossil fuels and the over production of greenhouse gases. As a result, parts of our planet are experiencing the highest temperatures on record, with drastic effects on human populations. Droughts are more persistent, rains are less predictable and often more torrential when they finally occur.

PWS&D recently issued a funding appeal for the East Africa Hunger Crisis. East Africa, also known as the “Horn of Africa,” has been experiencing its longest drought in recorded history. Five

# The Human Tragedy of the Climate Emergency

consecutive rainy seasons failed to materialize. Populations in Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya saw their crops dry out, their cattle die of hunger and thirst, and have had to migrate to refugee camps or to already overpopulated urban centres, hoping to find food to stay alive.

The World Weather Attribution Initiative—an organization made up of international scientists—asserts that this devastating drought would not have happened without human-caused climate change.

The World Food Programme states that after three years of drought, over 23 million people in Somalia, Kenya and Ethiopia are facing severe hunger. Long awaited rains finally came, but resulted in flash floods that inundated homes, washed away surviving livestock, closed schools and health facilities, and created conditions where water-borne diseases proliferated.

This has also been happening in other regions. In Malawi, in the month of March, Cyclone Freddy destroyed hundreds of thousands of acres of crops, leaving half a million people displaced. It was the longest-lasting tropical cyclone ever recorded in the southern hemisphere.

Despite contributing very little to the emissions that cause climate change, Malawi and countries in the Horn of Africa bear many of the heaviest costs of these climate

events. While global leaders fail to take action to turn the climate emergency around, we are left with an ever-greater responsibility to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need, and to help them build resilience to face future extreme weather events.

We are leading a food assistance project in Malawi in response to Cyclone Freddy; and we are supporting food assistance and nutrition projects in Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya through collaborations at Canadian Foodgrains Bank.

PWS&D is committed to increasing its climate action programming, given the impact of climate change on populations in the world’s poorest countries. As such, we are pooling resources with the United Church, the Primate’s Fund (Anglican) and World Renew (Christian Reformed) to support climate initiatives for partners in Eastern and Southern Africa.

But collective global action is necessary. At the last global conference on climate (COP26), leaders of wealthier (and more polluting) countries agreed to set up a fund for loss and damage for poorer countries. Churches, through ACT Alliance, had been lobbying along with others for 10 years for this to become a reality. We need to ensure that they deliver on these commitments, and this includes Canada’s share.



Members of Danforth Grow Hope gather for a field visit in June 2023.

## Growing Hope

By the Rev Alex Bisset, Riverdale Presbyterian Church and Westminster Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont.

Six churches in the Danforth area of Toronto are working together to grow hope in a field about 45 minutes away from their neighbourhood, just outside the community of Stouffville.

These six congregations—including Riverdale Presbyterian and Westminster Presbyterian—are part of the Danforth Grow Hope Project in support of Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB). A Grow Hope Project is different from a regular CFGB growing project because it involves urban congregations sponsoring acres to grow crops in a rural location.

The Foodgrains Bank, in its beginnings, was a farmer-driven program, where grains were donated and then sent to where they were needed. Today, the actual grain isn’t shipped overseas, rather the money raised by selling the crop is used to enable emergency food aid and long-term food security. While still largely a rural program, Grow Hope projects are working to get city congregations involved.

Here’s how it works: urban churches raise money to pay for growing a specific acreage of a crop. In 2022, in our case, this was estimated at \$500 per acre. The farmer that the Project partners with—for us it was Reesor Seed and Grain—does the field preparation and planting, harvests the crop and sells it, then donates the gross proceeds to CFGB.

In 2022, over the space of a few months, the 10 acres of the Danforth Grow Hope Project—two acres of which were sponsored by Westminster and Riverdale Churches—produced a yield worth \$8,850, which means

that the \$500 per acre that our churches donated grew, quite literally, into \$885 per acre.

But it was after harvest that the real growth happened. Through a grant from the Government of Canada, donations made to the Foodgrains Bank are eligible to be matched up to 4:1. That means the initial donation of \$500 per acre, which grew into \$885 per acre, ultimately became over \$4,400 per acre. Through PWS&D partners around the world, that money was used to provide food aid to those in need, and to teach farmers methods to produce better and more reliable crops for themselves and for their families.

In 2023, with the price of everything increasing, the cost per acre has risen to \$600. Two new churches joined the original four partners, meaning that four denominations are now participating, and the Danforth Grow Hope Project has nearly doubled in size, going from 10 acres in 2022 to 18 acres in 2023. The Danforth Grow Hope Project is a wonderful opportunity for local churches to work together. It also demonstrates the way that small efforts—like seeds—can grow into something bigger.

On June 19, 2023, representatives of several of those churches drove out to visit the field. I led the group in a short service of blessing. As part of this, I read from Psalm 65, and then prayed for good weather and favourable growing conditions. My prayer ended, “Help us to bring you glory by using well and sharing the good things we receive from you. Make us and others willing to share our time and our resources, so that all may receive what they need to live. For we ask all this in the name of Jesus, the Sower and the Harvester. Amen.”



Food insecurity caused by years of drought in the Horn of Africa has left hundreds of thousands in need of food assistance in Kenya. PHOTO CREDIT: CWS.

## PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

# Responding to the Hunger Crisis

By Emma Clarke, PWS&D Communications

Climate change, conflict and other factors have led to emergency levels of hunger in many countries across the globe. In Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia, some 23 million people are without reliable access to food and water due to the ongoing severe drought.

Many people are also living in camps for refugees and internally displaced persons because conflicts, such as those in Sudan and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), have forced thousands of families from their homes. South Sudan, Chad, DRC and the Central African Republic have received refugees—but these countries' resources were already strained.

Recognizing the need to support the world's hungriest, PWS&D has been responding for many years in countries now acutely affected by this crisis.

### Kenya

An ongoing drought in Kenya has

affected close to 90 percent of the population. Farmers' crops have failed to grow on the parched land, leaving even more people food insecure amid elevated market prices. A sad consequence—many are concerned about an increase in gender-based violence and early marriage due to the economic hardships.

PWS&D has been supporting food security work in Kenya for many years. This spring, help was mobilized through the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund at Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Three months' worth of food baskets served the needs of 2,006 vulnerable households, with special attention to women and girls, elderly people and those living with disabilities.

### Somalia

The situation in Somalia has approached famine-like conditions: 1.8 million people have been displaced over the past year, primarily coming to camps in search of food and humanitarian aid. Sadly,

40 percent of Somalia's population is currently listed as severely food insecure—with more people facing that reality every day.

Abdi, his three-year-old sibling, and his parents were forced to leave their home due to severe drought. "We spent two days and one night on the road in a donkey cart before arriving [at the Jazira Internally Displaced Persons camp]," reflects Abdi's mother, Gabey. "The drought and displacement left us with no food to eat and no source of income."

At 11 months old, Abdi was particularly vulnerable to malnutrition. When a nutrition worker visited the camp, Abdi was selected to participate in a therapeutic food program supported by PWS&D. His health has now improved, and Abdi spends his days playing with those around him with childlike joy.

"I feel so much better and calmer now that he is better than before," reflects Gabey.

PWS&D is continuing a response in Somalia that provides

integrated health and nutrition services, some of which are mobile to meet the needs of those in rural areas. The project aims to improve the nutrition of the most vulnerable population, particularly children under five years of age and pregnant and lactating women, through therapeutic feeding, nutritional training and food baskets. The program has served over 22,000 people.

### South Sudan

South Sudan is facing its highest levels of food insecurity and malnutrition since its independence 11 years ago. With this year's lean season, from May to September, the worst on record, 9.4 million people are expected to need humanitarian assistance by the end of 2023.

A current response by PWS&D's partner Tearfund Canada is assisting 1,200 households, primarily female-headed, by providing a series of four food vouchers intended to get families to the next harvest.



Now healthier after receiving therapeutic supplemental feeding, 11-month-old Abdi plays with his mother. PHOTO CREDIT: TROCAIRE.

### Respond with us

PWS&D and other humanitarian organizations are relentlessly serving people in need in these and other East African countries. From May 1 to June 30, PWS&D participated in a Humanitarian Coalition appeal through our membership at Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Funds received through this appeal were matched by the Government of Canada to make the support go even further.

However, as political instability and hostile weather conditions continue, even more humanitarian help is needed. Respond with us by supporting PWS&D's ongoing work. Visit [WeRespond.ca/Hunger-Crisis-in-East-Africa](http://WeRespond.ca/Hunger-Crisis-in-East-Africa) to learn more.

# Falak Remained Hopeful Despite Hardship



As a trained weaver, Falak specializes in crafting wooden bedsteads. PHOTO: CWSA.

By Stephanie Chunoo, PWS&D Communications

Falak Sher, a determined individual from Mehr Veesar village in Pakistan, aspired to join the army but faced a setback when a poorly set bone left him bedridden for five years. Despite his dreams fading, he continued his education.

Unable to find suitable job op-

portunities due to his disability, he apprenticed himself to a master weaver specializing in wooden bedsteads called charpoys. For years, he enjoyed steady work and income until the floods of 2022 devastated the region, destroying homes and the local economy, leaving Falak and other weavers without customers for their goods.

Between June and August 2022, severe rains and flash floods deeply affected over 5.7 million people in Pakistan. Farmland was ruined, and homes and schools were destroyed, necessitating urgent water, sanitation and health services.

During this challenging time, Falak and his family relied on the kindness of a landlord for one meal a day. Falak would often sacrifice his own food to ensure his young son and nursing wife were fed.

Eventually, work began to trickle in. However, due to his dis-

ability, Falak faced the additional expense of hiring a motorbike taxi to commute to the work site. But Falak never gave up.

Then in January 2023, through Community World Service Asia with the support of PWS&D and Canadian Foodgrains Bank, Falak received the first instalment of cash assistance for food.

With the cash, Falak purchased

food rations for his family. He had a full meal for the first time in four months and continued to do so for the following months.

Being a talented craftsman, Falak had not lost hope, which paid off. In February, he worked on the netting for twelve charpoys. The cash from the food aid strengthened his hope and ability to provide for his family. With work



Falak and his two young kids standing in front of their temporary shelter. PHOTO: CWSA.

slowly picking up pace, Falak can finally start thinking about rebuilding his collapsed home.

## Pakistan Floods: One year later

Working with Community World Service Asia in Pakistan, PWS&D implemented over \$1 million in programming to assist 45,624 people like Falak and his family. Support included monthly cash assistance for food needs, access to medical facilities, as well as water, sanitation and hygiene initiatives to combat the serious increased risk of water-borne illness.

A year later, PWS&D continues to assist those severely affected by and struggling to recover from the floods. In Mirpur Khas district, one of the hardest-hit areas in Sindh province, homes were destroyed, families displaced, crops washed away, livestock lost and livelihoods affected. A food assistance project is ongoing, allowing 3,100 families to receive three monthly cash transfers for food and essential needs.

Through your generous support, families and individuals in Pakistan have food in times of adversity and are rebuilding their homes and livelihoods after the floods. Thank you!

**PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT**

# PWS&D Partner Spotlight: CWSA



Marvin Parvez, regional director at CWSA, visiting a community project supported by PWS&D, with Leslie Scanlon, the Canadian High Commissioner to Pakistan. PHOTO CREDIT: CWSA.

By Karen Bokma,  
PWS&D Communications

Marvin Parvez is the regional director at Community World Service Asia (CWSA)—a long-time partner of PWS&D. Based in Pakistan, Marvin provides leadership to CWSA's staff of approximately 300 people, primarily based in Pakistan and Afghanistan. PWS&D works with CWSA to provide emergency relief, food security, health, education and livelihoods programs.

Starting work in the development and relief sector in 1990, Marvin Parvez was motivated to serve from a young age. High school involvement with the YMCA and his local church fed his desire to work for the church. Marvin joined Church World Service after completing university and has been serving communities in Asia, the Pacific and Central Asia ever since.

Today, as regional director of CWSA, Marvin has overseen the organization transition from being part of the global Church World Service program to becoming a fully nationalized operation. CWSA is a Pakistani-Afghan partnership, with leadership, management and governance coming from those two countries.

**What do you love most about your work?**

I loved it from day one and continue to love what I do. It comes from my faith and what I understand service to be—the servant King—ultimate humbleness is when you

wash the feet of the disciples or, in our case, the communities.

**Why is the model for how CWSA works so important?**

A lot of our work comes from missionary movements, where the relationship with the local community and local families was central. The communities are the heart of our work and part of our DNA. National organizations like CWSA understand the local context and are the most capable first responders. We are on the ground. It helps when we have a national team.

**How does the partnership with PWS&D impact your work?**

This partnership is a way of practicing stewardship. I love the word stewardship. It's how we treat each other, it's how we manage resources, it's how we manage creation. Stewardship is what should dictate the decisions we make in the work.

It's an empowering model for the whole sector. There are more resources available to us, more technical support. And it's more than that. I like the terms where people are talking about decolonizing so that you're actually sharing power, which is difficult.

**In the past several years, the situation in Afghanistan has been especially complicated. How have you dealt with that?**

The situation in Afghanistan is the worst humanitarian crisis and no one is talking about it. Everybody's talking about Ukraine, so we don't talk about Afghanistan

anymore. Jesus had strong solidarity and love for marginalized people, and I see some of that same thing when I think about Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is an example of why being a national organization is so important. If we were totally dependent on expatriate staff in Afghanistan, after the Taliban takeover we wouldn't have been able to function. I'm not saying the lives of my Afghan colleagues weren't at risk, but they understand the language, the culture, the tribal linkages.

We also have a gift which we didn't have in the '90s—digital media, social space. Unfortunately, not every young woman in Afghanistan has a smartphone, but many do. Compared to what we could reach in the late '90s, our capacity is much bigger today to reach many more people.

**What keeps you hopeful in this work, despite the challenges?**

I do get frustrated. I don't see voices of peace or talk of reconciliation. The sadness comes from the fact that I don't see global leadership for the peace initiative. But I was encouraged by seeing a delegation of African heads of state go to Ukraine. I'd like to see Christian leadership do the same.

Ultimately, to serve communities in need with love is the most important thing. Love is the most important commandment, and we should focus on that. Obviously, we have to be strategic and smart about it, but everything is possible. When we work together, when countries work together, we can do big, hard things.



Despite ongoing challenges since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021, CWSA remains committed to girls' education in the country. PHOTO CREDIT: CWSA.



Members of the sponsorship group welcomed an Afghan couple who arrived in May.

## Welcoming New Friends

By the Rev. Dr. Ta Li Hsieh,  
minister at Vancouver Taiwanese Presbyterian Church

There are about 110 million refugees and forcibly displaced people around the world as of 2022. This number is an historical high. How can a church respond to the call of hospitality this situation requires, working together to be the witness?

After the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, the Government of Canada pledged to welcome 40,000 Afghan refugees to Canada. To date, over 30,000 Afghans have arrived in Canada.

Afghan refugees have been welcomed to Canada under different immigration streams, one of which is the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program. Under this program, the costs for the sponsorship are shared with the Canadian government. The sponsoring group commits to a full year of social, emotional and settlement support, as well as six months of financial support. The government provides the other six months of financial support.

Since September 2022, Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church and Vancouver Taiwanese Presbyterian Church have been working together to undertake a sponsorship under the BVOR program. With support from refugee program staff at PWS&D, we applied for a BVOR sponsorship. Each congregation will take on one quarter

of the full expense of the partnership, which is about \$14,000 for one year of financial support. The joint committee formed by the two congregations worked very diligently, including arranging housing, daily living support and documents to prepare for arrival and a smooth transition into a new home.

On May 5, 2023, we met our long-awaited new friends at the Vancouver International airport—a gifted young couple from Afghanistan. The members of the Refugee Committee took them to the home that had been prepared for them—for a peaceful rest after the long journey. Since their arrival it is very exciting to see our new friends adjust well—finding work and entering the job market. They are beginning new dreams in their lives.

Refugees leave their original homes, and finally reach their new homes. As it says in Romans 15:7, "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." On Sunday, June 11, the two congregations had a welcoming potluck lunch for the newcomers and introduce them to the congregation members. The room was filled with good food, joy, warmth, caring, laughter. The compassion took over the worries.

To learn more about how you could take part in a BVOR refugee sponsorship, please contact [sponsorship@presbyterian.ca](mailto:sponsorship@presbyterian.ca).



In June, a welcoming potluck lunch was hosted to introduce the newcomers to the two congregations.

## PLANNED GIVING

# The Potential of Gifts of Insurance

By Jim MacDonald and  
Karen Plater, Stewardship  
& Planned Giving

Are you looking for a way to make a meaningful gift to your church, but don't think it's financially possible? There may be a way you haven't considered. Life insurance can be a creative way to leave a lasting legacy with a relatively small investment of funds.

There are a variety of ways to use life insurance to give. You can transfer ownership of an existing policy to your church and receive an immediate tax receipt for the policy's cash surrender value, or acquire a new life insurance policy with your church as the owner and beneficiary. In both these instances, you receive charitable tax receipts from the premiums to offset taxes now. Alternatively, you can make your church the beneficiary of your life insurance, providing a large charitable tax receipt for your estate when you die.

### Example

Jean sat at her kitchen table pondering the paperwork for her life

insurance. She was no longer sure if she needed the policy. Her house was paid off and both children had good jobs and no longer needed her financial support. The next day she brought up the subject with her financial advisor, who suggested donating the policy to her favourite charity.

The idea intrigued Jean. As a long-time member of a Presbyterian congregation, she arranged to meet with her advisor and a member of her church's stewardship committee. They gathered around the table and Jean listened as they explained how the

gift could work. Jean would gift the policy to the congregation, receive charitable tax receipts for the policy's cash surrender value and for the premium payments she continued to make until the policy was paid up. She could use the receipts for tax credits against her current income. She learned the congregation used planned gifts like these to help ensure future outreach ministry. It would help replace her regular giving and support the community she loved.

After some discussion, Jean signed a gift agreement, which

included detailed instructions on how her gift would be used, and contacted the insurance company to initiate the transfer. When she was done with the paperwork, she was happy knowing that her gift would continue God's mission in the world.

### Creative ways to give more for less

1) *Charitable insured annuities.* Combining a charitable gift annuity and a life insurance policy donation is a great way to make a tax-efficient gift. This involves purchasing a charitable gift an-

nuity to pay the premiums for a life insurance policy you've given to the church. One gift becomes two: you receive tax benefits of the annuity and annual tax credits from the premiums and, when you die, your church receives both the remainder of the charitable gift annuity and the death benefit from the insurance policy.

2) *Canada Life My Par Gift Life Insurance.* Canada Life has developed a unique program designed for charitable giving that allows donors to make a single premium payment for a policy that is owned and controlled by the registered charity. The donor receives the tax receipt for the premium payment (which is larger than normal) and the charity receives the payout on the death of the insured person. Over time, the life insurance policy grows in value, so the donor's smaller payment can make a substantial gift.

To learn more creative and tax-efficient ways to give, email your questions or concerns to [stewardship@presbyterian.ca](mailto:stewardship@presbyterian.ca) or call 1-800-619-7301 and ask for Stewardship & Planned Giving.

### 3 Ways to Give Life Insurance

How was insurance given?	Who gets the tax receipt?	Receipt amount
1) Purchased new policy in the name of the church.	Donor during life*	The amount of the annual premium(s) donor pays.
2) Transferred ownership of existing insurance policy to the church.	Donor during life*	A portion of policy's cash surrender value and receipts for any annual premiums paid after the transfer.
3) Made the church a beneficiary of an existing policy.	Estate	The amount of the life insurance in the year received by the church.

\*Donor must ensure church receives a copy of the premiums paid each year.

## RECONCILIATION

# Healing and Reconciliation in Calgary



By Amy Dunn Moscoso, Grace  
Presbyterian Church in Calgary,  
Alta.

Grace Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., has been on a Truth, Healing and Reconciliation journey since July 1, 2021, when red paint was splattered on the front doors of the church. This led to listening, relationship-building and learning steps on a generational journey.

In 2022, the Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Team at Grace commissioned local Tsuut'ina artist Nathan Meguinis (also

known as Buffalo Boy, Traveling Rock, Kindhearted Man) to create an artwork. The painting "Living in Balance" was created and it now hangs outside the sanctuary as a reminder of the journey, and as an invitation for those who view it to learn and join the journey.

Nathan shared an artist's statement in a video. These notes come from the video and now hang alongside the painting.

### Artist's statement

We Dene live a life of beautiful balance with the world around and with other Indigenous Nations. In my artwork:

- The colour red represents Mother Earth. All the abstract human figures are red to show our connection to the earth, with each one having a white outline which is our spirit.
- The braided sweetgrass circle represents lasting unity.

- The prayer prints hanging in the tree represent our prayers and these flags are hanging from a poplar tree which represents life. Each colour has a meaning: Red – Mother Earth; Green – Plant Life; Blue – Air and Water; Yellow – Sun and Protection; and White – Soul and Spirit.
- The buffalo represents caring for family and all Indigenous Nations who have been resilient and rebounded from being driven from known ways of life.
- The symbol above the poplar tree represents the North Star. The North Star is the guiding star and as people we are called to be North Stars guiding others into living in balance.
- The background colours are in a blanket pattern. The orange represents Truth and Reconciliation, and the blue represents water and air,

which need to be protected and not polluted.

- The 13 feathers represent the 13 moon cycles in the year, which is the calendar the Tsuut'ina people follow. We live in balance when we are working to care for one another and for the earth all the days of the year.
- My artwork shows people of the earth coming together in prayer and peace.

To view a video of Nathan sharing this statement, visit [youtube.com/watch?v=gF1ZvBqSyDw](https://youtube.com/watch?v=gF1ZvBqSyDw)

### 2023 steps: Orange Shirt Day event

In 2023, for the second year, Grace is working with Stardale Women's Group to welcome the community into coming together in honour of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation for Reconnection, Reconciliation and Resilience—an event for hope and a better future in honour of

Orange Shirt Day.

This event is an opportunity to discuss the effects of residential schools and their legacy and is open to the public. This year, the event has grown and is welcoming other churches in the Beltline neighbourhood of Calgary, and Stardale has engaged businesses and organizations. There will be performances by the Stardale Girls Drumming group, and film showings that educate on the residential school system.

Grace continues to share steps from the journey and celebrate the journey of others.



**RECONCILIATION**

# Creatively Working Toward Reconciliation



*By Cathy Gale, elder, Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., and member of the Grace Quilters group*



signments in that context, sharing things I'd learned about Indigenous cultures. My final creative project illustrates this: a quilted table runner.

This "Reconciliation Runner" is meant to be a visible reminder of the ongoing need for reconciliation, and the work required. It's intended for reflection by non-Indigenous people and doesn't presume complete knowledge of Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing. It's meant to spark curiosity and interest about whatever each of us needs to learn to become people of reconciliation. Since I am not an Indigenous person, I didn't use an Indigenous design, but all design choices—pattern, colours and individual fabrics—point to common Indigenous cultural priorities, such as the importance of land, and cultural and spiritual values.

For many Treaty 7 Indigenous peoples, on which Calgary-Macleod exists, the Bear is considered sacred, symbolizing courage or bravery. The Bear's Paw pattern used in the runner is meant to remind us that acts of reconciliation take courage, while rotating blocks point to the need to consider multiple perspectives. Meaningful colours indicate the foundational importance of land, among other things, and lead into the unifying potential of reconciliation for all of us.

Reconciliation requires growth, and new ways of being, signified in the floral fabric that shows flowers in various stages and sizes. Reconciliation requires working together, and the black fabric shows hands clasped in the shape of a heart, reminding us of community, collaboration and cooperation. Loving respect for one another is at the core of Indigenous relationships, as it is in Christian ones.

Reconciliation starts with learning, so I share two key teachings for non-Indigenous people to com-

mit to, that my professor repeated regularly. The first learning: "Nothing about us, without us, for in speaking for me, you take away my voice." Learning firsthand is important, directly from Indigenous people about their cultures and ways of knowing. Non-Indigenous presumptions and assumptions won't help learning, and can perpetuate stereotypes, even unintentionally. Although I had learned from a credible, non-Indigenous authority, I had already chosen and cut the fabrics before I recalled the need to consult. It showed me how easily patterns of how we approach Indigenous cultures persist. If I was doing this again, I would reach out to Indigenous Elders or a nearby community and use their input right from the start.

The second learning: "Don't walk ahead, to lead, or behind, to push, but walk alongside, to share the journey." Becoming a responsible ally requires rethinking relationships and being honest about the best ways to be led by and work with the Indigenous cultures we live among.

I sought input from the Rev. Jake van Pernis, Grace's Associate Minister of Engagement and Service, and the Rev. Tony Snow, Indigenous Minister, Chinook Winds Region (United Church of Canada). Tony saw the design and gave feedback that something connecting to the community would be helpful, and an idea of circulating it within the presbytery came about.

Jake and Tony provided the idea of having the Reconciliation Runner visit each congregation for several weeks, to spark opportunities for curiosity and discussion in as many people as possible. Each ministry decides how it will be viewed and used. The runner spent the month of June at Grace, displayed on the communion table, referenced in worship and in their regular communications,

including social media. My home church of Varsity Acres will host it in September, before it moves to the next congregation that books it. The Runner is accompanied by a document explaining its purpose and features. Hopefully, over time, it will take on an instructional "life" of its own within the Presbytery of Calgary-Macleod.

My advice to other creators? By learning about local Indigenous cultures, non-Indigenous people realize what they and others need to learn also. Seek out and listen to the Indigenous communities whose traditional lands you live on; consider what needs to be shared. What are Indigenous priorities? How can these be illustrated to others? For non-Indigenous creators, visual media must be careful not to appropriate Indigenous imagery. Learning comes first, and perhaps the idea of how to share it will follow. A visual tool engages people easily and encourages them to come back to reflect and go deeper. Think creatively, source locally and close at hand—textile art, a painting, banner or mural, sculpture or carving, even something digital—the possibilities are endless. It should be as unique as the context you live in. Ideally, it would involve a group of people to learn, share and build community; these are things the church can do well.

I'm very grateful for the support

of: the Grace Quilters, a ministry of Grace Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., who generously shared their pattern library and "quilting stash"; to Jake and Tony for their input; and to my two inspiring professors who sparked this learning and encouraged me.

Growing into right relationships, we support principles of reconciliation and become more active participants in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, and more like Jesus, who loved all.



## HELPFUL ONLINE RESOURCES

For Members, Treasurers, Presbytery Clerks & Clerks of Session

Available for download at: [presbyterian.ca/pensionandbenefits/helpful-resources](http://presbyterian.ca/pensionandbenefits/helpful-resources)

- Your Group Benefits Plan Booklet
- Pension Plan Booklet
- Treasurer's Guide to Pension & Benefits
- Administration Guide for Presbytery Clerks & Clerks of Session
- Automatic Withdrawal Program

## BOOK REVIEW

# A Review of *After Dispensationalism*

By the Rev. Alex Bisset,  
Westminster Presbyterian Church  
and Riverdale Presbyterian Church  
in Toronto, Ont.

*After Dispensationalism: Reading  
the Bible for the End of the World*

Written by Brian P. Irwin,  
with Tim Perry  
Lexham Press, May 2023

Brian P. Irwin (Associate Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures at Knox College), with Tim Perry (Professor of Theology at Providence Seminary, Otterburne, Manitoba), has written a book that is detailed and scholarly as well as readable and relatable. *After Dispensationalism* will be useful not only to ministers and academics but to Christian laypeople who want to understand the ways in which the end of the world is described in the Bible and in popular culture.

The book begins by noting that

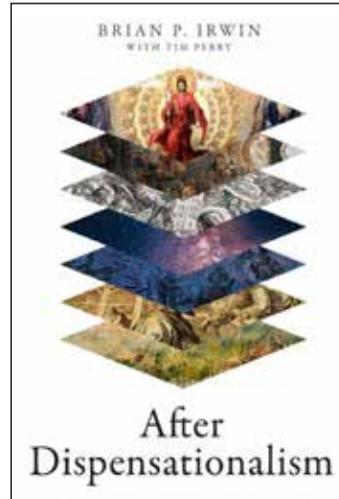
interest in the end times seems to increase every few decades. It provides an overview of the history of such interest and speculation, and then discusses the history of what we know as dispensationalism, which it defines as a theological approach to understanding both the Bible and God's action in the world, with an emphasis on the literal interpretation of scripture and the precision and present-day application of prophetic prediction. The authors give brief sketches of the lives of prominent dispensationalists, including John Nelson Darby (1800–1882) and Cyrus Ingerson Scofield (1843–1921). They remind us that while dispensationalism is a minority theological position in the church, its ideas permeate contemporary Christian culture and influence the understanding that those outside the church have of Christian belief.

After noting that attempts to pinpoint a date for the end of the

world so far have had a 0% success rate, the authors offer a reading of the books of Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation that asks how their earliest audiences might have understood them. The book points out that while prophetic scripture is *for* us, it is not all *about* us.

And while the book's focus is on apocalyptic and prophetic writing, almost all of the principles that the authors provide for reading such texts are applicable to reading any part of the Bible. The book concludes with 13 theses on how Christians should "read, think, and act on words that often mystify but were given to motivate us to greater love and labour for the Lamb." I found all 13 of these theses insightful and helpful for all times in the life of the church and especially for our times, but these five in particular stood out as being generally applicable:

"It is wiser to use the Bible to interpret the news than the news to interpret the Bible ..."



"We are on the surest interpretive footing when we consider the whole of a biblical book, not when we piece together tiny portions of different books." "Understanding some biblical passages symbolically is not to question the reliability, inspiration, or perfection of the Scriptures." "To live in expectation of Christ's return does not require knowing when Christ will return." "Looking for Christ to come again should not distract us from his presence with and in the church by the Spirit in word and sacrament." Roughly a quarter of the book's

400 pages are taken up by notes (placed at the end of the book rather than at the bottom of the page, and therefore less distracting), an extensive bibliography, and both a subject index and an index of scripture passages. While the subject matter is weighty, the book is written in a style that is accessible and at times humorous.

*After Dispensationalism* would be a good addition to any biblical or theological library and a valuable resource for preachers as they engage with the scriptures on a weekly basis. It could also be read and discussed by congregational book study groups.

The book begins by quoting a well-known collect from the Book of Common Prayer: "Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life ..." *After Dispensationalism* indeed offers many insights and interpretive principles that will be helpful in our common work of reading, marking, learning and inwardly digesting the scriptures.

## WOMEN

# Teddies for Tragedies

By Mary Purdy

In 2013, Olive Lewis asked the women of Greenbrier Presbyterian Church in Brantford, Ont., if they would be interested in knitting teddies for "Teddies for Tragedies."

Jump ahead a decade and the year 2022 marked our 10th anniversary with the project, and we have donated 2,010 teddies and 1,010 bags! We donate at least 200 bears per year, contributing to projects like Brantford's Nova Vita, an emergency shelter, Children's Aid, the Fire Department and Police Special Victims Services. The balance of teddies go to Duff's Presbyterian Church in Puslinch, Ont.

We have a great assembly line. Mary Purdy and Irene Phillips knit the teddies. Elaine Johnson sews

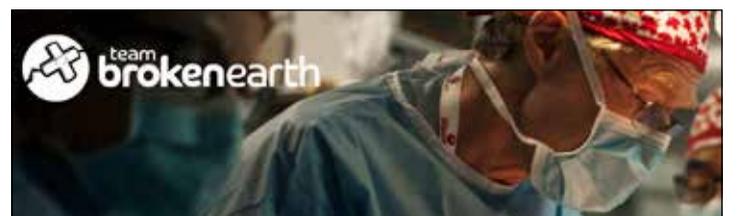


Pictured (left to right) are Elaine Johnson, Irene Phillips, Margaret Rutledge, Mary and Sam Purdy—and, of course, the teddies.

them up and Sam Purdy stuffs them. Then Mary Purdy puts on the happy faces. Margaret Rutledge has made most of our bags.

This ministry couldn't be done

without the prayers and donations of wool and cash from the congregation of Greenbrier Presbyterian Church and other community members.



# Update from Barrie Presbyterial

The Barrie Presbyterial WMS held their annual meeting in Elmvale, Ont., on June 24, 2023. President Janice Terry welcomed all and opened the meeting with prayer. A reflection on Ephesians 3:20 had been prepared as part of the devotions by the Rev. Tim Mason. Business was conducted and a memorial service was held for WMS members who had passed in 2022.

Our guest speaker was Mary Robinson. Mary is a registered nurse with anaesthetic experience. In 2022, Mary joined Team Broken Earth in a surgical mission to Guatemala. Team Broken Earth is an organization that provides

care and education to people in remote communities. Poverty is often extreme in these locations and many children are malnourished. During the trip, Mary was part of a group who performed over 50 surgeries in five days, including orthopaedic, gynaecological and general surgeries in a hospital where operation rooms were sparse and outdated (e.g., no IV poles and limited supplies).

Mary showed slides comparing the Guatemalan hospitals where she worked to Canadian ones. In the fall, Team Broken Earth will be at the San Pedro Hospital in Antigua, which is a mission church converted into a hospital.



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**WOMEN**

# Update from the Southwestern Ontario Synodical



At the Women's Missionary Society synodical for Southwestern Ontario, participants watched an historical skit of the first planning meeting that joined Hamilton and London into Southwestern Ontario in the spring of 1947.

By Shirley Miller,  
Paris Presbyterian President

The Women's Missionary Society Southwestern Ontario Synodical "75+" Anniversary was hosted by Paris Presbyterian and held at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Simcoe, Ont., on April 18–19. Synodical president Margaret McGugan welcomed members and guests to the celebration meeting. Janet Brewer brought greetings from the WMS Council Executive.

An inspirational worship and communion service was led by the Rev. Mikal Schomburg, minister of St. Paul's Simcoe. Guest speaker Callie Long, Associate Secretary of Communications, shared news of many new changes in the communications department of the PCC.

During the two days of meetings, an historical committee provided several historical highlights through vignettes. On Tuesday afternoon, four workshops were offered: rock painting, Bible study, Orange Shirt brooch creation and participation in an ad hoc choir.

President Margaret introduced dinner guests: Moderator of Synod, the Rev. Gwen Ament; Moderator of Presbytery, the Rev. Mikal Schomburg; the Rev. Ian and Linda Shaw of St. Paul's; and Missionary Priscilla Anderson. Past President Mary Simmons introduced the Rev. Margaret (Grieg) Robertson, who read greetings from the Rev. Anne Yee Hibbs as well as past synodical presidents.

The entertainment after dinner was an ad hoc choir organized by Simcoe choir directors Becky Stewart and Heidi Bowman. A sin-

galong of WMS favourite hymns, with introductions by choir members of the history of each hymn, was performed.

Wednesday morning opened with worship and a memorial service prepared by Marybel Brennehan of Embro. President Margaret lit a special candle in memory of Pauline Brown, missionary for 70 years in the Jobat region of India.

A presentation of Camp Kintail was made in the absence of the Rev. Theresa McDonald Lee. Jean Aitchison of the Stratford Medical Depot gave an update on the supplies needed, and informed us that containers loaded with provisions are being shipped to many countries, such as Ukraine, Turkey, South Sudan, Cuba. A Synodical



Cutting the anniversary cake is Southwestern Ontario (SWO) Synodical President Margaret McGugan, Council Executive Janet Brewer, and Paris Presbyterian President Shirley Miller.

Pandemic Project of pocket prayer shawls with attached prayer cards began in early 2020, with knitters and crocheters joining in. As of this meeting, over 3,000 little prayer shawls have been distributed to seniors, those in hospitals and added to containers shipped from Stratford Medical Depot. Margaret presented the knitters with appreciation gifts. The Rev. Ian Shaw installed the new executive. The 2024 SWO Synodical will be held at Camp Kintail with Sarnia Presbyterian hosting.



An appreciation bouquet was given to Mary Duffin for organizing historical presentations.

## WMS Honorary Memberships

Maitland Presbyterian Women's Missionary Society (WMS) was pleased to present WMS Honorary Memberships to Betty Mitchel (Molesworth) and Margaret Hamilton (South Kinloss) at the Maitland Presbyterian Rally held at Camp Kintail.

Betty Mitchel has served the WMS in many capacities over the years—as president, secretary, liaison with other groups, a welcoming hostess, and as an "ideas person." She encour-

aged our group to partner with the Sunday school to organize a pancake supper each Shrove Tuesday, and to enable the Sunday school to move forward on a monthly basis when interest and numbers were dwindling. Betty also helped raise awareness and support for work in Africa. With her leadership, the group bought medical supplies, shoes and paid school fees. Betty is always generous in giving of her time and talents.



Betty Mitchel.

Margaret Hamilton has been a dedicated treasurer for the South Kinloss WMS for many years. With likeminded commitment, Margaret contributed her many talents planning our Bible studies and other projects. She has given generously of her time to support church programs as an elder, Sunday school teacher, choir member, and shares duties as organist and pianist. A program that is special to Margaret is the Secret Pal Mailbox, which matches Sunday school children with members in the church. From September to June, letters, cards and gifts are exchanged. Margaret's kindness and cheerful nature is a gift to all.

Thank you, Betty and Margaret! God bless!



Photo corner! Several host members gathered around incoming synodical president Judy McIntosh.



Margaret Hamilton, centre.

## REFLECTIONS

# Travel and Transcendence

## My experience on the moderator's trip to Taiwan

By William Burr, Master of Divinity student, Vancouver School of Theology

My name had been put forward by the Vancouver School of Theology for me to become a member of the trip that the moderator of The Presbyterian Church in Canada takes each year. In April, the Rev. Dr. Robert (Bob) Faris was bringing a delegation from across Canada to Taiwan. I'd been looking forward to the trip for weeks.

"Maybe it will help with your discernment," my professor had said. I'm studying for a Master of Divinity, the degree to become a minister, but I'm not sure what I'll do with it.

Upon arrival, we drove through suburbs into bustling Taipei, where lush green trees framed highways and industrial buildings.



(Left to right) Zahra Brown, Cathy Reid, president of the Women's Missionary Society, and Robert Griffiths, president of the Atlantic Missions Society, on the campus of Aletheia University outside Taipei, which Canadian missionary George Leslie Mackay founded in 1872.



The delegation from The Presbyterian Church in Canada after learning how to make flower garlands in a rural village.

A Taiwanese Canadian member of our group, Paul Wu, led us on a visit to a temple wedged between urban buildings. Large red dragons adorned the pillars, and dozens of people gathered in a courtyard had lined up to be smudged with incense or to throw wooden divination blocks.

Taipei was calm and humming, dense but organized, with narrow alleys, wide thoroughfares, and motorbikes weaving seamlessly in and out of traffic. Pedestrians filled the sidewalks but never seemed to rush. The sun was hot and humid, 30 degrees in mid-April. When the skies opened up a day later, the motor-bikers had suddenly all donned full-body rain suits, without skipping a beat.

The day after our arrival, we attended the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, one of the main denominations in the country, founded by Canadian and Scottish missionaries in the 19th century. We sat in a huge hotel conference space,

where over 500 people took in the rapid, occasionally heated Mandarin and Taiwanese proceedings. Everything seemed formal and ceremonial, and yet debates were constantly emerging between speakers on the floor and leaders on the stage. I struggled to follow the simultaneous live translation.

Proceedings stopped suddenly when a flurry of television news crews scurried in, followed by the Taiwanese vice-president, who gave a speech about choosing democracy and religious pluralism over authoritarianism.

"Even if China invades, we have the God of history on our side," the pastor of one church we visited later said to us. "Pray for Taiwan," several people said as we left their communities. "Don't forget us."

On our third day, we visited the Jing-Mei White Terror Memorial Park, which commemorates a period in Taiwan from the late 1940s to early 1990s, when martial law

was in place. People were imprisoned without due process, and an atmosphere of secrecy and mistrust hung over the country. The names of people executed by the state were shown on a wall of the former prison. Our guide had spent over 10 years unjustly detained, and he showed us a small, sterile room that he'd barely left for years. He was a jovial man whose demeanour seemed at odds with this grisly history. It was so important for him to come and tell his story there every day, he said.

We went around the island on bullet trains, regular trains, by mini bus, even by foot, through low mountains, Indigenous villages and university campuses, seminaries and churches. Bright flowers grew wildly on the sides of dusty roads next to rice fields. Communities everywhere welcomed us, sang, danced and told their stories. One Indigenous group walked us past colourful murals that showed how the community had once been expelled from another region. The people there earned their livelihood by making toys out of bamboo, and showed us how to work with the strong, brittle material. They were hearty, welcoming and relaxed after the formality of General Assembly. They served us rice and seafood wrapped in grape leaves, a sweet and crispy fried meat, fresh melon and guava.



A member of an Indigenous group, left, about to give a gift to the Rev. Bob Faris, former moderator of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. In the middle stands Chiang Chi Kang, our guide. PHOTO CREDIT: GRACE MCCREARY.

We were accompanied on our travels by two guides from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan: Chi Kang, who introduced us everywhere we went, and Rachel, who made sure none of us got lost. Other members of the moderator's trip ranged in age from late-20s to retirees, and were selected to represent different aspects of the church's life and ministry. Every time you took a seat in the bus or the train, you might talk to someone new from the group. I learned about switching careers from day trader to Presbyterian minister, and the challenges of being a gay minister. I heard about a doctoral thesis on open relationships in the church, mission work in Malawi, and advocacy work for people with disabilities.

We wanted to be present, in this new place, for these people who knew little of Canada, for whom we would be the example. There is something so heartfelt in that desire to be a good representative.

We went to church once, in one village. But we were always in a kind of church, literally or

Continued on page 37

### Moderator Visits

Each year, the moderator of the General Assembly visits denominations and mission partners the PCC has outside Canada. These visits give moderators a greater understanding of Christ's work in the world in different contexts.

It used to be the case that moderators travelled with their spouse and perhaps a staff person who worked with our partners. In the last few years, this custom has been changed so that moderators travel with people from across the PCC who are chosen based on the priorities of our partners and moderators. Earlier this year, the Rev. Dr. Bob Faris travelled with nine people from across Canada who were associated with many aspects of the PCC's ministry. In 2023, the Rev. Mary Fontaine will visit with ministries and people in Israel-Palestine.



A large group of delegations (including the Canadian group) from different countries who came for the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, standing in front of Chè-lâm Presbyterian Church, Taipei.

## REFLECTIONS

# Reflections on End of Career Inter-Mission

By the Rev. Capt (RCN)  
George L. Zimmerman

The year Covid struck, I had planned to holiday in Kenya to experience a safari, at Maasai Mara, and to visit the mothers of Kenyan immigrants of the congregation of St. David and St. Martin Presbyterian Church in Ottawa, where I was serving. My original plan collapsed, but it opened a possibility that I had not previously considered: a 10-week inter-mission incorporating a longer visit to Kenya.

I resolved that my inter-mission had to meet certain goals:

- experience Kenya, not as a tourist, but as a visitor
- worship in congregations that had raised members of my congregation
- experience African solutions to complex African problems

What I encountered set me on a new, unexpected pathway. I was told Africa would change my life, and it did.

Following my objectives, I paid pastoral visits not only to the mothers of my congregants, but also to their many relatives and neighbours. The welcome I received from these sincerely devout, Christian, kind and hard-working people touched me deeply. One congregant refused to advise his father, an elder of the Presbyterian Church East Africa, that I was coming to visit him until a few days before, because if he had given too much notice, the father would have built for me a house!

I preached twice in the Riara Ridge Presbyterian Church. The elders met to rename me the Rev. Wangai, a wonder indeed, as it



The Rev. George Zimmerman at MCF Ndalani, Kenya.

means "Born of God."

I visited schools in areas where tourists never go. There, I met the poverty that kills but also the first-century church, as envisioned by Jesus of Nazareth. In these slums, there are 9.5 million suffering Kenyan children. I lunched in the church mission schools of Githorgoro and Githorai. The efforts of the Kenyan Christian churches serving these slums promote an optimism that goes beyond human understanding. Their ministry is devoted to making a difference among the tens of thousands of young people trapped in terrifying conditions of malnutrition, sexual predation, environmental filth, open sewers, drugs, glue sniffing and homelessness where there is little health care, skills training and education.

Finally, I lived for two weeks at the Mully Children's Family (MCF) of Ndalani. MCF is a Christian-based, registered, non-governmental organization dedicated to

saving children's lives. Over 34 years, its founder, Dr. Charles Mulli, once a Kenyan slum street child himself, has successfully rescued, rehabilitated and reintegrated 26,000 children. During the summer of 2021, I met Dr. Mulli online after I had seen the *Mully Movie*. He invited me to visit MCF and judge for myself. I added it to my inter-mission plan. With skepticism, I arrived at MCF Ndalani in January 2022. There, among the 1,200 rescued children, to my delight and wonder, I experienced the real presence of God's love for us, God's children.

From these encounters there arose in me an authentic, mystical attachment to the rescued children of MCF. I recognized that this was a genuine gospel call to a chaplaincy empowered by a Presence greater than myself. I saw, unequivocally, the ministry of the first-century church successfully addressing the core issues of Jesus: oppression, injustice, narcissistic power-mongering,

hopelessness and defeatism. The dedication of the volunteers from the churches, the staff at MCF, and the performance of the hundreds of high-performing rescued MCF children shows the concrete work of the Nazarene in our time.

Like others blessed to enter their eighth decade, I was struggling with the common question: "What is God asking from me in the latter stages of my life?" My inter-mission to Kenya gave me a fresh passion and the deep-felt hope that defeats the impact of the negativity of our world. As long as my health and money hold out, God willing, I plan to go to MCF for a month or two every year. MCF and Dr. Mulli, discerning the hand of God at play, have endorsed my new chaplaincy.

In 2023, I returned to Kenya as a volunteer chaplain and taught leadership to MCF staff, faculty and students. Rarely have I felt such fulfillment. For me, it is truly a mystery that I, a white man from middle-class Canada, after a great ministry in military chaplaincy

and congregational life, ended up finding a fresh hope, forgiveness, compassion and faith in the backwoods of Africa from children.

Presbyterians in Canada may invite me in worship and presentation to share this Easter resurrection story with my anecdotes, videos and photos about MCF. These presentations instil Christian hope even in the bleakness that dominates our world today. I am convinced, amidst the chaos of our broken world and stressed church, that we need to be exposed to more life-giving stories. With no expectations or fees, I am delighted to do so.

It is my prayer for all who have lived out their lives serving the church that they may feel the presence of God in a fulfillment beyond understanding. I have been truly blessed that God placed me in the cradle of humankind to know the hope of resurrection. Such was my inter-mission at retirement after 45 years of ordination. Praise God from whom all blessings flow.



Children supported by Mully Children's Family (MCF) in January 2023.

Continued from page 36

figuratively. To look for God is perhaps sometimes more to look for a type of conversation. "God understands me better in my own language," one Taiwanese Indigenous man told us.

A New Testament scholar at one of the Taiwanese seminaries told me how she ended up in an academic career because of her professor's suggestion, and said that maybe I would like to pursue a similar path. At one theological college where all the professors met us, dressed formally, sitting behind desks in a conference room, and where they spoke in careful, fluent English, looking calm, collected and reflective, I did feel an affinity.

When our moderator asked the president of that theological college about LGBTQI+ inclusion in the church in Taiwan, it wasn't possible to tell where the faculty stood on the question. But one woman we met on our journey left an impression I'll never forget.

We met Maelyn at a dinner on a restaurant terrace overlooking a mountain valley near an Indigenous village. There were a few of us Canadians and a few local people at my dinner table. Speaking to us with the help of Paul Wu's translation, Maelyn suddenly asked the Canadians at the table: "What is the position of your church regarding people of multiple gender identities?" When

we explained to her that LG-BTQI+ people are included and respected as equals, she burst into tears. We were all quite concerned, not knowing what was going on. Was she angry? Then she said some words to Paul in Mandarin, and he explained to us that she had a child who was assigned a male gender but who liked to dress more femininely. Her child, who still lives with her, had been excluded by her church, and to make things worse, her father was one of the church leaders. It felt so moving to listen to her and encourage her; to tell her that I was gay, and to see relief in her eyes after a desperate search for recognition.

"Walk with me," said Louise Gamble, an 84-year-old Canadian mission staff who worked at a school on the outskirts of Taipei, transcribing archival documents. She told me about joining a diaconal order in 1965, when women were not allowed to be ordained, studying Mandarin and flying to Taiwan. "They had me teaching. My limit was when they asked me to teach a high school ethics course entirely in Mandarin!"

Over dinner one evening, another traveller in our group told me how he once spent summers in his youth working at an upscale resort in rural Quebec. I imagined him absorbing some of the *laissez-faire* atmosphere that comes

with an environment of holiday and excess, of summer, still lakes, peaceful nights, crickets and moonlight, wind in the leaves. Somehow, the busy asphalt world of Taipei was a similar departure from the confines of regular life. The trip, with all the new places and people who moved into and out of our lives in a matter of days, had all the strange power of circumstances that could never be reproduced.

Occasionally, with some people, in some places, a kind of door opens, and it has been so long since it last opened that you forgot it was there, and you walk right through the door into a new life that was waiting for you all along.

## REFLECTIONS

# Making Social Media a Social Good

By the Rev. Steve Filyk,  
St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church  
in Kamloops, B.C.

How do you use social media? Some maintain streaks with friends on Snapchat. Some coordinate sports teams with WhatsApp. Some learn dance moves from TikTok. Some publish their photography on Instagram, make comments on Twitter, or celebrate milestones on LinkedIn.

I'm enough of a dinosaur to have been in university when Facebook was first making its rounds across campuses. Facebook was initially a way for me to reconnect with my past: childhood friends and people I had met at college or on overseas adventures. Fast-forward many years later and Facebook has become, for me, about buying and selling used goods on Marketplace or being entertained by random feeds (I love watching rusted tools being refinished and wood bowls being turned).

A lot has been written about the

negative effects of social media. There are correlations with its use/misuse/overuse and depression and anxiety. How you are using it, or being used by it, seems to be key.

Many people use social media for self-promotion. While there are some who limit themselves to sharing newsworthy stories or humorous observations or photos of cute kittens, many use it to broadcast successes and accomplishments. Having these triumphs noticed or "liked," briefly boosts our personal sense of self-worth.

My daughter's soccer team recently performed very well at a tournament. I was proud of her accomplishment, and I posted some photos. Now, if I'm honest, the people who would have most delighted in her achievements are a small circle of family whom I could simply email or text. Yet, I felt compelled to post the story online, sharing it with friends, acquaintances and strangers alike. I knew that this post would reap

many comments and "likes." That is exactly what happened.

But even as I checked my own post, I noticed similar posts from others. There were posts about other people's children who competed in the same tournament. Their posts were also getting many likes, some more than mine. In the end, sharing my daughter's success made me feel smaller. I would have been better to have posted nothing at all.

Anecdotally, my story only proves what people have been saying about the use of social media: that there are correlations with its use and declining mental health. As the Danish philosopher/theologian Kierkegaard noted long ago, comparison is the root of anxiety: "The more he compares himself, the more indolent and miserable the life of a person becomes... Whoever compares himself must admit to himself that he is behind many others."

To preserve my sanity, I have been



The Rev. Steve Filyk's selfie on Snapchat.

gun "unfollowing" people whose feed is overflowing with well-burnished images. Some people go further and periodically pause their use of social media. I have read many "signoffs" from people who are taking a break from social platforms altogether. Others, maybe the wisest among us, have been steadfast in refusing to join in at all.

I sometimes wonder if going offline would be the better path. In the end I have always decided against it. Because of my work in the community, I feel I need to keep various lines of communication open. To keep these lines open and stay healthy I will need to better discern and master my own use of social media.

But more recently, I've been

thinking not just about avoiding the personal pitfalls of using social media, but how it might be a tool too for promoting the well-being of everyone. Could social media become an instrument for something more than bringing attention to ourselves?

Of course.

Instead of posting yet another vacation photo that demonstrates to everyone that I'm enjoying the good life, I could post a picture of a sports team bagging groceries, or a crew picking up garbage, or a server handing me a latte with the little heart etched in foam (all with permission of course). I could post a photo of a soccer game at the park, or my neighbour installing his own irrigation, or the flow-ers springing up in my yard.

I'm not talking about virtue signalling but about promoting the everyday goodness that can be seen in the world. What did Jesus say so long ago? "You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world" (Matthew 5:14 MSG).

My guess is that such posts will boost the esteem of those who have been captured. My guess is that such posts will encourage those who witness them online. My hope is that this turn outward will uplift my own mood as well.

# Considering Green Burials

By the Rev. Kenn Stright  
retired minister

Come with me along Prospect Road, which takes you to the beauty of Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia. On the way you pass through Hackett's Cove and in this small hamlet you will find Sunrise Inter-faith Cemetery. What is unique about this place is that it offers green burial.

Green burial sounds new, but it is actually ancient. Green burial is the only practice known in the scriptures.

We have been called a death-denying culture for a reason—we find it difficult to face the reality of death and therefore we compartmentalize the process and hand it over to others. The first call after the death of a loved one is to the funeral home, and from there the



process is automatic, leading to embalming or cremation. Our own personal involvement is in choosing what accessories will be part of this practice.

Green burial means different things to different people. For some it may be a very hands-on experience of preparing the body, maybe reminiscent of the women on their way to the tomb of Jesus with the intent of washing and preserving with natural spices the body of Jesus. By the time of the New Testament, the burial and mourning process included more ritual than is often seen in the Hebrew culture. In a short time after death, family members came to mourn and prepare the body for burial. The body would be washed, then anointed with

a variety of oils and spices. The body would be wrapped in white linen grave clothes that also contained spices (John 19:39-40). The common practice in rocky ground was to prepare a tomb for the deceased that would be used, time and again.

Today, participation in a green burial may be as simple as taking part in filling in the grave at the close of a burial service, with each one present taking their turn.

In today's version of green burial there is an intentional turning away from the artificial to the more natural. In practice, this means no embalming, no elaborate dressing of the deceased, no ornate coffins with metals and plastics and fabrics, and often no permanent marker for the gravesite. Instead, we are able to plant a tree on the site or have a natural rock marking the spot. The words "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," can take on new meaning in this context.

*For the Love of Creation* is a national initiative that brings together faith bodies and faith-based organizations in Canada to mobilize education, reflection, action and advocacy for climate justice.

Their call to "Let's Get Green" touches every aspect of our lives. This changes how we buy and spend, how we look at driving our car and heating our house and grow and/or buy our food. This changes what we believe our government, our community and our church should be doing with the resources available to us. It demands education on the climate issues facing us. It demands advocacy as we confront political leaders in support of green issues and caution in expanding projects that degrade the earth. It allies us with Indigenous people and like-minded folk in seeking to be better stewards of creation.

To be honest, I was not keen on this green burial concept until I put it in the context of my life and my theology. As Shakespeare had written in *Hamlet*, "To thine own self be true." And to be true to my faith, my theology and my love of creation, this was the next step in my journey of faith. Neighbours and friends and family may more and more choose this option in the years ahead, and it may seem strange to you, at the moment. But it is a choice some will make out of love for creation.

## What is a Green Burial?

According to the Green Burial Society of Canada, green burial is an environmentally sensitive practice where the body is returned to the earth to decompose naturally and contribute to new life. It is for those seeking to minimize their impact on the local environment, and those who are mindful of the cyclical nature of life, as green burials seek to find spiritually fulfilling alternatives to conventional burial or cremation.

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Peterborough, St. Stephen's (full-time minister)

Presbytery of West Toronto – General Presbyter (part-time minister)  
Richmond Hill, ON (full-time minister)  
Toronto, Formosan (full-time minister)  
Toronto, Glenview (full-time senior minister)  
Toronto, Graceview (full-time minister)  
Toronto, Mimico (full-time minister)  
Toronto, York Memorial (half-time minister)  
Vaughan, Vaughn Community (full-time youth minister)

### Southwestern Ontario

Ailsa Craig, Beechwood (part-time minister)  
Amherstburg, St. Andrew's (full-time minister)  
Burlington, St. Paul's (half-time minister)  
Brussels, Melville & Molesworth, St. Andrew's (full-time minister)  
Forest, St. James (full-time minister)  
Innerkip, ON (full-time interim minister)  
London, Trinity Community (half-time stated supply minister)  
Lucknow & South Kinloss (full-time minister)  
Milverton, Burns (half-time minister or half-time stated supply)  
Mosa, Burns (full-time minister)  
North Pelham (Fenwick) & Lincoln, First Presbyterian & Rockway Presbyterian (full-time minister)  
St. Marys (full-time minister)  
Stratford, Knox (full-time minister)  
Strathroy, St. Andrew's (part-time minister)

### Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario

Selkirk, Knox (full-time minister)  
**Alberta & the Northwest**  
Banff, St. Paul's (full-time minister)  
Calgary, Grace (full-time lead minister)  
Calgary, St. Andrew's (full-time minister)

Calgary, St. Giles / New Generations (full-time minister)  
Grande Prairie, Forbes (full-time minister)  
Red Deer, Knox (half-time minister)  
**British Columbia**  
Abbotsford, Bradner and Mission, St. Paul's (full-time minister)

## DEATH NOTICES

Read full obituaries online at [presbyterian.ca](http://presbyterian.ca)

**The Rev. Roy Donald Currie**  
Deceased July 27, 2023  
Winnipeg, Man.

**The Rev. Dr. James Farris**  
Deceased July 24, 2023  
Charlottetown, P.E.I.

**The Rev. Dr. Donald C. Smith**  
Deceased July 19, 2023  
Brampton, Ont.

**Grace Whyte**  
Deceased July 16, 2023  
Scarborough, Ont.

**The Rev. John Yoos**  
Deceased July 12, 2023  
Sylvan Lake, Alta.

**Charlotte ("Lottie") McDonald Sutherland**  
Deceased July 2, 2023  
Kingston, Ont.

**Henry Ernest Adney Stewart**  
Deceased June 17, 2023  
Kelowna, B.C.

**The Rev. Dr. Fred Rennie**  
Deceased April 10, 2023  
Cornwall, Ont.

## JUST WONDERING...



Submit your questions to [connection@presbyterian.ca](mailto:connection@presbyterian.ca)

**I was shopping in different neighbourhoods and noticed that the Catholic churches all held Mass on Saturday nights as well as on Sundays. It got me wondering about why my Presbyterian church only has worship on a Sunday morning at 10:30. Do any other Presbyterian churches worship on other days of the week and at different times of day?**

Answered by the Rev. Ian Ross-McDonald, General Secretary

In the Roman Catholic Church, "Sunday Obligation" generally means that Roman Catholics are expected to rest from work and other obligations and leisure activities in order to attend Mass on Sundays and other holy days. Provision is made in some areas for people to attend Mass within 24 hours of Sunday and still fulfill their "Sunday Obligation." This practice is not very different from what Presbyterians know as Sabbatarianism, the obligation of the faithful to rest from work to dedicate time to worship, in the spirit of fulfilling the 4th Commandment. The time of worship varies across denominations in Canada. It isn't unusual for Presbyterian congregations to worship on Sunday afternoons or evenings. And many gather for worship very early in the morning, at lunchtime or in the evening of weekdays for those who cannot attend worship on Sundays or who would appreciate an additional time of devotion.

Section 111.1 of the Book of Forms indicates that: "The Session is responsible for regulating the hours and forms of public worship and for arranging special services. The Session determines the appointed times and provides for the administration of the sacraments." From time to time, Sessions will consider the day and hour for worship to strengthen the witness of the congregation and to meet the changing needs in their community.



All photos and articles for the *Presbyterian Connection* newspaper can be sent directly to [connection@presbyterian.ca](mailto:connection@presbyterian.ca).

