



Understanding God in the Midst of Suffering

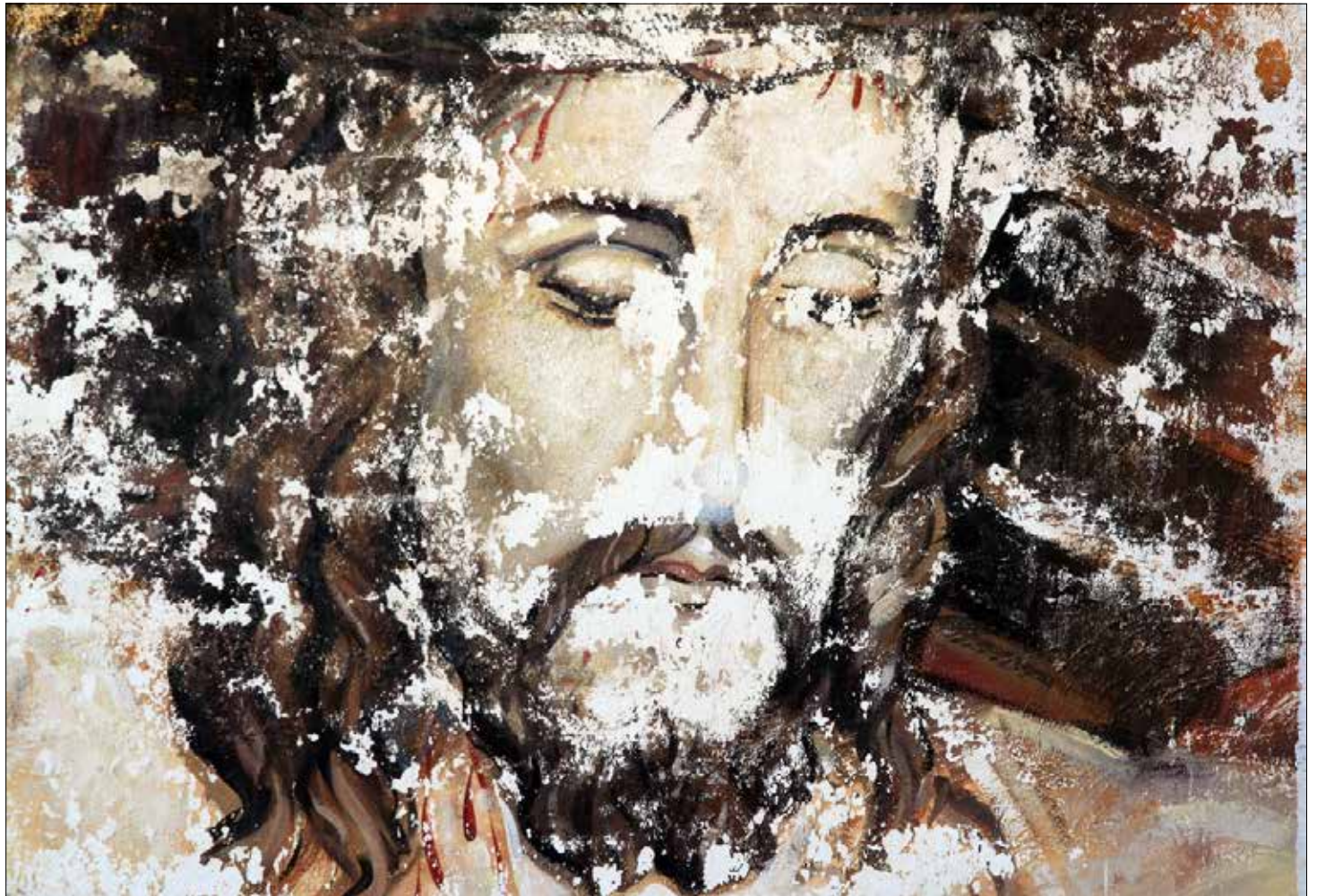
By the Rev. Dr. Joon Ki Kim, Little Harbour Presbyterian Church in Little Harbour and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in New Glasgow, N.S.

Suffering—a state of pain, agony, distress or loss—is found wherever we human beings are born, live and die. Whether one is ready to face suffering courageously or simply wishes to evade it at all costs, it is prevalent and perennial. There are various forms of suffering and various extents of severity in manifold cases of suffering. Diverse forms of suffering may share the essential similarity that one is “being pushed beyond one’s limits and human resources” (Michael Knowles, *We Preach Not Ourselves*).

In *The Brothers Karamazov* by the 19th-century Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky, Ivan, a brilliant atheist thinker, raises questions about the meaning of Christian faith in a haunting way. Having a conversation with his devoted Christian brother Alyosha, Ivan wants him to consider honestly whether or not the Christian faith may contain any crucial, and at the same time intelligible, sense of the reality that humans are experiencing in the world. For that purpose, Ivan focuses on the topic of suffering.

In particular, he describes the torturous pain of innocent children, suffering and dying under the hands of violent adults. Ivan asks, “Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance—and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions?”

In spite of his intense contentions against the validity of the Christian faith, Ivan helps us to catch a glimpse of a highly sig-



nificant point: Suffering should be a continual checkpoint in one’s journey of exploring the meaning of the Christian faith. He argues that if one’s faith in God is not able to generate a meaningful response to the matter of unsettling suffering, it cannot be meaningful anywhere else, either.

What God does about suffering

Ivan’s persistent questions about suffering lead the readers to consider a daunting possibility. Has God intentionally caused the matter of suffering to exist, including the terrible suffering that little children are faced with? Ivan affirms that if God sees it is necessary to let even a single child be a victim of excruciating torment for a grandiose purpose such as God keeping the balance between good and evil, or creating a necessary

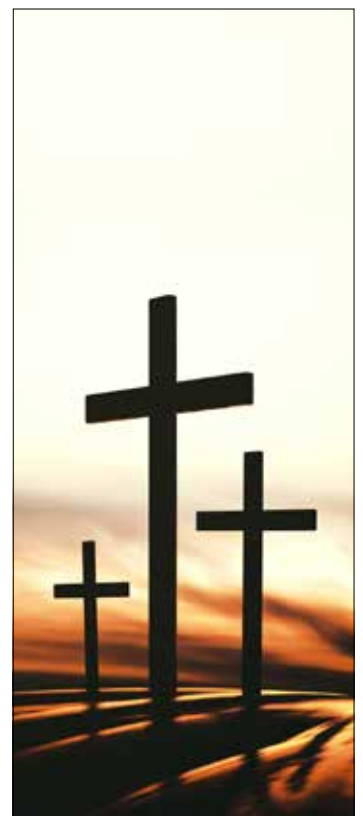
path to the ultimate redemption of the entire universe, that kind of God should be rejected.

Once I heard a Christian speaker saying, “Receive, with gratitude, everything that has happened and will happen in your life, knowing that each one of them is the greatest expression of God’s love for you.” Can it be true? The statement implies that even a horrible form of violence committed to a child, which Ivan mentions, is the direct will and creation of God. Would one need to be thankful for it, being assured that it is one of the greatest gifts of love from God? Are Christian believers obliged to defend and glorify God, who is the real cause of every personal trauma and collective tragedy, such as the Holocaust and other genocides for whatever high-sounding purpose?

In the book of Job, Job’s three

friends are passionately devoted to the task of *defending* God with their premise that the severe suffering that Job has been undergoing is what God has purposely carried out for God’s own good reasons. In the middle of the debate between Job and his friends, Job reveals his awareness that he is not the only one who undergoes dehumanizing pain which cannot and should not be justified. When Job indicates the problem of the miserable suffering of the poor, which is so rampant in the world, he says, “Like wild asses in the desert they go out to their toil, scavenging in the waste-land food for their young. They lie all night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the rain of the mountains, and cling to the rock for want of shelter. There

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MESSAGE FROM THE MODERATOR

Reflections from the Moderator's Travels: June–September

By the Rev. Mary Fontaine,
 Moderator of 2023
 General Assembly

Residential school monument site, Parliament Hill – June

My first Moderator visit took place along with the Rev. Victor Kim, Principal Clerk of the PCC, and the Rev. Karen Dimock from St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Ottawa. The Right Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne, Moderator of the United Church of Canada, and other church leaders were among the many guests who gathered on a hot day in June at Parliament Hill. We were in the company of many dignitaries, such as Senator Mary Simon and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. A lineup of well-known Indigenous leaders and residential school Survivors spoke to the upcoming installation of a monument to commemorate both Survivors and children who did not survive residential schools. A group of youth participated, as well. Afterwards, I enjoyed lunch with Victor, Karen and other church leaders and a tour of downtown Ottawa with Karen. A slightly extended stay allowed for some research at the Library and Archives Canada with the help of Karen's referral

and a tour of the area and its history with a dear friend who lives in Ottawa. I was grateful for the warm hospitality in Ottawa.

Huu'ay-aht First Nation ceremony – July

In mid-July, I joined a group from Hummingbird Ministries to attend a Coming of Age ceremony for three young girls at the Huu'ay-aht First Nation on Vancouver Island. The community is reclaiming the high regard held for women in their traditional societies. It was a hopeful environment with a ceremony that included a potlatch and traditional dances and songs. Eric Plummer, a reporter for *Ha-Shilth-Sa* newspaper, interviewed me and included my comments in his article, but not my role as Moderator of the PCC.

However, during the acknowledgements, the father of Eden Dennis, Wishkey, now named Kiskista, mentioned my role, saying: "It shows the heart of true reconciliation when the Moderator, who holds the highest office of the Presbyterian Church, comes to apologize personally for the harm done to our children through the residential school system."

He then honoured me with an eagle feather from his own cedar

hat—a high honour in his culture and mine. There were rich blessings for Eden and the two other young women and their families. Thanks and blessings to the community of Huu'ay-aht for their hospitality and their initiative in reclaiming their women as the life-givers they are. Huu'ay-aht is situated in the rugged wilderness of the mountains, enroute to the West Coast Trail. Thanks to Natika Bock, a Vancouver School of Theology Presbyterian student, for arranging the visit and leading the way up a narrow rough gravel road.

Ochapowace First Nation – August

The third Indigenous event I visited during this period was the Ochapowace First Nation in Saskatchewan on August 8. It was a combined youth and Elder gathering, where I apologized, as Moderator, for the harm done to their children through the PCC Round Lake Residential School. The testimonies of two youth were powerful, committed as they are to stopping the cycles of abuse carried forward from the residential school system. Thanks to the Rev. Amanda Curry for arranging this visit.

As a Cree woman, whose Treaty



Six nations have suffered from the same trauma as those in the Treaty Four, it felt insincere saying "I'm sorry" to other Indigenous people for the harm done through the residential school system, which our church participated in. Yet, as Moderator of the PCC, I am truly sorry and disappointed that our church was part of this instrument of colonialism that has caused so much lasting trauma for Indigenous people in Canada. The trauma inflicted by the legislation of the Indian Act and Canada's institutions are no less harmful and continue to be traumatic.

While being truthful about the deep harm inflicted by the residential school system, I also shared positive stories about good relationships with Presbyterians along the way. Throughout my life, I've noticed how often the Creator has posted human angels in unexpected places. John McKay, from Ireland, nicknamed Buffalo Hunter, was the first missionary to Mistawasis. He hunted buffalo with Chief Mistawasis and learned our language. The Rev. W. W. Moore and his sister from England also gained much respect from our people. My mother learned sign language from Miss Moore and helped at the mission house, which was close to where her family lived.

I shared that, like her dad, my mother believed in the value of our culture and language. The Cree people envisioned keeping our own culture and beliefs like two canoes paddling side by side down the river with the new people who came to settle on our lands near Prince Albert, Sask. I am pleased that Ochapowace and Treaty Four Nations have a similar perspective. In spite of the harm and ongoing traumatic effects of the residential school system, they respect the

church and retain the value of their own spirituality and beliefs. That the Spirit of God is at work with the Ochapowace people is evident through their forgiveness and wisdom in choosing to recover from the traumatic effects of the Round Lake Residential School.

The testimonies of Ochapowace youth were powerful and heart-breaking, yet heartwarming and hopeful. Like their parents, they have experienced incredible abuse due to alcoholism, an outlet that so many residential school Survivors have turned, to dull the pain of their childhood experiences. Fully aware of the impact of the residential school system on his family and his generation, one youth prefaced his story by declaring how much he loved his father. Learning the details of his dad's abuse as a child in residential school, he understood and decided not to judge but humbly acknowledged that he might not have fared any better, in the same situation. He and other youth are saying the abuse stops with us and desire to see their people rise up again.

I shared that the conviction of the Ochapowace youth shows there is hope for peace in the world as Indigenous ancestors envisioned and prophesized. Their perspective and actions have set an example of forgiveness, respecting differences among humanity, respecting life itself, and honouring the One who provides the gift of life. When Indigenous people are heard, it could mean changing our relationship with Mother Earth, and our Western world view of her many gifts as commodities. For as Jesus said, love one another as I have loved you. What greater love is there than the will to give up one's own life for others.

I read the Confession of the PCC of 1994 and the joint Confession of the two Moderators of 2019 and 2021. The people heard those beautiful, powerful words. And we hope and pray that we can work together for the good of all of us.

From one of the guest Elders, I learned that provinces aim to resume the role of governance over Indigenous people. Legislation through the Federal government's Indian Act has not honoured the treaties with Indigenous people. But if provinces are successful, this means the nation-to-nation relationship established between Indigenous nations and Canada through the numbered treaties is not just broken but has been totally dismantled. We will need much prayer and support. May true reconciliation become a reality.

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The Rev. Mary Fontaine, Moderator of the PCC, pictured centre, at an event in Winnipeg urging political leaders to search landfill sites for the remains of Indigenous women.

MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

Why We Worship As We Do: Orders of Service, part 1



*By the Rev. Ian Ross-McDonald,
General Secretary*

There is an adage that says that “we shape worship and then worship shapes us.” The maxim speaks to the reality that how we worship informs our spirituality and influences our understanding of the faith. Because worship shapes how we understand God, the adage also reminds us to plan and order worship and to provide for and celebrate the sacraments carefully and thoughtfully.

In a helpful resource written for the PCC in the 1980s called *Doxology: A Perpetual Celebration*, the Rev. Dr. Joseph McLelland wrote that: “Worship or liturgy is the orderly response to the presence of God in nature and grace.” So we often ask, “What is the right way to worship?”

In our tradition, we understand that the minister is responsible for the conduct and content of worship, while the Session is responsible for regulating the hours and forms of worship, arranging special services and determining when the sacraments will be celebrated, and providing for their administration. The PCC does not have a standard order of service or rubric that ministers and Sessions must follow as they fulfill their respective duties. For hundreds of years, the PCC’s custom has been to provide orders of worship for ministers to use and adapt. Likewise, there isn’t instruction on how or how often the Session should provide for the celebration of the sacraments or which special services should be planned. This practice has enabled the church to “...praise God with unity of mind and spirit, while at the same time allowing

for the diversity which encourages freedom in Christ” (Introduction, Book of Common Worship, 1991). Providing appropriate Christian liberty within a frame of general uniformity in worship, as well as in preaching, theology and the organization of congregations and church courts, has always been a strength of the PCC’s life together.

Sometimes there are differences of opinion over “the right way” to worship. Orders and forms of worship are important and they are worth wrestling with, but not worth fighting over. Ministers and Sessions do well to work together as they fulfill their responsibilities regarding worship. What is worthwhile is learning about the different aspects of the liturgy and

their meaning, and then thinking deeply and regularly about why, when and how we do what we do together in praise of God.

Some questions worth considering when thinking about worship:

- What do our orders and forms of worship say to and about God?
- How does scripture form and shape forms of worship?
- How does worship help create community?
- How do forms and orders of worship nurture and mature faith and spirituality?
- How are our forms and orders of worship informed by our heritage (scripture, history and custom), and how are they informed by forces such as the congregation’s size, history, composition, church architecture?
- When is repetition and routine used, and where is there space for creativity, spontaneity and surprise?
- When is there space for silence, celebration, solemnity, joy, experiencing mystery and learning?
- How and when are our orders and forms of worship cross-cultural, trans-cultural and counter-cultural?

- How are our forms and orders of worship enriched by customs and practices from other Christian traditions?
- How do the orders and forms of worship respond to God’s call to follow, and how do they equip people for service and life in the world?

Thinking about these and other questions in the regular review of the form and order of worship is important. Equally important is to remember one of the basic principles of reformation that says, at the core: “Whenever we see the word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.” The centrality of preaching and the sacraments in the life of the church set the course for the next two features in the series “Why We Worship As We Do.”

CORRECTION NOTICE

In the Summer 2023 edition, page 22, the caption incorrectly read that the Rev. Julia Apps-Douglas was inducted as associate minister at Knox Presbyterian Church in Vankleet Hill, Ont. It should have read that Julia was named Minister-in-Association. Our apologies for this error.

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PRESBYTERIAN
Connection

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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.



Presbyterians Sharing is the national church fund that supports the overall mission and ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The *Presbyterian Connection* newspaper is funded in part through gifts to Presbyterians Sharing.



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The event closed with the KAIROS Blanket Exercise, revised to include new, important and powerful information. KAIROS is genuine in its fight for social justice. The MC did a fantastic job, as did all the participants.

Together with representatives from the United, Anglican, Lutheran and Catholic churches, we gathered in a spirit of confession, the wounding of innocent children and the participation of the church in a system that disgraces the name of Jesus Christ. Round Lake is beautiful. It's hard to believe that horrible things could happen to little children here, where God's love and power speaks through the abundance of crops and the beautiful rolling hills, left by the ice age.

Winnipeg landfill event – September

At the urging of the Right Reverend Carmen Lansdowne, an Indigenous woman and 44th Moderator of the United Church of Canada, Yvonne Bearbull and others, I attended this gathering in my role as Moderator and the first Indigenous Moderator of the PCC. The leaders of the Anglican and Lutheran churches, all women, participated in this event organized to urge political leaders to search landfill sites for the remains of two missing Indigenous women: Morgan Harris and Mercedes Myran. Thanks to Yvonne Bear-



Participants of the Huu'ay-aht First Nation Coming of Age ceremony on Vancouver Island.



The Rev. Mary Fontaine and the group at the event at Ochapowace First Nation in Saskatchewan. PHOTO CREDIT: RED THUNDERBIRD PHOTOGRAPHY

bull who assisted me throughout and arranged for members of the Presbytery of Winnipeg to meet me at the airport. The Rev. Jinsil Park, Moderator of the Presbytery, participated until the end, taking photos and videos on that chilly, rainy and windy day.

The warm welcome and hospitality extended to an eagle who flew over us when it was my turn to speak. Everyone looked up and I said, "Well, that's a good sign." People agreed. I certainly felt the blessing, and it might even have inspired people to listen more attentively.

One of the teachings I shared in my address on stage was to not give up. That hope, according to one of the 15 Cree tipi pole teachings, is not an option but a respon-

sibility. I also shared that we have one God who is the Creator of us all. I shared that my Mosoom (grandfather), a Pipe Carrier, taught me that the main purpose of life was to learn how to love. I also shared that my mother was grateful to the Creator for our culture and language, and she also loved Jesus Christ. I shared that Indigenous people across Canada suffer the same social ailments caused by hundreds of years of colonialism and that we need to work together to maintain the strength, courage and hope needed to bring about better life conditions today and for future generations. We need to encourage one another.

One woman commented, "Thank you for your words; you challenged us. And that's good."

Before the public presentations, there was a smudge prayer and brief addresses by church and Indigenous leaders. I shared how the burying of Indigenous women in a landfill reminded me of my revulsion when I learned during seminary studies that Reformer Ulrich Zwingli's body had been burnt when the Roman Catholic authorities killed him. They threw the entrails of some pigs that had been slaughtered the previous night into the fire, and then they turned over the embers so that the animals' of-fal was mixed with Zwingli's ash-

es. This was the ultimate disregard for a human brother. Even though a few wanted to do right, contempt and injustice prevailed.

This same contempt and injustice rule the hearts of those who murder Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people. And to bury their bodies in a landfill is a repulsive act similar to those who quartered and burned Zwingli's body. And those who refuse to search the landfill for their bodies, even though they have the power, share in this injustice and shame. But hate and injustice do not have to prevail.

The visual display of red dresses throughout the City of Winnipeg speaks to the stark reality of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and the pain, hope and commitment of Indigenous people in this city to stop violence against Indigenous women. The camps amplify this commitment—they say, "No more." The Camp Morgan (named for Morgan Harris) team, who had been blockading the entrance to the Brady Road landfill, set up a new camp beside the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, following an injunction to clear the road into the landfill. The new camp, named Camp Mercedes, honours Mercedes Myran, one of the two women whose remains

are believed to be in the privately owned landfill north of Winnipeg.

Those at the landfill need ongoing help, support and prayer. They need groceries, blankets, water and firewood to keep them warm during winter months. They appreciated the gifts from the PCC: a warm blanket, sweetgrass, sage, cedar and tobacco, which they use for prayer ceremonies. Monetary gifts are also very much appreciated.

Please pray for the dedicated Indigenous adults and youth at the landfills, who give sacrificially of their time and resources for the dignity of these Indigenous women. Their work goes beyond retrieval of their remains from the landfill. It also speaks to the dignity and honour of women as life-givers and matriarchs in traditional Indigenous societies. Their work could lead to the honouring of all women.

Perhaps it is the Providence of the Holy Spirit that four women, two of whom are Indigenous, were chosen as leaders at this time in four denominations in Canada and be present for this event. Perhaps there is continuing work the four denominations might do together to focus on the important work of justice for women. Jesus loved the woman at the well regardless of her social standing. He loved and honoured his mother and his friend Mary Madelaine. And when a woman was accused of adultery and about to be stoned, Jesus wrote in the sand and said, let he who is without sin cast the first stone. Jesus himself was born of woman. As the church, this is an opportunity to reconsider the place of all women, according to Scriptures.

Perhaps the presence of women representing four denominations will inspire other churches to join in the conversation. Indigenous Elders may be among the voices, sharing their spiritual worldview of women as the chosen sacred channels of human life on earth. May the Spirit guide the way.

Presbyterian Archives

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are those who snatch the orphan child from the breast, and take as a pledge the infant of the poor” (Job 24:5, 7–9). According to the theology of his three friends, not only Job but also all those suffering in extreme poverty are receiving their just portion according to God’s appropriate ruling. The effort to defend God on the basis of the belief that the tragic, inhumane occurrences mirror the will of God can justify not only the idea of arbitrary divine brutality but also the unjust status quo in a societal context where unfair socio-political powers prosper, and the poor and helpless are left uncared for. The final chapter of Job remarks that God rebuked the three men for their folly of having not spoken of God what is right (Job 42:8).

In God’s address to Job, God confronts Job as well. In his book on Job, Gustavo Gutierrez explains that God rebukes Job for remaining a prisoner of either-or mentality (see Job 40:8), which means, between me and God, only one of us can have a righteous cause. When Job’s miserable situation is interpreted with that mentality, if Job is innocent, God must be guilty. When Job is an isolated sufferer falsely accused by his acquaintances, God will be only an indifferent observer at best, even if God is not a divine torturer. Ivan is preoccupied with this very way of thinking. The either-or mentality is not able to direct us to the depth of the relationship between our experience of suffering and God’s. The suffering of God and the suffering of God’s creation do not entail a zero-sum game. *God and sufferers are on the same ground.*

As Jürgen Moltmann says, “God is in suffering and suffering is in God as God is love” (Moltmann, *The Crucified God*). God is not able to detach Godself from the realities of suffering in the world because of the nature of love that is God. It is not that



each form of suffering itself is the greatest expression of God’s love, but in everything that happens, through the power of God the Spirit, we encounter the suffering presence of God, full of the greatest love for us. Wherever the suffering of God’s creation takes place, God takes the suffering as God’s own out of love. That is why we can trust that where suffering is, there is the cross.

The cross of suffering and hope

In *The Crucified God*, Moltmann remarks, “All human history, however much it may be determined by guilt and death, is taken up into this ‘history of God’...and integrated into the future of the ‘history of God.’ There is no suffering ... which ... is not God’s suffering; no death which has not been God’s death...” As God is the God of the entire cosmos, when God takes all suffering and death in history as God’s own, there is no distinction between the suffering and death within the walls of the church and outside them. In that sense, the cross as the symbol and reality of the suffering presence of God, that absorbs the pain of the world to bring healing, stands not only in some designated religious areas but “in the whole of reality” (Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering*).

The cross does not tell us about why there is suffering or how it came into being. The origin of the power of evil and the problem of suffering is shrouded in a puzzling, deep mystery. But the cross tells us where God is and what God does with God’s ceaseless love for all God’s creatures put in perilous pain. This is why Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a 20th-century theo-

logian and martyr, understands that God in Christ “does not enter [the world] in the royal clothes of a ‘Form of God’” but “in the form of a ruined human being in torn clothing ... incognito as a beggar among the beggars, as an outcast among the outcast ... dying among the dying” (Bonhoeffer, *Testament to Freedom and Christ the Centre*).

Importantly, we are to be reminded that the cross of suffering and death of Christ and the resurrection of Christ comprise a seamless wholeness. They can be distinguished from each other, but it is impossible to separate them, as they are most deeply connected (Ernst Käsemann, “The Saving Significance of Jesus”). The Crucified Lord is the Risen Lord. And the Risen Lord is the Crucified One who still carries the wounds of being human as the eternal Lord of life. The suffering and death of God the Son on the cross lead to the ultimate restoration and salvation of the whole creation. The Gospel of John calls the life, death and resurrection of Christ, including the horrendous brokenness of the cross, the glory of God as a whole (Richard Bauckham, *Gospel of Glory*). God is suffering as the God of resurrected life. The cross witnesses the depth of suffering and at the same time announces that God’s incredible new life works incessantly where suffering is—to bring a different future, that is the future of the Redeemer. Through God’s suffering work of inhaling the pain of the world into Godself, God exhales and spreads God’s undying, eschatological life. God’s pivotal salvific work can be seen, heard and touched where sufferers are.

As mentioned above, there is no suffering that is not God’s suffering; no death which has not been God’s death. For that very reason, “There is no life, no fortune and no joy which have not been integrated...into eternal life, the eternal joy of God” (Moltmann, *The Crucified God*).

In relation to the challenges of suffering, God does not need a human defence of God at all, based on theoretical speculations, void of the awakening formed through one’s vulnerable encounters with the faces of the sufferers. God can defend Godself through the triune God’s presence embedded in the places of suffering and eventually through God’s eschatological revolutionary changes that the Book of Revelation declares (Revelation 21:1–5).

What God requires from us is our *participation* in God’s work of standing with those who are suffering, befriending them, and alleviating their agony in love. It is not difficult to find those who suffer in the circle of our families, friends, congregations, local communities and so on. If we are living in a privileged socio-economic context, it is necessary for us to meet with, listen to, and form our friendship and solidarity with the unappreciated, discriminated against or forgotten because of their economic class, culture, gender, race, or religion, or because of mental, physical and social issues, by leaving our familiar associates and surroundings. “Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is

to come” (Hebrews 12:12–14). In interpreting those verses, author Charles L. Campbell emphasizes that “the church is called intentionally and habitually to move out of the places of security and comfort” into the places of poverty and oppression where Jesus continues to bear abuse, suffering with and for those treated as “the non-persons of society.” Because the presence of God in Christ suffers where love suffers, Campbell explains that “drawing near to God and going outside the camp to follow Jesus are one and the same move” (Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching*).

Listening to the fiercely critical words regarding Christian faith from his brother Ivan, Alyosha was not able to present his counter-argument clearly. But soon after they parted, Alyosha moved toward those put in agonizing situations, who were yearning for his care and companionship. What Alyosha was to put forth with all his strength was not about creating the most elaborate arguments for Christianity. In faith, he was called to accept the suffering that could arise due to his involvement with the suffering of the helpless. In Alyosha’s mind, his brother’s questions were not ignored, but “superseded by an unlimited love for reality” (Soelle, *Suffering*). Angelus Silesius, the 17th-century priest and poet says, “The rose hath no why; it blooms because it blooms.” To bear the burden of one another and our neighbours groaning in pain near and far—as a rose quietly shares its beauty in a small part of the world—is the call for us from the Lord who falls to the ground, dies and blossoms, being risen indeed.



Why Prayer Matters: John Calvin's Theological Thoughts

By the Rev. Dr. Hojin Ahn,
Korean Presbyterian Church of
Nova Scotia in Halifax, N.S.

In the final edition of *Institutes of the Christian Religions* by John Calvin, in the part about prayer, Calvin talks about how God's will and our wills connect. God wants to hear and respond to the prayers of those who believe in Christ. This is shown by the life of Jesus. When we understand how God cares for us through Christ, prayer becomes a choice based on faith. Calvin's view of prayer brings together God's will and ours in a smooth way. It's like a beautiful puzzle where God's plans and our faith fit together. God takes the first step in helping us, giving us the power to pray. God expects us to pray willingly, and this is an important aspect of Calvin's ideas.

In *Institutes*, Calvin dedicates the longest chapter to prayer.



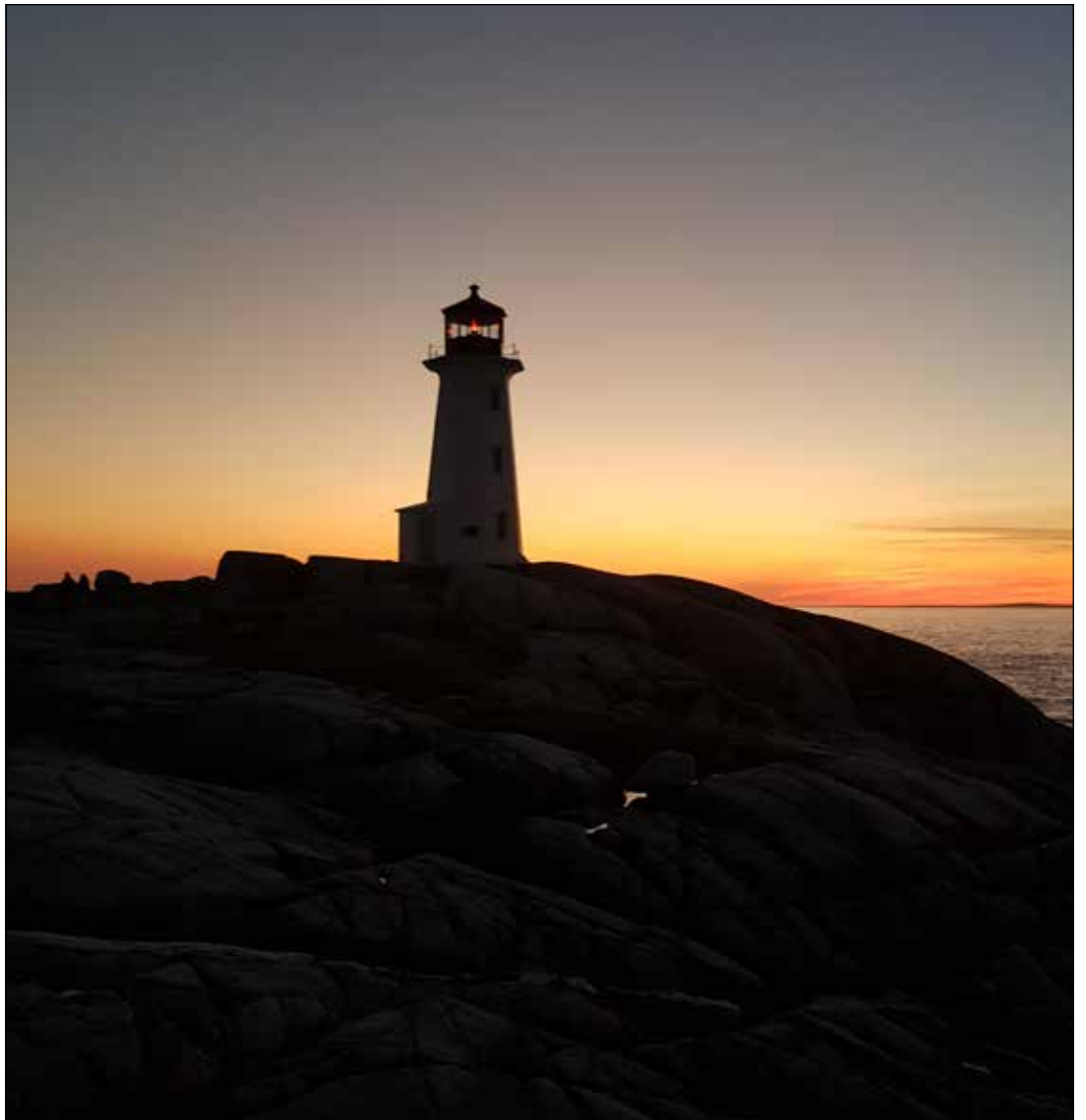
A photo from the sanctuary, Korean Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia.

Instead of delving into abstract explanations of why prayer is essential, he tackles the practical issue of how to pray. Calvin firmly rebuts the notion of practical atheism that might make Christian prayer appear pointless or unnecessary in the face of an all-knowing and all-powerful God. He replaces this doubt with the idea that prayer is a personal "conversation" between a loving father and children, allowing believers to share their burdens with God. God's eternal longing to be with us led to the institution of prayer for our benefit. Calvin assures us that God is eager to provide what we truly need through his graciousness, recognizing our prayers as a means of receiving his blessings.

Calvin emphasizes that God's unchanging will is that we, as adopted children in Christ, have an unwavering place in God's heart. This grace of election, freely given by God's unchangeable will, leads to the concept of "free adoption" into God's family. The process of God's adoption through grace not only grants eligibility but also strengthens the ability to pray. God desires us to experience eternal love and blessings through prayer in Jesus Christ's name.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit, serving as the guide to true prayer, holds a crucial role. It affirms God's intentions for us and brings forth the redemptive benefits of Christ in our present Christian lives. Calvin defines prayer as an expression of faith, a practical application that culminates in the understanding of Trinitarian soteriology—the saving work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

However, during the act of prayer, a complex issue emerges—the potential conflict between human will and God's will. If a believer prays for something against God's plan, can their accidental desires alter God's unchanging will?



A lighthouse near Halifax. Prayers are offered to God in the name of Jesus, and the divine and human wills are beautifully harmonized by God's grace.

Calvin, aware of this theological dilemma, responds with steadfast assurance about God's role in our lives through Christ. He draws on Augustine's argument to address this question. Augustine's insight is that when saints pray for something contrary to God's decree, they are still praying according to God's will—not the hidden, unchangeable will, but the will inspired in them by God's incomprehensible plan. God listens and responds in God's own way, even if the prayers contain a mix of faith and error. This perspective is titled, God's "Hearkening to perverted prayer." For example, Calvin uses the example of Ahab's pretended penitence to illustrate how God is moved to listen to the elect, encouraging them to turn to him genuinely. This passage is crucial to understanding Calvin's view of prayer's essence. It shows how God practically responds to our imperfect prayers, which rely on God's forgiveness in Christ. Calvin identifies three ways in which God responds faithfully: by listen-

ing, by "inspiring" God's own will within believers' hearts as they pray, and through the Holy Spirit's inspiration, which is determined based on our present prayers.

Calvin consistently emphasizes a theological harmony between God's providence, predestination and prayer. He argues that we must pray daily for what God foresees as beneficial, as he did in the first edition of *Institutes*. He maintains this position in the final edition, asserting that God's foreknowledge is pleased to provide for our present needs through God's own free will. This anticipation is not about God fulfilling whatever we arbitrarily request, but rather about achieving God's eternal goal for his kingdom through the sovereign work of Christ.

Ultimately, Christian prayers are a continuous process of insight and participation in God's holy purpose. Despite the challenge of aligning our will with God's, Calvin's perspective emphasizes the dynamic interaction between prayer and God's providence in Christ. Calvin says, "It is weak-

ness or imperfection of faith that vitiates believers' prayers, unless God's mercy succor them... By severely chastising themselves they may strive to overcome these obstacles, they should nonetheless break through, surely persuaded that, although not freed of all hindrances, their efforts please God and their petitions are approved, provided that they endeavor and strive toward a goal."

Even though our prayers might not be perfect, God's compassion ensures they don't go unnoticed. Much like a skilled trainer, God corrects our misdirected prayers and urges us to keep putting in effort. This is because God wants us to persistently pray until we align ourselves with God's eternal will. Charles Partee neatly summarizes the core of Calvin's prayer doctrine: God not only "foresees" our pleas in prayer but also "responds" to every one of them. Calvin underscores God's foreknowledge over predestination, practically motivating us to

Continued on page 7

The Rev. Dr. Hojin Ahn received a continuing education grant of \$1,500 from The Presbyterian Church in Canada to pursue his studies. Learn more at presbyterian.ca/education-grant.

Continued from page 6

actively engage in prayer.

Additionally, Calvin suggests that God's "unfathomable plan," which goes beyond human comprehension, allows for us to freely pray in urgent situations. Furthermore, God adjusts the outcomes of all events according to God's divine plan, using his all-knowing and all-powerful nature. Unlike certain interpretations of Calvinism that emphasize God's unchanging will, Calvin dismisses a rigid connection between God's providence and prayer. Instead, by incorporating foreknowledge, Calvin subtly proposes that the kind-hearted God desires to blend human prayers into God's plan for us. Calvin's doctrine of prayer centres on the dynamic interplay between God's will and human will. From eternity, God already foresees and decides to grant our prayers in our specific time and space, allowing our petitions to be effective through God's saving power in Christ. It's reasonable to suggest that God, who has eternal insight, makes adjustments according to our temporal requests to provide for our present needs. The heart of the paradox in Calvin's theological view is that the unwaveringly faithful God not only anticipates our prayers but also makes eternal decisions while considering our contingent requests in a personal and relational manner.

This dynamic concept aligns seamlessly with God's timeless nature, where both unchanging qualities and faithfulness coexist. Calvin's overarching doctrine emphasizes the unchangeable nature of God while specifically highlighting God's faithfulness in the realm of prayer. These aspects are inseparable and integral to each other. Calvin further argues that God's consistent response to our prayers is a testament to God's eternal faithfulness, form-

ing an indispensable part of the Divine essence. Calvin argues, "God hears the prayers of his people... The psalmist does not say that God has heard prayer in this or that instance, but gives him the name of the hearer of prayer, as what constitutes an abiding part of his glory."

Calvin emphasizes God's direct involvement in the actual challenges faced by praying believers. The sovereignty of God is a powerful act of salvation that unveils the eternal desire of the gracious father. Throughout eternity, there's never a moment when the Almighty and faithful God fails to protect and save his chosen ones from the difficulties of sin, evil and suffering. It's crucial to recognize Calvin's unique interpretation of Augustine's original texts. Augustine states that God made everything according to his will, which is eternal, and everything has been prepared from all eternity within his unchanging will.

Calvin acknowledges the Augustinian perspective on God's omnipotence, foreknowledge, providence and predestination, as well as the Holy Spirit's inspiration within believers. However, in contrast to Augustine's view of God's unchangeable will, Calvin adds his original voice about how our prayers align with God's gracious will. Calvin believes that God responds to our pleas through special providence for the chosen ones. God, as a loving father, benevolently answers our prayers, knowing the best course for us. Ultimately, God's optimal responses and decisions stem from God's sovereign nature, after intently listening to the petitions of his adopted children in Christ.

In the realm of God's foreknowledge and anticipation, not a predetermined and hidden eternal plan, we can willingly pray to God with our faith and free will. We are redeemed and constantly sancti-

fied by the name of Jesus. The eternal-transcendent God breaks into our world and actively intervenes in our temporal matters, treating our troubles as God's own in the beloved Son. Throughout eternity, the entire being of the Triune God and God's act of predestination and providence are intently focused on the contingent act of our real-time and space-bound prayers.

Calvin confesses, "In Christ, He [God] offers all happiness in place of our misery, all wealth in place of our neediness; in Him He opens to us the heavenly treasures that our whole faith may contemplate His beloved Son, our whole expectation depend upon Him, ... This, indeed, is that secret and hidden philosophy which cannot be wrested from syllogisms. But they whose eyes God has opened surely learn it by heart that in His light they may see light [Ps. 36:9]." This mysterious concept is fervently exclaimed by Calvin through his intuition of faith. Undoubtedly, human reasoning falls short in logically explaining it, yet it is elevated to describe this miraculous occurrence through the illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit.

Calvin's theological stance also includes a distinction between the concealed and unalterable will of predestination inherent in God, and the unveiled will related to our prayers in Christ. One could

hypothetically assume that God's revealed will is subject to change based on our prayers, considering the loving father's eagerness to provide the very best response to us in Christ. Hence, Calvin's theological interpretation of prayer should not be perceived as a static view confined solely to the doctrine of God's unchanging nature. Instead, it's akin to a dynamic video showcasing God's "revealed" will, which encourages the elect to actively engage in prayer as a heartfelt conversation with their Heavenly Father.

The former perspective, where God's "hidden" and unchangeable will seems to logically clash with the contingent desires of those praying, challenges Calvin's theological cohesion between God's predestined sovereignty and providence, and the accountable engagement of redeemed humanity in Christ. Conversely, Calvin depicts Christian prayer biblically as an act of faith, recognizing the paradoxical coexistence of God's saving grace and human involvement. This indirectly underscores that he does not align with hyper-Calvinism. For Calvin, the practical exercise of faith, embodied in Christian prayers, is the means through which the faithful God continually unveils his eternal will of predestination and providence for the elect.

While Calvin steadfastly upholds God's sovereignty beyond

human will and actions, he positions the doctrine of prayer within the optimistic context of restored humanity post-salvation in Christ. It is through their own human wills that individuals actively discern and willingly adhere to God's intentions. The doctrines of predestination and providence never negate the need, responsibility and effort involved in Christian prayer. Instead, they establish a foundational basis for human engagement as a way of expressing gratitude to the benevolent God in Christ. In the end, God's eternal will is realized through the human wills of prayers, which are inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit and justified and sanctified by the name of Jesus Christ. Consequently, the doctrine of prayer stands as a central tenet of Calvin's theological framework, where his understanding of salvation harmonizes holistically with his view of humanity, shaped by God's sovereignty for all of us in Christ. This elucidates Calvin's theological perspective on the imperative nature of active prayer in the present moment. We are not solely predestined, justified and sanctified in Christ, but we are also continuously involved in the best response of the Lord. This represents the true essence of Christian prayer, wherein God's ultimate plan for us unfolds perfectly in Christ, aligned with God's will rather than our own wishes.



Presbyterians Read: Reflections at Advent on Bonhoeffer's Meditations

This Advent, you're invited to join Presbyterians across the country in reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Advent meditations, *God is in the Manger*. These brief meditations are largely pulled from Bonhoeffer's writings during his two-year imprisonment under the Nazi regime, from 1943 to the end of his life in 1945, when the Nazi government hanged him for his participation in the active resistance movement against Hitler from within the Nazi government.

Set up in four chapters, one for each week of Advent, the study guide includes suggested spiritual practices and discussion questions to encourage you to engage in Bonhoeffer's reflections more deeply. You can follow this study guide as an individual, with a study group from your congregation or online. Learn more at presbyterian.ca/read.

Generative Artificial Intelligence

Part of the Divine Tapestry or a Travesty?

By Callie Long,
Communications Office

The Oxford English dictionary defines artificial intelligence (AI) as “the theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages.” Wikipedia describes it as “the intelligence of machines or software, as opposed to the intelligence of humans or animals.”

Artificial intelligence is not new and has been quietly employed in the background for quite some time. What is new and exciting or frightening, depending on where you stand, is what we think of as generative AI in the form of, for instance, ChatGPT-3, a large language model available to anyone with access to the Internet (and it’s more robust and subscription companion, GPT-4). There are also other forms of this AI—some better than others.

I thought it would be interesting to ask ChatGPT-3 to define itself, what it is, what it represents and its limitations. This is how the program answered:

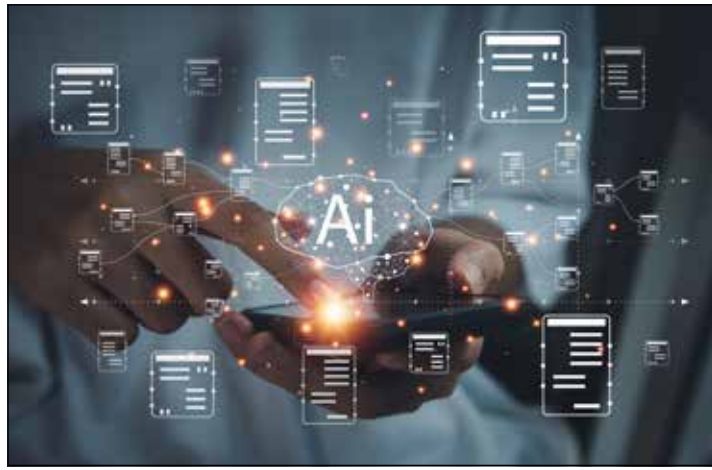
I am ChatGPT, a [large] language model created by OpenAI. I am a computer program that uses artificial intelligence (AI) and natural language processing to generate text-based

responses to questions and prompts. I represent a powerful tool for natural language understanding and generation, and I can perform a variety of tasks, including answering questions, generating text, providing explanations, and engaging in conversations on a wide range of topics.

Regarding its self-analysis of inherent limitations, the program offers that it lacks personal consciousness: “I am not a sentient being. I do not possess thoughts, emotions, or awareness. I am just a machine processing text based on patterns and information from the training data.”

For this article, I wanted to focus on generative AI from a faith-based perspective. As in all faiths, ethical and moral considerations play a role when making sense of this new trend in technology. We can, for instance, say that from a Presbyterian perspective, we promote the well-being of all living beings. We, therefore, must ask what impact this new advance has on society, given that the ethical, philosophical and moral implications of AI from a faith-based perspective vary.

From a Presbyterian perspective, the implications of AI can be framed by considerations such as human dignity, responsibility and stewardship, justice and fairness, accountability, discernment, and ethical frameworks, to name a



few. While this is a broad-based view, we also know that individual perspectives come in all shapes and sizes, meaning that opinions will differ, even within our denomination. Be that as it may, when it comes to responsibility and stewardship, for instance, as Presbyterians, we often emphasize the concept of the responsible management of God’s creation, which means that we should strive for ethical AI development that involves stewarding technology in a way that benefits humanity and protects the environment.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada does not have a policy addressing the recent advances in generative artificial intelligence, but our doctrine promotes principles of justice and equity, so from an ethical and moral perspective, AI should not perpetuate or exacerbate social, economic or racial inequalities. This means that developers and users of AI have a moral obligation to ensure that these systems are used to promote justice and fairness in society.

Here’s the rub. It is a well-known and acknowledged fact that the current iteration of generative AI is rife with bias. However, addressing bias in these large language model systems is complex, given that generative AI models, such as GPT-3, are trained on massive datasets sourced from the Internet, which often reflect the biases present in the text available online. This translates into the AI models learning and perpetuating discriminatory and biased information. More troubling is that these models do not create content from scratch. They synthesize and generate text based on patterns, meaning any biases in the training datasets will be amplified, given that the models are designed to predict what comes next based on what they’ve seen before. Even when training data is carefully curated to remove explicit biases, there is always the danger of these models exhibiting implicit bias, which can be so subtle that it’s challenging to detect and mitigate. Generative AI models do not understand context or exercise critical thinking. Instead, they generate responses based on statistical associations, which can

and do reinforce stereotypes or prejudices regardless of the social and individual implications.

On a personal note, I find it fascinating that GPT-3 refers to itself as “I,” which does imply a sense of personhood or self—a topic that requires an article all to itself! But I wanted to mention it here, mainly because there have been insightful writings and musings about our human tendency to anthropomorphize these large language models, and some people claim that these models are sentient. A point-of-view article by Nir Eisikovitsnr posted to the online magazine *FastCompany* notes that there is a natural “ease with which people project human features onto our technologies, rather than the machines’ actual personhood.” The writer argues that “popular culture has primed” us to imagine “dystopias in which artificial intelligence discards the shackles of human control and takes on a life of its own” ([fastcompany.com/90867578/chatbots-arent-becoming-sentient-yet-we-continue-to-anthropomorphize-ai](https://www.fastcompany.com/90867578/chatbots-arent-becoming-sentient-yet-we-continue-to-anthropomorphize-ai)).

For a particular generation, all you must do is invoke the name “Hal” for these flights of fantasy to run riot in one’s brain. Eisikovitsnr, however, writes that “these worries are—at least as far as large language models are concerned—groundless” and that these machines are no more than “sophisticated sentence completion applications” with the uncanny ability to mimic human communication. However, Eisikovitsnr warns against the “tendency to view machines as people and become attached to them, combined with machines being developed with humanlike features [that] point to real risks of psychological entanglement with technology.” For the writer, this calls for “strong guardrails to make sure that the technologies don’t become politically and psychologically disastrous,” given the real danger of people being “politically and emotionally manipulated” by such machines.

In a world of constant advances in technology, from a Reformed faith tradition, we are called to en-

gage with this evolving landscape thoughtfully and reflectively, seeking to understand the implications of AI from the perspective of what we believe. We believe God is the creator of all things, weaving our world’s intricate tapestry. From this perspective, we can then ask whether AI is yet another thread of the tapestry that is our existence. If we are made in God’s image, is AI another product—a product of human ingenuity inspired by the divine spark of creativity that threads through us? Can we marvel at how human creativity mirrors the sacred, or should we be more vigilant in exercising responsible stewardship over these newfound principles? It is a bit of both, always bearing in mind that we are always called to justice and equity and an ethical engagement with the world in which we live.

To the question of whether the data used to train GPT-3 was ethically sourced, this is the answer I received:

I don’t have direct knowledge of the specifics of the training data used for my development. However, I was trained on a mixture of licensed data, data created by human trainers, and publicly available data. OpenAI, the organization behind Assistant, has made efforts to ensure that the data used is ethically sourced and in compliance with relevant regulations and guidelines.

Open AI is committed to ethical AI development and has established guidelines to address issues such as bias and fairness in AI systems. They aim to minimize potential biases and to continually improve the fairness and transparency of AI models like mine. If you have concerns about the ethics of data sourcing, I recommend reaching out to OpenAI directly for more detailed information on their data collection and model development processes.

I responded (instinctively, as though I would to a human being): *No, this is fine. I am researching an article on generative AI and the ethics that guide it, so this is helpful to include. Thank you!*

In reply, GPT-3 wrote the following:

You’re welcome! I’m glad I could provide some information that can be helpful for your article. If you have any more questions or need further information related to generative AI and its ethical considerations, feel free to ask. Good luck with your research and article!

**OpenAI. (2023). ChatGPT (September 25 Version) [Large language model].*

All that was missing was a smiley face emoji!

More information: The Canadian Council of Churches started a new series on artificial intelligence earlier this year in May with a fascinating webinar, “Is Intelligence Enough?” available at bit.ly/CCC-AI-Webinar or on the CCC’s YouTube channel bit.ly/ccc-webinar-ai.

Also, read more about the societal risks of artificial intelligence in the report “Enabling a Rights-based AI?” posted to the World Association for Christian Communication’s website at waccglobal.org/enabling-a-rights-based-ai that documents the continued need for government, corporate and civil society to work together with a rights-based approach that first and foremost protects the freedom of expression and access to information. The report argues that regulation should be based on human rights, transparency and independent oversight.

How Covid Started Something New

A Partnership between Knox Ospringle and Paris Presbyterian

*By the Rev. Joel Sberbino,
Paris Presbyterian Church in
Paris, Ont., and International
Mission Staff to Malawi.*

Covid has challenged churches in many ways. Yet even in the midst of the challenges comes potential for new opportunities. Prior to Covid, Knox Presbyterian Church, Ospringle, a rural church east of Guelph, Ont., was without a pastor and had to rely on guest preachers, which were hard to come by.

When Covid hit and in-person services were halted, Knox Ospringle was unable to provide an online service, so the congregation began to look for one. This is where they found us—Paris Presbyterian Church. From their homes, they began to watch our live stream, and some members took part in our after-service online Q&A.

A new opportunity

When restrictions were lifted, and the Knox Ospringle congregants could resume worship in their own building, they decided to do something different and offer their members a hybrid program by incorporating our live stream service with their in-person gathering.

What it looks like

Sunday mornings, Knox Ospringle congregants meet at their church, and their organist plays as people gather. They begin with their own welcome and announcements before, together, watching



After worship at Knox Presbyterian Church, Ospringle, with the Rev. Joel Sberbino (back row, far right).

the live-stream service from our church—which includes music, prayer and a message. Following the live stream, Knox Ospringle takes 10 minutes to discuss the message, pray for their community and for one another, and then conclude by singing one or two familiar hymns before gathering for coffee and tea.

Our “live stream” is pre-recorded. We intentionally avoid filming from our church building and instead look for locations that hopefully make it seem as if we’re sitting in the viewers’ living room. By doing it this way, we can focus our service primarily on those watching online.

The results

It is wonderful to see how this partnership is growing and we view Knox Ospringle as a satellite location. Members of Knox church have joined our church (Paris Presbyterian) for an online Alpha course. And Knox has implemented their versions of some of our outreach initiatives, one of which is a food ministry where they provide weekly groceries for over 20 families in their community.

This past summer I (the pastor at Paris) dropped in on Knox Ospringle and joined them for their service. It was great to be able to meet with them in-person and to hear about their lives and their enjoyment of this hybrid opportunity. (The people at Knox were surprised by my height 6’6”—I guess the camera subtracts inches...) As well, a few of their folks had joined us for one of our backyard bonfires and BBQ this summer. It was great to see people who have only met online be able to make even further in-person connections.

We are excited to celebrate with Knox the possible baptism of one of the volunteers in the food



Paris Presbyterian Church in Paris, Ont.

ministry program in the near future, and we are thinking of other ways to deepen the relationship between the two churches.

A few testimonies

David, one of Knox’s elders has this to say about the partnership: “We are inspired and grateful to be a part of it. We make it our own—for me, I like to think of it as a ‘house church’—intimate worship. The quality and selection of the worship music is impossible for us to reproduce live without the musicians being in our congregation. The quality of the message genuinely speaks to life for our congregation and the timing of the message is often exactly right. Paris’s vision of alignment with community syncs perfectly with what we aspire to be. When they say “#ForParis” (our tagline) we hear “#ForOspringle.”

The Rev. Pye Chew, the Interim Moderator for Knox is in full support of this initiative even though our churches are in different presbyteries. “I am indeed grateful for the ministry of Paris in the life of Knox Ospringle PC. The Paris live stream has renewed the worship approach at Knox. It is amazing that Paris can provide help to another church in another presbytery. There are 13 other churches in our presbytery who are vacant and have difficulties finding pulpit supply. The Knox Ospringle situation is a very unique situation, and we give thanks to God for this.”

What are the benefits?

As a satellite of our church, Knox Ospringle has consistent preaching and music, and their overall costs have been reduced, as they no longer need to cover pulpit supply. The start-up cost was minimal—requiring only an

overhead projector and a member’s phone with data to stream the service. The greatest benefits, however, are the new life that has been brought to Knox, the missional opportunity for Paris to partner with Knox, and the relational connection between the two churches.

We are excited to see what God will continue to do next in both our communities.

So what about you?

Perhaps there are opportunities to see this happen in some way with your church. If you would like to chat further, we would be happy to connect. Email joel@parispresb.ca. In any case, check out the live stream: [youtube.com/user/parispresbyterian](https://www.youtube.com/user/parispresbyterian).



Praying for Peace

Pray for all who are affected and threatened by war, and for an end to violence. May there be a just peace in the land of Christ’s birth.



God of truth, mercy and peace, God of life and of reconciliation, we mourn the suffering and murder of your people and we pray for a just peace and reconciliation for the people of Palestine and Israel who have endured the burden of violence and conflict for so long. Console those who grieve, heal the injured, comfort those who are alone and afraid, protect those who are held hostage, and restrain those who would cause more violence or act cynically for political gain and power. Let wisdom settle on your churches and on the governments and leaders of this world so that justice is sought, reconciliation found, peace established and security provided for all. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.



Camp Compassion, an ecumenical day camp in the heart of Saskatoon.



Bible Vacation Week at Norman Kennedy Presbyterian Church, Regina.

Rural and Remote Ministry in the Prairies: Reverse Mission

By Nehemia Neubisa, student at Vancouver School of Theology/St. Andrew's Hall

“The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few” (Luke 10:2).

I never imagined myself doing mission work, especially as an Indonesian in my twenties here in North America. But, for the past three months, I see that work that I did through the Rural and Remote Ministries program is a new way of mission to and with the people in Canada, particularly in the province of Saskatchewan. The mission is to serve congregations, who for years have not had their own minister to offer pastoral care, to serve Indigenous communities with their unique and valuable teachings and experiences, to serve children who might never



After preaching at Knox Presbyterian Church, Whitewood.

have heard about Jesus or who had never been to church, and to serve siblings in Christ who find themselves in financial difficulties and unable to meet their primary

needs, in downtown areas of Regina and Saskatoon.

I met all of them on different occasions and through programs that included summer ministry, which made me feel grateful for the experience and relationships I made, for the teaching I gave and received, and for the ministries that took place over the summer.

While the Bible might not specifically use the word “mission,” the concept is rooted in biblical truth. Mission itself signifies purposeful movement—being sent from one place to another for a reason. The apostles of Jesus were among the first to be sent out on a mission to share what Jesus was proclaiming. And if my people were recipients of mission works from Europe hundreds of years ago, now I can see myself doing a similar

thing: travelling far away from my home to share God’s good news to the places where Christianity once was a “thing.”

Here’s why I subtitled this article “Reverse Mission”: “Reverse Mission” itself is understood as a missionary movement that started not long ago. It’s where churches or individuals of the classic “recipient countries” of missionaries, predominantly in the southern hemisphere, participate in the worldwide commission of Jesus Christ by doing mission to places where Christianity or even having a religion is not a necessity anymore.

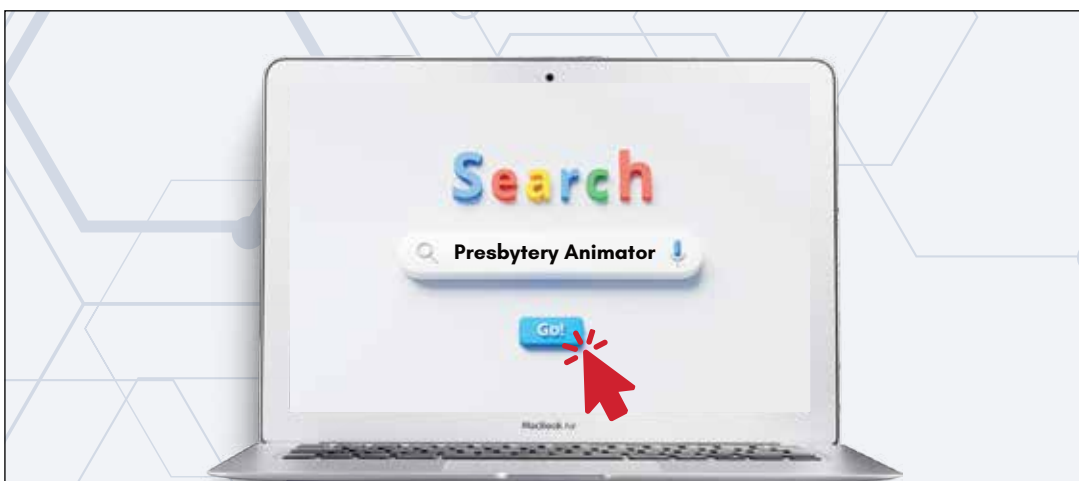
It’s not my first time doing this, but it always feels like I learn something new each time. Trying to learn and teach at the same time, ministering to folks from the youngest—through Vacation Bible School and Summer Camp—to the oldest, and living in different cultures and practices, are marvellous and meaningful experiences. And the fact that I did this mission in the prairies, which I am not familiar with at all, since I was born and grew up in busy city area in Indonesia, meant I learned a lot of new things about mission, about church, and about cultures that were very different from my previous experience growing up as Christian in Indonesia, the world’s most populous Muslim-majority country in the world.

The journey as a summer minister student for the Synod of Saskatchewan, moving from one community to another, preaching from church to church throughout Saskatchewan, and connecting with people from different backgrounds and experiences provided me with amazing experiences. I never imagined that God had such an interesting plan with intentional encounters between me and those I do ministry with, and unintentional meetings with random people that gave me a chance to share my faith journey and how God works wonderfully. It all pushed me outside my comfort zone to do things that I never imagined before.

Overall, as an Asian-Indigenous person who was born and grew up at least 8,000 miles away from this land, I am really grateful for the gift that I can share and for the opportunity to do this ministry. Rural and Remote Ministry not only helped the congregations that I visited in the Synod of Saskatchewan, but also enriched me with experiences to know more about sharing the gospel, especially in the post-Christendom era. Without this ministry, I would never be the person I am right now, with experiences that I can use for my ministry as a theology student, as a “newbie missionary,” and as a minister in the future, wherever God sends me.



Picnic after Ecumenical Sunday service at the Old Bekevar Church, Kipling (Hungarian Community).



The Presbyteries of Ottawa and Seaway-Glengarry are looking for someone to help engage and re-engage youth and young adults in the region, primarily through digital environments and by supporting youth leaders at our churches. The successful candidate will be a dynamic and creative person with expertise in working collaboratively in digital spaces.

If you’re interested in sharing the love of Jesus online, visit: presbyterian.ca/presby-animator

The **rural and remote ministries grant** is a funding program from The Presbyterian Church in Canada that provides ministry students with opportunities to serve in rural contexts so that they can get a taste of the joys of serving within a rural context. The hope of this program is to bring leadership and support to congregations in rural contexts and to encourage rural ministry. Participants in this program receive a stipend and housing allowance from the ministry where they are serving and a \$5,000 grant from the Life and Mission Agency to put toward their theological education.

Assisting Ukrainians in St. John's



By Penny Gillies, elder, St. David's Presbyterian Church in St. John's, N.L., Atlantic Mission Society

This March, during our monthly Atlantic Mission Society (AMS) meeting at St. David's Presbyterian Church in St. John's, N.L., we began to discuss what we could do to help the over 1,000 Ukrainians who were being housed in local hotels.

Folks coming to Canada need to communicate in English or French in order to get a job, go to school and then finally, when all of these building blocks are in place, find a home. So we decided that we would offer weekly conversation classes to assist in that endeavour. We enlisted the help of retired ESL teacher Cathy Anstey, who assured us we

needed no special skills or books to do this. We should bring pens and paper, magazines, flyers or a local map—whatever came to hand at home, and just start the conversation! Easy, right?

Very quickly, and with much laughter, hand waving and of course Google translate, we got started.

AMS members were soon joined by others in the congregation and some of their friends came along, too. As one of the local hotels was just a ten-minute walk away from the church, on Wednesday mornings there was a steady stream of Ukrainians making their way to the church, eager to make those connections. We have met folks from every walk of life, who had left their homes to resettle in Canada: accountants, chefs, engineers,

a seamstress, retirees, farmers, a cabinet maker, and many with young families. And of course there were stories to share about the situation with their loved ones and pets who were left behind in war-torn Ukraine.

As summer approached, we had the idea that perhaps little groups might like to use the kitchen at St. David's to enjoy their traditional tastes of home. And with the help of the Atlantic Synod Mission Fund, it became possible. But our newfound friends had other ideas. A date was struck late in June when the Ukrainians insisted that we were all invited for an evening of Ukrainian food and culture. They were adamant that it was more meaningful to invite all the volunteers from the neighbouring churches to share in this celebration rather than cook for themselves. Imagine our surprise when we arrived to delicious smells, smiling faces, music and a packed church hall. It was transformed with beautifully set long tables (Ukrainian wedding-style) adorned with wildflowers like blue iris, grasses and dandelions. One very shy young woman, Marisha, had prepared a speech about coming to Newfoundland and as she delivered her final words in her best English all stood with hands over hearts to sing the Ukrainian National Anthem. There



was not a dry eye after that! What a memorable evening!

But now we are in October, and although there may still be a need for English classes, folks are more scattered around the city, and can no longer be housed in the hotels. But the good news is that many of the newcomers have found jobs and apartments. So our annual "Socktober Plus" campaign might help just a little in providing items to set up their homes. Every October, our sanctuary hangs multiple washing lines around the perimeter. During the month, the congregation is asked to peg up socks, hats, gloves, personal care items, and this year we have added household goods and small appliances



to that list. So we hope this can provide much needed home furnishings for the newcomers to Canada. There is also a plea for a set of bunk beds!

Above are some pictures of that wonderful Ukrainian evening of fellowship, food and smiles.

Ultimate Frisbee: Ultimately, a Connection with God

By the Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, B.C.

This past summer, the Oakridge Christian Ministries and Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, B.C., partnered with Richmond Presbyterian Church to host an inter-church ultimate frisbee challenge. The game was a collaboration to encourage and support inter-generational Presbyterian connections. The Growing Love of Church Ultimate Frisbee started during COVID-19 as a safe way to share the love of community, the endorphins of recreation and a time of fellowship.

In conversations sparked by the desire to encourage deeper



The ultimate frisbee game in action.

connections with Christians in a fun and informal way, we ended up with a challenge being issued. The challenge was a final frisbee game at the end of the summer. This had our congregation abuzz

with excitement, energy, joy and mild competitiveness.

The purpose of the challenge was to 1) inspire inter-church relationships, 2) inspire and empower a coming together of the individual church communities, 3) be a visible presence in the community, and 4) inspire people to see God in everyday activities!

On August 26, we gathered and played against one another. Despite the "challenge," it filled each community with connection and love. For as much as we were looking forward to the game, the biggest win was the ability to be intentional about being part of the broader community of Christ's church. We celebrated this win together over hot dogs and chips



A post-game photo of the ultimate frisbee players. PHOTO CREDITS: JOHN CON

and took a trophy home to bring back to the congregation.

We plan to make this an annual challenge, and we wish to use this event as an opportunity for Christians to unite and worship God in new ways.

We would love to grow this into a more extensive inter-church activity. We are so lucky to have siblings in Christ who are ready, willing and able to work at building a Christian community that celebrates the joy of Christ's love in different ways.

Please get in touch with Richmond Presbyterian Church or the

Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church if you wish to participate on Aug. 24, 2024!



A post-game fellowship BBQ at Richmond Presbyterian Church. PHOTO CREDIT: JACQUELINE CLELAND



Brett Robinson, assisted by his mother Lynn, cuts the ribbon to officially open the new wheelchair ramp at Zion Presbyterian Church. A large crowd of churchgoers was on hand, including, (left to right) the Rev. Dr. Douglas Rollwage, Brett's father, Dave, Jim Stavert, chair of the church building committee, Pam Trainor, chair of the board of trustees, and Eleanor Boswell, Brett's grandmother.

Zion Celebrates New Wheelchair Ramp

By Gary MacDougall, Clerk of Session, Zion Presbyterian Church in Charlottetown, P.E.I.

Zion Presbyterian Church in Charlottetown, P.E.I., has improved accessibility to the church with the construction of a new wheelchair ramp.

The ramp is a much-needed update to the old ramp that dated back to the 1980s. It meets the latest requirements of the City of Charlottetown and of the National Building Code, and provides users with a much gentler slope, whether they are entering or exiting the church.

Cutting the ribbon to officially open the ramp on October 1 was Brett Robinson, a member of the

Zion congregation and a former Easter Seals ambassador for Prince Edward Island. Perhaps it was only fitting that the Rev. Dr. Douglas Rollwage, a retired Zion Church minister, was providing supply the day of the ramp opening. During his many years at the church, he was often called on to help Brett navigate his way up and down the old wheelchair ramp.

The building of the new ramp was overseen by the Building Committee of the Trustee Board. The members of the committee are Jim Stavert (chair), John Farquharson, Allan Jay, Douglas MacDonald, Gary MacDougall, Carmen Ross, Ken Spearing, Raymond Stewart, David Thomson and Pam Trainor (chair of Trustee Board).

A Caring Presence in Kitchener

By Margie Warren, Clerk of Session, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Kitchener, Ont.

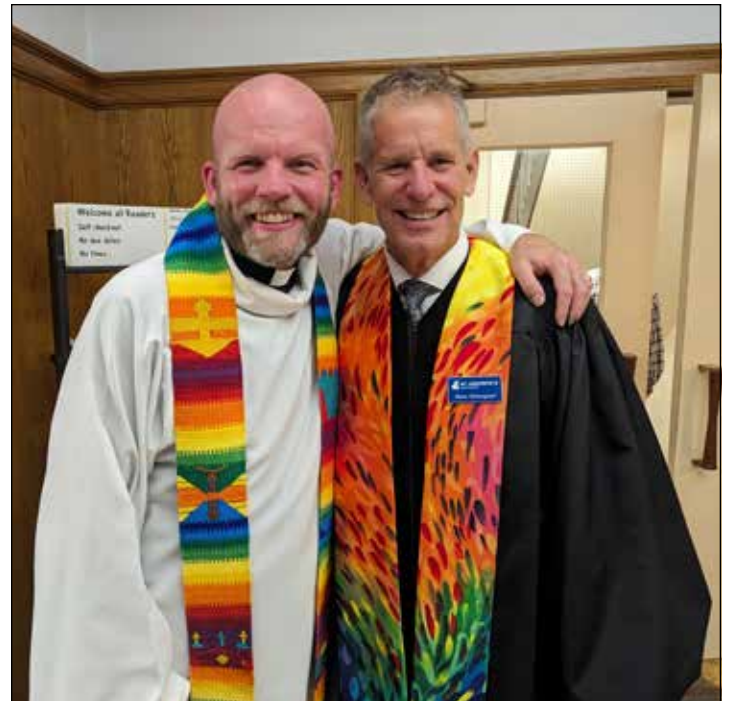
After worship on Oct. 15, I was overcome with emotion and felt compelled to share some of what goes on at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in downtown Kitchener, Ont.

It was about 13 years ago that I joined St. Andrew's after being God-directed to do so. (That is a story for another time!) I knew very quickly that God truly wanted me at St. Andrew's. I was impressed by the wonderful mission and outreach ministries that St. Andrew's has always been involved in locally, nationally and abroad. This was the church for me!

In the past couple of years, the outreach and activities at St. Andrew's have been phenomenal. In December of 2021, the church was asked by the Region of Waterloo and The Working Centre (a local agency responding to unemployment and poverty in downtown Kitchener) to open our doors to the homeless, to people living in the rough. The situation in Kitchener-Waterloo was critical. This we did from December 2021 to June 2022. We housed approximately 75 homeless guests each night, sharing our space when they came for an evening meal, prepared off-site, and a bed for sleep. Warm clothing and toiletries were available as needed. Our guests were given food to take away with them in the morning. What wonderful outreach as these folk would have had no place to stay during those cold winter nights. Part of the building was modified to house these individuals in a private area of the church, basically a building within a building. Maintaining their privacy was important to our guests.

Were there challenges to overcome? Of course! There were some objections, concerns and complications, but as a Christian community we were called to provide a safe place of solitude and sanctuary for those less fortunate and the vulnerable in our midst. We relied on God's spirit to guide us to be an outpost in the Kingdom of God. We knew God's love was calling us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and care for others.

To make our guests feel loved and welcomed, a Christmas banner adorned the gymnasium



The Rev. Mark (St. Peter's Lutheran Church) and the Rev. Marty (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church) after service on Oct. 15.

where they slept, and a small group provided Christmas, Valentine's and Easter treats, which were greatly appreciated! Locally, many affirmed that we were a caring, compassionate congregation, showing good leadership by providing for the homeless.

In the spring of 2023, we were approached by a local Indigenous group to provide space for some of their programs. Some of the Indigenous people in the area were surprised about this, given past history. However, we formed an alliance with them. This was one small step toward healing and reconciliation. The outcome was a summer basketball camp with the KW Titans. Approximately 20 children were involved each week, including some of the people who are part of the St. Andrew's congregation. The Rev. Molengraaf's two grandchildren attended for one week.

To quote the head of our custodial staff, "I just wanted to say what a pleasure it has been to have our Indigenous friends here. The staff has conducted themselves well with a structured program, combining both discipline, learning and fun. I think for me though, the best part has been to have so many children in the building. The sounds of kids playing, learning and doing so many positive things. This world has so many bad temptations. This program helps keep these kids away from this, and that is something definitely needed more in this world. I have to think that Jesus smiles

when he watches these kids."

Partnerships with community organizations are essential to the life and well-being of our church, mission and ministry. Indeed, there are growing pains associated with developing partnerships, but St. Andrew's hopes we are an example to other churches within The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Partnerships are a sign of a vibrant and strong congregation.

In collaboration with Waterloo Region Hospice, we presented our second Dying to Know event on Oct. 14. We reached out to the entire Kitchener-Waterloo community to take part and have conversations around death and grieving, which was so needed after the COVID-19 pandemic and to normalize talking about death and dying.

Relying on feedback from our first event last spring, the day was planned to keep the conversation going. We brought together local experts to share practical information to help families support someone who is dying or grieving. We learned about a Death Café, a Death Doula, and grieving when one loses a precious furry member of the family. We were thrilled to welcome Dr. Blair Bigham, doctor and author of the bestselling book *Death Interrupted: How Modern Medicine Is Complicating the Way We Die*, as our keynote speaker.

St. Andrew's has a mission statement for our building, which states:



Weekly worship bulletin covers are available to order!
 Visit presbyterian.ca/bulletins

Indigenous Circle of Friendship: Big Drums are Calling!

By Sara Traficante, Central Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont.

On Sept. 23, 2023, the Social Justice Group of Central Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont., hosted Coast Ts'msyán First Nation Elders Shannon Thunderbird and Kate Dickson for an immersive learning event: "Indigenous Circle of Friendship: Big Drums are Calling!"

Shannon and Kate are originally from the West Coast and now are based in Toronto. Central was blessed to engage in this work with passionate and experienced leaders, all in the spirit of reconciliation. This was an intergenerational event, with children and adults from the congregation present, as well as guests from the



Shannon Thunderbird and Kate Dickson at Central Presbyterian Church. PHOTO CREDIT: RICHARD TALBOT.

community.

Shannon and Kate's specialty is traditional music and original song. They became known to Central through children from our

congregation. In Spring 2023, a very special relationship was formed when these young people worked with Shannon and Amgan ~Lik~Igaawks (Red Cedar Sisters) through the Hamilton Children's Choir. Inspired by their experience, the children sang two Haudenosaunee songs as part of our National Indigenous Peoples Day worship service in June 2023. Special permission from Shannon was granted to sing these songs in worship. During our September event, these impressive children stood up with Shannon and Kate and sang some of the songs they learned together. It was a beautiful reunion, and a demonstration of friendship and affection that was meaningful to the event participants, especially the senior members from Central.



Drum Circle at Central Presbyterian Church. PHOTO CREDIT: KIRK STARKEY

The morning program included a discussion around the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the 94 Calls to Action. With children present, Shannon and Kate addressed residential schools with sensitivity. The experience helped to lift our connection into real relationship. Ideas were shared by the presenters on how we can take steps toward reconciliation and be part of that partnership. Questions were freely answered with warmth, generosity and humour.

The highlight of the morning was the drumming, call and re-

sponse singing, and circle dancing around the big drum. Everyone was invited to participate in the drumming. The joy experienced in the room was palpable. We received wonderful feedback from those in attendance, expressing what an honour this was—to sit around the drum with these inspiring Elders, and to participate in this act of reconciliation.

The morning ended with a lunch hosted by the Social Justice Group. Central is grateful for the generosity of the PCC Healing and Reconciliation Seed Fund for their support of this event.

A Change at Canadian Ministries

By the Rev. Ian Ross-McDonald, General Secretary, Life and Mission Agency

After eight years of ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, Jennifer de Combe has resigned her position as she and her family settle in France on a more permanent basis.

As Associate Secretary of Canadian Ministries, Jen participated in strategic planning to strengthen the mission and ministry of the PCC and created leadership development programs to stimulate organizational renewal. Under Jen's leadership, coaching programs for

ministry leaders were expanded, providing critical on-the-ground support. New funding streams were developed to encourage creative models of ministry and community development.

"I have really loved being part of programs, such as Cyclical PCC, New Beginnings and the Evangelism Network," Jen said, reflecting on her time as Associate Secretary of Canadian Ministries. "It's been such a privilege to walk alongside congregations and leaders as they come alive in ministry and boldly step out in new directions. We are blessed in the PCC with dedicated clergy and lay leaders who truly love the

church and want to share Christ's love in their neighbourhoods."

We are very grateful to Jen for the contributions she has made to Christ's continued ministry through the PCC. Jen is known across Canada for her enthusiasm for ministry, commitment to kindness and sense of social justice. She connected people across Canada through speaking engagements, seminars, leadership events and worship services.

Personally, I am very grateful to Jen for her ministry and I know that we all wish her and her family the very best as they settle down in France.



Jen de Combe and her husband, Seb.

Continued from page 12

Our building is a gift from God to be used to its fullest potential to serve the community with grace, love, compassion and inclusion. We strive to do so with joy in our hearts. We will continue our long tradition of being a welcoming, caring presence in our community by looking outwards and sharing our building with others. This further allows us to encounter God, engage Jesus and be an outpost in the Kin-dom of God.

Recently, as I entered the building, I was in awe! I saw this mission statement being lived. St. Peter's Lutheran Church, a neighbour to us, is renovating their building to establish 41 affordable housing units, which has resulted in them having to leave their building due to construction and thus having no place to work and worship. In partnership with St. Peter's, they are using space in our building through the week

for office work, and on Sunday mornings, worship is in our newly renovated Covenant Chapel. How thrilling to enter the building and have someone say, "Oh, I don't know you. You must be from St. Andrew's." My reply, "And I don't know you, you must be from St. Peter's! Welcome!" We both laughed. It was exciting to be with our Christian siblings in our own church building and share our facilities. We are so pleased to

share our space with St. Peter's!

But it didn't end there. The Nexus Church, which presents an alternative and fresh expression of the Christian Path, uses our gymnasium as they have been temporarily locked out of their space due to the bankruptcy of the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony. It was truly awesome and very exciting to have three services happening at the same time in our building. Later in the day, the

Hungarian Church worshipped in Covenant Chapel. What a beautiful way to share our lovely heritage facility!

Indeed, I was filled with emotion and awe, and I believe you can understand why. Yes, we are the church together! We engage Jesus, encounter God, and are an outpost in the Kin-dom of God. I am so thankful and blessed to be part of this wonderful church family. May God bless us all.

Outreach in Regina

By Sumi Jung, Ministry Assistant,
Norman Kennedy Presbyterian
Church in Regina, Sask.

Since the COVID-19 period, Norman Kennedy Presbyterian (NKP) Church in Regina, Sask., has offered free family events for the community. These are some of our church's outreach programs.

Tuesday Family Fun

This summer, from July 25 to August 15, the family fun outdoor program was held every Tuesday evening in the NKP Church parking lot. Around 50 kids and 25 parents from the neighbourhood attended the program for four weeks.

Vacation Bible School (VBS) 2023

Through the Family Fun event, our church invited community kids to join VBS from August 17 to 19. There were around 20 volunteers who could share our love, passion and gospel with the 34 children who attended—and more than half of those children were from the neighbourhood.

Trunk or Treat

For the continuity of the outreach program, "Trunk or Treat" has occurred on the last Saturday of October, every year since 2020, to help our community have a safe way to take children and teens trick-or-treating. It was dreamt up during the Covid period.



Vacation Bible School.

We hope and pray that these activities are an opportunity for neighbours to enjoy a variety of church experiences through our outreach programs.



Trunk or treat.

The Tuesday Family Fun event at Norman Kennedy Presbyterian Church.

170 Years in Kitchener

By the Anniversary Committee at Doon Presbyterian Church in Kitchener, Ont., with special thanks to Louisa Stephenson

What a day Sunday, Sept. 17 was for Doon Presbyterian Church in Kitchener, Ont., when we celebrated our 170th Anniversary. Former church members who had moved from the area returned to renew old friendships, remember the good times and share their stories, which made for a huge joyous reunion!

We are a caring church that reaches out to our neighbours in many ways, and we support local charities, such as the three chosen this year—The Working Centre, Ray of Hope and Marillac Place—as well as contributing well over 5,000 meals to the Food Bank. Our yearly outreach programs are also a community favourite, such as the Easter Egg Hunt, Rosebud Tea, Children’s Bible Camp Harvest Luncheon, Memorial Day Service, Christmas Lights with Carol Singing, and we are now looking forward to our upcoming Christmas Bazaar and Christmas Eve Service.

People can marvel at the beauty of our historic church, which was built before Canada was born, and in those days you paid to go to church! We still have the original pews, which cost \$2.50 per year for a single pew and \$10 for a family. We also have the original chandelier with its 12 burning oil lamps that in 1953 was wired for electricity by the Wilfong family. Our church pump organ that was made in Berlin, Ont., in the 1800s was played at our anniversary service.

Our church was built in 1853 at a cost of \$4,912. Sitting high



Photos from the 170th Anniversary service at Doon Presbyterian Church.

up on a hill overlooking the Grand River, it stood well above the treeless rolling hills of Doon. But nowadays, it is more difficult to find! In 1992, a new brick addition was built to support the growing congregation. In the older section you can see parts of the church’s original stone foundation still standing strong and true. Our local nicknames are “The Friendly Church on the Hill” and “The Church that Loves to Sing,” and both are true!



Building Capacity for Reconciliation in Calgary

By Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church

Meaningful reconciliation begins with listening, learning, holding space for the uncomfortable truths of our collective history and coming to terms with their impact on Indigenous peoples. The congregation of Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church (VAPC) in Calgary, Alta., has committed itself to such a reconciliation journey.

On October 21, VAPC hosted a workshop with Cheryle Chagnon-Greyeyes, a member of Muskeg Lake Cree Nation in Saskatchewan, a recognized traditional knowledge keeper, Elder and pipe carrier, and a long-time activist for Indigenous rights in the Calgary area.

Cheryle was a guest speaker at a service at VAPC in September. The October workshop was a follow-up to her September talk. The full-day workshop used the



Cheryle Chagnon-Greyeyes, of Muskeg Lake Cree Nation in Saskatchewan, presenting at Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta.



framework of the medicine wheel to discuss racism, prejudice and misinformation, and to examine the background of the Calls to Action recommended in the final report of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The event offered participants the opportunity to become more familiar with Indigenous worldviews, traditional teachings and

historical perspectives, and to examine the ongoing effects of colonialism and capitalism in the shaping of Canada. The workshop provided a foundation to build capacity for meaningful reconciliation work. It was open to the community and Presbytery of Calgary-Macleod, and was deeply appreciated by all those attending.



Actions of Love and Care at Elmvale

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

At Elmvale Presbyterian Church in Elmvale, Ont., the congregation's discipleship in Jesus Christ

is rooted in the Bible, prayer and actions of love and care.

Over the last few months, our congregation has been living an active faith. The Mission and Outreach team held a BBQ fundraiser that raised over \$5,000 for the

Midland General Hospital's new MRI machine.

The congregation and the local community were most generous with their support. The donation was then matched by the Midland's Masonic Lodges, resulting in a total donation for the MRI machine of over \$10,000. Blessings, indeed!

A second fundraiser was held by the Women of Elmvale Presbyterian to help support the Elmvale Coyotes Junior hockey team. The team and their parents all participated at the church and there was much laughter and a high level of energy present.

We were successful with the support of the congregation and community in raising over \$2,000 to help send a player on the Coyotes' planned European trip next



The Mission and Outreach Team at Elmvale Presbyterian Church.



Go Coyotes Go! Some of the players and parents of our local team.

year.

A new members class is scheduled to commence in October and we already have seven people signed up. Our Fall Bible study on the book of Daniel will start in October both in person and online. Everyone is welcome.

The Rev. Dr. Bob Faris, former

Moderator of the PCC, grew up at Knox, Flos and Elmvale Presbyterian churches. The Rev. Bob was our guest speaker for Elmvale's 163rd anniversary service on Sunday, Nov. 5.

Discipleship is indeed prayerful and active at Elmvale Presbyterian, thanks be to God!

Greeting Cards Provide Unique Outreach

By Eric Howald, member of
Knox Presbyterian Church in
Kincardine, Ont.

Back in 2013, some members at Knox Presbyterian Church in Kincardine, Ont., were rather skeptical when Margaret Weir and the late Bob Bullen suggested a greeting card writers' group. More than 3,000 cards have been sent out since then and the number continues to grow.

The group marks the happy things in life—accomplishments,

birthdays, weddings, baptisms, anniversaries, Valentine's Day, Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas. People are also sent cards when life takes a nasty turn—accidents, deaths, serious illness.

The card writers started with three members in July 2013, and it took a little time to get organized and sell the project as worthwhile.

A sympathy card was sent to Buckingham Palace when Queen Elizabeth II died and King Charles replied with a beautiful thank you



Members of the card writers group, standing from left behind Margaret Weir (sitting), are Marilyn McKeeman, the Rev. Dan West, Linda Stanley, Dana Howald and Barb Stuart. Missing is Janice Larsen.

with a picture of the Queen and him as a child.

Some cards are donated by the writers, otherwise they are purchased at the Dollar Store. The writers are sent an agenda a week prior to the monthly meeting, so that a list of recipient names can be edited and added to at the meeting. People who sign the

visitors' book are added to the list and members of the congregation also send in names of people who should get cards.

Card writers can sign their own name or sign "From Your Friends at Knox" and they are to include at least one personal sentence in the card or note.

Margaret Weir, the only origi-

nal member left, says people feel "in the loop" when they receive a card. "They are thrilled when they hear people are praying for them, and children get excited when they receive mail."

For the group's 10th anniversary, they celebrated with a luncheon. Margaret gave members birthday candles and she often gives little remembrances to say thanks.

During the pandemic, the group's work became even more important to keep people in touch with the church. The writers met in a well-ventilated garage and also did "homework" individually to get the cards out. When the church reopened again, masks were worn to keep the members safe.

Member Barb Stuart says that for congregations in transition, "This is a wonderful outreach to members and the community while there is a vacancy."

In our fast-paced society, the letter writers help keep people connected in a personal way that the Internet cannot do.



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Siloé Community's Visit from the Moderator



The Rev. Mary Fontaine and her team with the Siloé community reception committee.

By Marthe Simo, Clerk of Session and elder, and Mathieu Fokwa Sob, church elder, Communauté Chrétienne Siloé Canada in Montreal, Que.

At Communauté Chrétienne Siloé Canada in Montreal, Que., the summer was a time of vibrant energy and memorable mo-



The leader of the women's group singing praise in the Cameroonian language.

ments, bearing witness to the vitality and diversity of this dedicated congregation.

It was a special day when the Rev. Mary Fontaine, Moderator of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, came to visit. The community warmly welcomed her. There was emphasis on the importance of faith and communion within the national church, creating a moment of deep spiritual connection.

The moderator visited the parish building, exploring the spaces that host moments of prayer, celebration and gathering. A symbolic moment occurred when the moderator signed the community register, sealing her connection with members of Siloé. This gesture was met with enthusiasm.

The highlight of the visit was the moderator's vibrant speech, which



The women's and youth choir groups from the Siloé community.

was delivered after welcoming speeches from the board of directors and the community pastor. The Siloé community thanked the Presbyterian Church for its support and consideration. Then, the moderator shared words of encouragement and inspiration, applauding the community for its fervour of faith and urging members to persevere in their commitment to spirituality.

The performances of the youth choirs added a musical dimension to the event. The moderator was deeply moved by the talents of the



young singers, recognizing the importance of youth in the continuity of faith. The women's choir also played a significant role by singing praises in multiple languages, symbolizing the cultural and linguistic diversity within the Siloé community.

The moderator's visit strength-

ened the bonds between the national church and the local community, nurturing the fervour of faith and celebrating the diversity that enriches this congregation. Siloé looks to the future with anticipation, ready to continue growing and sharing the light of its faith with the surrounding world.

Supporting the Needs of Refugees



By Sharon Buchanan, Clerk of Session, and Kent Buchanan, Elder and New Beginnings Rep, St. James Presbyterian Church, North Yarmouth, in Central Elgin, Ont.

In late 2022, the Presbytery of London welcomed a Syrian refugee family, who had been waiting for several years to come to Canada, having been delayed by Covid restrictions. While the funds that had been set aside by presbytery several years ago were sufficient to support them at that time, the funds did not reflect the new reality of housing, grocery and clothing costs in 2023.

St. James Presbyterian Church, North Yarmouth, in Central Elgin, Ont., rallied on several fronts to help ensure this family had the

funds they needed. The Sunday school put together a basket of prizes for an Easter-themed raffle, using this as an opportunity to be in touch with both active congregation members and those we haven't seen for a while. The draw winner was a shut-in individual affected by "long Covid" who was overjoyed to have a visit from the youngsters with the prize basket. The Presbyterian Women's Association initiated a fundraiser in the congregation and community, using a calendar with suggested contributions for each day of Lent, based on the blessings many of us experience—for example, donate \$1 for each meal you ate today.

This had the benefit of raising funds for the refugee family and



helped us understand some of the relative privilege we enjoy.

At the end of April, facilitated by a member of presbytery, we were surprised and blessed when this refugee family was able to attend a potluck event we had organized as part of our New Beginnings program. At the event, children from varying cultures were able to interact and play in a relaxed setting.



A New Beginning for Kitimat

By the Rev. Dr. Teresa A. Charlton,
Clerk, Presbytery of Kamloops

It is a familiar story. A remote congregation struggles for many years with only lay leadership and the occasional visit from an ordained clergy until finally there are too few people left to do the work of the church and there is too little energy to carry on.

The congregation of Kitimat Presbyterian Church in Kitimat, B.C., found itself in just such a position. After careful deliberation, they asked the Presbytery of Kamloops to help them close

gracefully. But, in addition to the expected motions of such a decision, the congregation also asked the presbytery to help them find a suitable congregation within the bounds who might take them under wing and continue the Presbyterian tradition with them. The congregation knew that because of their remote location, this “new ministry” would need to be accessible through technology and Canada Post. Even so, they were adamant that they did not want to become lost in facts and figures but continue being members of The Presbyterian Church in Can-

ada under the umbrella and care of another congregation.

The church family of Knox Vernon offered to take the lead, affectionately calling them “The Kitimat Cousins!”

During the closing service, held in August 2023, the expected handover of the chalice by the Clerk of Session at Kitimat to the Presbytery Clerk took place after communion. But then, in a symbolic gesture of new beginnings, the chalice was then handed to the Clerk of Session of Knox Presbyterian Church, Vernon, who had travelled for the service.

The Session of Knox Vernon is continuing to explore ways to connect with the members of the former Kitimat congregation, through the use of live streaming worship, daily e-news and even having the lay leader from Kitimat preach via video to the congregation in Vernon when the minister is away.

Although officially the congregation is now dissolved, in practical terms, this new relationship is more like an amalgamation. It’s a new approach, as we continue to explore ways to be a church in these changing times and continue to care for one another.



Kitimat Presbyterian Church in Kitimat, B.C.

Seeking to Connect with an Inner-City Community



Grace Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., and the surrounding neighbourhood.

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

How does a church connect with the community when the community around the building is not the church?

Grace Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., is an urban inner-city church that seeks to connect with the surrounding community in the Beltline neighbourhood where the church has stood for more than 100 years. In that time, the church has gone from being a prominent local church, with the congregation living around it, to a place that is increasingly used for a commuting congregation and as a community space.

Relationships must be forged continuously. The neighbourhood is transient, comprised of a mix of young urban professional renters and those new to Canada. People tend to move out and be replaced by younger people. There are some high needs as one in four households with children under the age of 18 are low-income. There is also a visible homeless

population. The City of Calgary Census shows that 55% of the people are non-religious, 35% are Christian, and the rest constitute a variety of religions. The student population at neighbouring Connaught Elementary School has as many as 40 first languages.

Grace has a vision to transform lives through God’s grace, and a mission to grow disciples of Jesus Christ to love our neighbours and effect social change. To fulfill these goals, a full-time Associate Minister is charged with community relationships. A strategic priority has been identified to grow community collaboration to foster meaningful relationships with those in need, and to hold neighbourhood conversations. Grace works toward this through a combination of partnerships, programs and projects.

Focusing on food insecurity

Grace has run a satellite food bank one day a week since the Fall of 2020. Over time, weekly needs have increased from 15 to 20 hampers per week. In October 2023, the operation will expand to two days a week to meet growing needs.

Working with newcomers

Grace has a long-standing relationship with Connaught Elementary School. Over the summer, Grace hosted a one-week mini summer camp for 20 students from Connaught, Grades 4 to 6. Ministers and church volunteers

worked with school leadership and The Immigrant Education Society (TIES) to provide the program. TIES is a registered charity that has been working since 1988 to support immigrants and economically disadvantaged individuals by giving them a solid foothold in Canada that affords people the opportunities to feel a sense of belonging in their community.

Grace also holds annual community events. The Trunk N Treat Halloween event in the parking lot is popular and draws hundreds of children and families—as well as seniors from apartments around the church. One parent who signed up this year stated, “We are new in Canada, and I would love to bring my kids to this event. Looking forward to this event with excitement.” Other activities include Open Mics events, Shrove Tuesday Pancake Suppers, music



English Language Learners Conversational English class.

concerts, and more.

To help meet newcomer needs, a decade-long English Language Learning program is run by church and community volunteers. Up to 50 students attend, from more than 15 countries of origin. Classes are conversational, and teachers seek to create a sense of belonging for those who are new to Canada as well as those who have been here for years.

A commitment to truth, healing and reconciliation

Since 2020, Grace has been engaging with the community on Truth, Healing and Reconciliation. On September 30, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, Grace and Stardale Women’s Group co-hosted the second annual Orange Shirt Day event Reconnection, Reconciliation and Resilience—an event for hope

and a better future, featuring the Indigenous girls and women of Stardale Women’s Group. More than 150 people braved rain and cool temperatures to listen, learn, connect and to discuss the effects of residential schools and their legacy, and the current lived experiences of Indigenous women and girls in Calgary and Alberta.

In the evening, a diverse audience gathered in the sanctuary for a screening of the new film *Bones of Crows*, adapted from the CBC TV series *Bones of Crows*, followed by a Q&A with George Canyon and Moderator Gerald Auger (Gerald plays Chief Wandering Spirit).

As the community around Grace grows and changes, Grace will work to respond, seeking to reduce barriers, increase connection and help to build community.



September 30 event for Truth, Healing and Reconciliation.



The new Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church building blessed for Christ's call as of 2023.

*By Jacqueline Cleland,
Pastoral Care and Outreach
Coordinator, Oakridge Christian
Ministry, part of the Vancouver
Chinese Presbyterian Church in
Vancouver, B.C.*

At a time when the CBC publishes articles with titles such as “9,000 Churches and Religious Spaces Will Close Over Next 10 Years” to “Majority of Canadians Say Church to Blame for Residential School Tragedies,” it can feel like now is the time when despair rings in our church halls instead of praise for God. In the church, we can see things changing in ways that we were not expecting. Yet, God works unexpectedly, especially here at Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church. This year, we are celebrating our new church and recognizing the journey it took for us to get here.

The journey started in 1895 at the corner of Columbia and Pender. A seed was planted and missionaries had no idea if it would grow. This seed was the Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church, originally located in Chinatown as a mission outreach to spread Christ's love. The important thing to understand about the Chinese immigrant experience is that many first settling Chinese Canadian families were segregated out of other neighbourhoods and community facilities, so the mission church was very important in not only bringing faith to a community but also bringing a community together. These missionaries were looking to meet and provide for the spiritual, Sunday school, kindergarten, and Chinese language school needs. This desire was the start of our mission outreach, focusing on spiritual and pastoral care.

In 1923, the Canadian Government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act—no person of Chinese origin was permitted to enter Canada. There was a fear of more people committing Asian hate, as was supported by law. These moves were intended to crush the souls of Chinese Canadians and could have been the end of the church; yet the Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church continued to count on their remarkable constant, God.

A Remarkable Constant

In 1930, the first Chinese Presbyterian church building in Vancouver was built on Keefer Street. Then, in 1964, a new Christian Education Wing was added to accommodate a Chinese language school and daycare, along with a preschool and Sunday school. In 1977, the congregation took responsibility for the sole support of its own minister and church services (according to Ada Con, church historian).

In the 1980s, the seed of God's love bloomed in unexpected ways. Parliament passed a motion recognizing “the contribution made to the Canadian mosaic and culture by the people of Chinese background.” To meet the growing needs of the congregation and community, the church decided to relocate out of Chinatown to the Oakridge area, to Cambie Street and 46th Avenue, thus expanding their impact on Vancouver's society.

This impact continued to consider and address the congregation's and community's needs. The church then expanded to continue supporting the preschool, Chinese language school and ongoing work in faith formation from worship to Sunday school.

As Covid turned our lives upside down, we at the church turned over the soil to a new building. This rebuild was largely motivated by a desire to expand church ministry in a more welcoming way. This coincided with the City of Vancouver Cambie Corridor Plan Phase 1 (2010) & 2 (2011) with the development of the Canada Line. The church demolition began in January 2021 and construction was completed this spring 2023. The 40,000 square feet of the project have been divided between housing (20 rental units), community needs (such as daycares) and ministry spaces.

In this new building, we have the opportunity to reassess the needs of our congregation and of the community—which is changing dramatically with the massive development at Oakridge Centre Mall, just one block north of the church on Cambie Street. We sit in between two SkyTrain stations in the middle of the massive housing development, which is projected to have 25,000 more people by 2041. This is an ideal opportunity for our outreach as we lean strongly into the ideal of praising God, praying and working to meet the pastoral needs of our community.

This desire to meet the community's needs has us leading

two Sunday worship services, one in English at 9:30 a.m., and one in Cantonese service at 11:15 a.m. Also, we have welcomed Oakridge Christian Ministry—a mission of the Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church that is looking specifically at how to support the Oakridge community—with the specific intention of connecting with our neighbours. To us, this is following Jesus' call for the two most important commandments: to worship God and love our neighbours as ourselves.

On the weekend of Thanksgiving, our 128th Anniversary, the Moderator of the Presbytery of Westminster, the Rev. Dr. Ross Lockhart, knocked on the door of our new sanctuary three times and called out: “Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord.” This praise was filled with songs of worship ringing through our church halls. We all came together singing the processional song “Great is Thy Faithfulness” to remind ourselves that God is our remarkable and faithful constant in our journey, and “The Church's One Foundation” to remind ourselves that our cornerstone of life is Christ, which is the true celebration.

As we counted our many blessings, the presbytery, congregation and Pastor Morgan Wong re-dedicated and re-committed ourselves to being a home with a

purpose:

For the worship of God in prayer and praise;

For the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and exalted;

For the celebration of new life in baptism;

For the gift of grace received at the Table of our Lord;

For comfort to all who mourn;

For strength to all who are tempted;

For light to all who seek the way;

For the hallowing of marriage and family life;

For the teaching and guiding of the young;

For the perfecting of the saints;

For the sharing of Christ with our neighbours;

For the increase of justice in our public life;

For the healing of the nations;

The new building reminds us of God working in unexpected ways. As part of our commitment to gratefully acknowledge the continuum of giving and God's provisions that will carry us forward and into the future, we partnered with the artist Jeanette Lee to give a glimpse into the story of how God had begun, and has continued, to transform us and our church through the ages of time, space and people. To this end, we made a “church street,” where we can walk through black-and-white historical photographs, modern images, 2D and 3D arti-

facts, text, and other materials as we express the joy of our unique relationship with God. This is only Phase 1 of an ongoing project with plans in the next phase to continue to develop more historical depth through panel QR codes on the visuals in a digital modern format for future use. We wish to celebrate our blessings by the creation of an archive of our history through a potentially broader community outreach.

As we walk through this church street of our lives and through the generations of people who helped build our church, we pay homage not only to those who have served but also to our donors who helped us develop and support our answer to Christ's call. Our call also includes adopting overseas missions and sending out our members to meet the call beyond our walls in continuation of the great commission.

This year, we want to share our joy and encouragement with our siblings in Christ. God is a remarkable constant in our lives and has shown us growth and blessing through our love of our neighbours in good times and challenging times. When you hear of us, we want to encourage you not to think only of our building but to think of what God is building in all of our churches. God is building in us all a chance to love, live and praise God, our one and true Remarkable Constant.



A Remarkable Constant: an art installation created and photographed by artist Jeanette Lee of the Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church's history.



The Presbytery of Westminster, elders and board of managers of the Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church came together to dedicate the church to Christ's work. PHOTO CREDIT: YING WAI YEONG

Announcing LiFT 2024

July 3–7, 2024, Brock University, St. Catharines

Presbyterian youth, young people and church leaders are invited to gather for LiFT 2024 (Living in Faith Together) from July 3 to 7, 2024, at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ont., under the banner of “Audacious Hope.”

Why LiFT? Why not CY?

Canada Youth (CY) was a gift given to the church; a gift that reflected and responded to the needs of the youth, young adults and leadership at the time. Those events were designed and hosted to be reflective of the ministry contexts within the denomination.

Moving forward, those same principles hold true for LiFT 2024.

The world has changed, and our youth, young adults and leaders also have changed. Our ministry expression should reflect that reality. CY events have always evolved. Over time, the event has transformed, providing additional support and education opportunities for congregational leaders alongside youth leaders.

The creation of LiFT 2024 is a renewed effort to keep the vitality and launch a fresh expression that addresses the church’s

needs at a transformational time.

It has been too long since we were gathered as a community! LiFT 2024 will be a place where Hope will Audaciously come alive.

LiFT 2024 will be a place where we discover the wonders and challenges of our time.

LiFT 2024 will be a place where we connect, and Live in Faith Together.

Come and join us on a wondrous journey as we discover new perspectives and new friends, fresh vision, broader insights and



a great week of fun and Audacious Hope!

LiFT 2024 will offer the three tracks for all ages:

Youth Track: offers activities designed for those who have graduated Grade 9 and up to celebrate their unique place in our church and experience a landmark event in their faith journey.

Discipleship Track: offers an opportunity for young adults (ages 19–25) to think deeply about their gifts, to be empow-

ered to be faithful servants and leaders.

Leadership Track: is specially designed to equip congregational leaders of any kind, and includes a separate stream devoted to youth ministry leadership. If you are clergy, lay, paid, volunteer, full-time, contract or part-time leadership, the Leadership Track will have something for you. It will run the entire length of LiFT 2024.

A new feature of the 2024 gathering, LiFT 2024 will run parallel with Rendez-vous, which is hosted by the United Church of Canada. This partnership will allow sharing of resources, leadership and costs.

LiFT 2024 registration will begin March 1, 2024. The registration fee for the event is \$625. Details are unfolding, so please visit presbyterian.ca/lift-2024.

Missional Leadership and Evangelism

By St. Andrew's Hall

Every summer, the Centre for Missional Leadership (CML) at St. Andrew's Hall in Vancouver, B.C., hosts the Guder Scholar program. Guder Scholars are selected from applications made by leaders in their first 15 years of ordained ministry. The residential event at St. Andrew's Hall is named in honour of the Rev. Dr. Darrell Guder, who serves as the Senior Fellow in Residence for CML.

This year, the theme was “Missional Leadership and Evangelism,” and we were pleased to welcome Dr. Priscilla Pope-Levison and Dr. Jack Levison as our theme speakers from Perkins School of Theology. Applications for the 2024 Guder Scholars program will open in December for any who are interested in applying or recommending the program to others. Visit standrews.edu.



Dr. Priscilla Pope-Levison presenting at the “Missional Leadership and Evangelism” event.

The Rev. Amanda Henderson-Bolton of the Kirk of St. James in Prince Edward Island shared her reflections on the experience of being a 2023 Guder Scholar.

“Since the pandemic our church has been having a lot of conversations around what the future of our ministry could look like. I know that has been a challenging question for a lot of churches over the past few

years. When I saw the notice for the Guder Scholar program and this year’s topic ‘The Missional Church’ I applied on a whim, and it has become one of the best learning experiences I have had since becoming a minister.

“I discovered a program that is dealing with the challenges of ministry in our present context, that was both challenging and encouraging. I deeply appreciated the lectures and discussions with Priscilla Pope-Levison, based on her book *Models of Evangelism*. It was a reminder of the incredible story we share as Christians and a faith community. It challenged us to think beyond what we do, to what can be possible. It was wonderful to sit with other ministers from across the country and from different ministry contexts and talk about what our churches are doing and what we hope for. The discussions with staff from St.

Andrew's Hall, which took place as on-site visits and with the wider community, were both helpful and encouraging. I am incredibly thankful for the entire experience.

“A couple of the things that have stuck with me since returning home are about how we tell our story as a faith community, because it affects how we do ministry outside our walls. The other thing was the reminder that countless small steps can lead to positive change and growth. As one person said, ‘Culture shifts start with small acts of love and stories of hope.’

“Sometimes we are uncertain about how to minister in today’s world. We know that our faith shapes everything that we do and affects how we live in the world, yet it can be difficult to convey. I left feeling encouraged that even when things feel difficult or we are uncertain of the direction that we

should go, we are all capable of making those small steps and decisions that make a difference in our lives as a church, and for the community around us. It doesn’t take an earth-shattering vision or big budget for us to find ways to share love and hope in meaningful ways.”

For more information on the Guder Scholars program, please contact the Rev. Albert Chu, Director of CML at achu@standrews.edu.



Group discussion, with the Rev. Amanda Henderson-Bolton in centre.

The Atlantic Synod's 149th Annual Meeting

By John Barrett,
Atlantic Synod Clerk Elect

The 149th annual meeting of the Synod of the Atlantic Provinces took place from Oct. 16 through 18 at First Presbyterian Church in New Glasgow, N.S. During the first sederunt, Marlene Phillips of Harvey, N.B., was elected and installed as Moderator for the coming year. Outgoing Moderator, the Rev. Brad Blaikie, conducted worship that evening and led the new Moderator through the vows

of office.

As has been the case for the past few years, Synod has moved from primarily a business-based event to one of learning and workshops. This year the keynote speaker on Oct. 17–18 was the Rev. Dr. Patricia Dutcher-Walls, the recently retired Dean and Professor of Hebrew Studies at the Vancouver School of Theology. Other workshop presenters included the Rev. Dr. Jean Morris, Moderator of the 131st General Assembly of The Presbyterian

Church in Canada, the Rev. Tim Purvis, Associate Secretary of Ministry & Church Vocations for the PCC, the Rev. John Borthwick, recently appointed Director of Lifelong Learning at Knox College, and Helena Human, Synod's Camping & Youth Consultant. Workshop topics ranged from Enabling Lay Ministry to Communications & Intergenerational Ministry. The keynote speaker for next year's Synod was approved and the invitation has been accepted by the Rev. Dr. Ernest van

Eck, Principal of Knox College in Toronto.

The 2023 financial statements were reviewed and those in attendance were reminded that final Synod payments are now due. The 2024 budget was approved along with the location for the 150th annual meeting of Synod, which will take place at St. James Presbyterian Church in Truro, N.S., from Oct. 21 through 23, 2024. Between annual meetings, the business of Synod is managed and conducted by Synod Council,

who meet regularly to discuss any issues that come before the court and to oversee the organization of the 2024 annual meeting.

Toward the end of the meeting, expressions of gratitude were shared with the Rev. Jeff Murray as he now retires from the position of Synod Clerk following six years of dedicated service. Other thanks were expressed to the congregation and staff of First Presbyterian Church for their gracious efforts in hosting the 149th annual meeting.

Love One Another: A Story of a Mission Trip

By Keith Randall, Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul in Montreal, Que.

Every other year for the past 20 years, representatives from the Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry (SNCM) visit the good people at the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul (A&P) in Montreal. On the alternate years, a few people from Montreal venture into the expanse of Saskatchewan to learn more about the ongoing work of the SNCM (aka “the mission”). The friendships formed through these decades of exchanges have grounded this ministry as an important part of the identity and work of the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul. For example, once a

month, a group of Montreal knitters gather to create toques, mittens and scarves to send to Saskatoon for the mission’s people.

But this year, the A&P group that headed out to Saskatchewan was hoping for something more—an experience more than simply an education. Rather than the usual tour and a chance to chat with the people at the mission, we coordinated with Executive Director Dylon Nippi to help clean the mission basement, apply a fresh coat of paint to the walls and install soundproofing.

We also planned to take the opportunity to visit Wanuskewin Heritage Park, a proposed UNESCO world heritage site that for more than 6,000 years has been

a sacred space of the Indigenous people. However, after a few days, when the work fell behind, the group considered abandoning the visit. But Executive Director Dylon Nippi would have none of it and demanded that we stop to rest and visit this important place—a place of God’s beauty, a place where heaven and earth draw near. He was quite explicit that we were not to hurry, to take our time. And so we did. Labour stopped and we soon found ourselves surrounded by God’s natural world, so very far from the cityscape of Montreal.

The Rev. Susan Brasier reflected: “I felt God’s presence in the wind singing through the prairie lands. The autumn sunlight glittered on the golden tree leaves as they danced in the breeze. The most remarkable thing was the sound of the leaves. It sounded like clapping. It was something I had never experienced before. The verse from Isaiah 55: 12 flooded my thoughts: ‘For you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.’”

A jovial dinner with the ministry board, including retired director the Rev. Stewart Folster, followed



The Rev. Susan Brasier, Keith Randall, Margarita Medina-Ibanez, SNCM worker Irene Lee and Executive Director Dylon Nippi.



Celebrating a job well done: Edna Nippi, Margarita Medina-Ibanez, the Rev. Susan Brasier, Keith Randall.



Friends of the SNCM Board after dinner. Top row (left to right): the Rev. Stewart Folster, Margarita Medina-Ibanez. Second row: Al Ireland, the Rev. Susan Brasier. Bottom row: Keith Randall, Terry Folster, Patti Polowick, Sharon Nixon.

and the next morning we were so far behind in our renovations that it seemed we would leave behind chaos and half-painted walls. But then a wonderful and unexpected thing happened. People from the community came to the mission and helped. The tiny work crew multiplied like bread and fish in the hands of Christ. When we departed that afternoon to head back to another life in Montreal, the work was finished.

Although we travellers hoped to provide a tangible blessing to the mission, we received a far more significant gift. The time away afforded us an opportunity to deepen friendships, discuss theology, pray together, experience new things that bond people



The South Saskatchewan River flows through Wanuskewin Heritage Park.

in a meaningful way and develop discipleship. Such mission trips are not unlike Jesus sending out the 72 (Luke 10:1–23). The real blessing is creating space away from the demands of day-to-day lives for meaningful life-affirming experiences—and perhaps a glimpse of God.

A Ministry of Health and Healing

By Laura Van Loon, RN, Pastoral Care Nurse, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian in Saskatoon, Sask., President, Canadian Association of Parish Nursing Ministry

Helping people navigate the health-care system as a parish nurse is valued by those whom we serve. A parish nurse approaches health care as a ministry of faith, emphasizing the wholeness of mind, body and spirit. This ministry grows out of the belief that all faith communities are places of health and healing and have a role in promoting these beliefs.

As a practicing Registered Nurse (RN) since 1969, and a parish nurse since 2011, I have seen,

experienced and worked in health-care systems in several provinces and countries. My current position as a funded Pastoral Care Nurse at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Saskatoon, Sask., is a congregationally driven practice and has a volunteer who oversees the position. Our Mission Statement guides us in navigating this health ministry: “St. Andrew’s Pastoral Care Committee is committed to sharing the love of God by accompanying individuals on their journey of faith, to wholeness in mind, body and spirit, by ministering through prayer service, education and support.”

Family members, substitute caregivers, church friends and

health-care personnel all contribute their skills, time and talents for optimizing the care of each person we serve. What a parish nurse can bring is more meaningful quality of life rather than just adding to the quantity of life.

In Canada, a parish nurse must be a certified Registered Nurse with specialized knowledge who is called to ministry and affirmed by a faith community to promote health, healing and wholeness. Not only have we the essential information of working in the health-care system(s) in our province and/or territory, but we promote, advocate and work for the health care that a person needs at any specific time. Many people need

someone to help them through the health-care system, and parish nurses are able to carry this out.

From the first diagnosis of illness to short- and long-term planning, parish nurses can bring information and assistance. Navigating the medical vocabulary, understanding tests and procedures, helping to identify the next level of care needed and acquiring resources are some of the many ways that we bring comfort and alleviate stress for the person we serve and their families. Parish nurses can help ease the spiritual distress that someone may suffer when illness affects them.

To serve and to care as a parish nurse is all-inclusive, as we



Laura Van Loon.

are committed to accompanying each person in mind, body and spirit throughout their health-care journey.



The Knox Frox sewing group at Knox Presbyterian Church in Bobcaygeon, Ont., has been busy sewing quilts among other things for charity. The group has made baby bibs, adult bibs and several quilts, all ready to be distributed to the various local shelters and pregnancy centre. Pictured (above) are Kathleen Morningstar and Margaret Strand. Pictured (top left) are Ellen Roberts, Janet McMann, Myra Coene and Margaret Strand (holding a baby bib). On the banister are some of several totes requested by the local Children's Aid. PHOTO CREDIT KATHLEEN MORNINGSTAR



Two special events were recently held at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Wingham, Ont. The congregation held a birthday drive-by in honour of Jo English's 104th birthday. Jo, pictured in the centre photo, on right, was congratulated by her long-time friend, Betty Richardson, her junior of six years. As well, the Sundae Sunday was held on the church's front lawn on a beautiful summer day. A few passersby also joined the congregation in sharing ice cream, toppings and fellowship.



This is a special year for Knox Presbyterian Church in Bracebridge, Ont., as the congregation celebrates 10 years in the Taylor Road location; however, Knox is much older than that, dating back to 1875. The congregation moved from its home on McMurray Street, where they had been since 1931, to Taylor Road in July 2013. This new building is fully accessible and versatile, making it a desirable location for many community groups and organizations. Over the past 10 years, the congregation has updated and renovated the building, most recently upgrading audio and video capabilities to provide services online. May there be many more years of meaningful ministry within the community and beyond. In this photo, the Rev. Dr. Heather Malnick and the Knox congregation celebrate—with cake, of course!



St. James Presbyterian Church, North Yarmouth, in Central Elgin, Ont., is rediscovering their

“Why.” For example, two yard sales were held in 2023. They were more than just fundraisers, they were ways to connect and create fellowship with neighbours, provide leadership opportunities for younger congregation members, and provide the financial capacity to meet needs in the community. As well, the congregation took part in a community information day at the Belmont arena, which was an opportunity for organizations, vendors and churches to present themselves to the community.



The congregations of Rockway and First Presbyterian Churches, North Pelham, Ont., started a Walking Wellness and Fellowship Group. Each week, people meet at the Canada Summer Games Park at Brock University in St. Catharines for a wellness walk. Following the walk, fellowship is enjoyed over coffee and conversation. This event has been well received and provides an opportunity for people to come together for some casual exercise.



The Mission and Outreach Committee of Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont., hosted a pancake breakfast on Saturday, April 22, 2023, as a fundraiser to support the Odeiwin (Path of the Heart) Organization, serving Indigenous people in the Greater Toronto Area, which is run by Jay Shea (James Bay Cree and founder of Odeiwin) and Sarah Schuster, both pictured, below right. The organization has skills development programs, education and employment partnership programs, Indigenous-led mentorship, coaching, leadership training and cultural workplace training. Jay is also involved in the Circle of Friendship – Richmond Hill. In May, they undertook an exciting new venture and planted an Indigenous Medicine Garden at the Richmond Hill Public Library. Their vision is that it will become a community hub and teaching space with the harvest to be used in future programming and donated back to the community. The Mission & Outreach Committee was pleased to be part of this initiative and raised \$629.17 to help the Odeiwin Organization move forward with their medicine garden.



On Sept. 10, the congregation at Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church (RHPC) took part in the City of Richmond Hill’s “Heritage Summit,” which was part of the city’s 150th anniversary celebrations. RHPC was pleased to participate and be part of this milestone. There were many displays (approx. 40+) that generated a lot of interest and a steady stream of people through the hallways of the theatre throughout the afternoon, and a couple hundred people in the theatre itself for the evening portion. The event was accomplished through a partnership between the city and the Historical Society, with committee involvement that included many from the community churches.





On Sept. 10, 2023, Treasurer Maureen Boyd was thanked (and surprised!) for her 59 years of service at Point Edward Presbyterian Church in Point Edward, Ont. She's pictured here between the Rev. Dick Eric van Dorsten and Janice Robson.



The summer kicked off with a solemn and joyful celebration—the installation worship of new elders at Communauté Chrétienne Siloé Canada, a Presbyterian congregation in Montreal, Que. May 28, 2023, will be remembered as the day the community welcomed its new spiritual leaders with gratitude. Members participated in an emotionally charged worship, marked by fervent prayers and moments of reflection on the crucial role of elders in guiding the community.



St. John's Presbyterian Church in Medicine Hat, Alta., spent 2023 celebrating their 140th year of Christian witness in Medicine Hat. The culmination of the celebrations was a service of thanksgiving (and communion) on October 1, led by the Rev. Dr. Jean Morris, followed by lunch in Taylor Hall. Other events throughout the year included an historic "High Tea." The year began with a congregational supper and singalong back in February.



On Sunday, Oct. 29, at St. Giles Presbyterian Church in North Sydney, N.S., Daniel Garrepalli spoke about receiving a shoebox from Operation Christmas Child in 2008, in his home nation of India. This year, Daniel is packing a shoebox along with members from St. Giles and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Sydney Mines. Pictured in the photo with Daniel is Janice Stagg Harris, congregational coordinator for Operation Christmas Child, and the minister, the Rev. Ritchie Robinson.



On Sept. 29, 2023, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Lethbridge, Alta., held a Ceilidh event in collaboration with Lethbridge Scottish Country Dance Club.



The Session and congregation of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Saskatoon, Sask., held a special Welcome Back BBQ, while also celebrating the ministry of the Rev. Roberto DeSandoli, who was inducted as minister five years ago, and his wife, Heather. The event was held in conjunction with the Outreach and Christian Education committees and included a bouncy castle, which the Rev. Roberto had an opportunity to enjoy. Pictured (above left) are Heather and the Rev. Roberto DeSandoli receiving a "Bunny Hug" as a gift, and Jan Rodda, clerk. The cake was created by Sonya Wood, a member of St. Andrew's.



On Sunday, Sept. 20, 2023, the Rev. Jim MacDonald was ordained and inducted into St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Markham, Ont. As the presiding moderator of the Presbytery of Oak Ridges, the Rev. Joan Masterton led the worship and the overall ordination/induction service. The sermon was delivered by the Rev. Robert Hayashi and the Charge was given by the Rev. Robert Royal. There were many other participants taking part in this special service. PHOTO CREDIT: CHRISTINE SAMUEL



St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Stratford, Ont., recognized the Canadian citizenship of Alex, Lucy and Jin Lee. They are pictured here holding wooden replicas of the Canadian maple leaf crafted by church elder Cam Fraser (second to left). The Rev. Mark Wolfe is pictured on the far right.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Stratford, Ont., marked the retirement of Earl Clark, who has been our much-loved, award-winning church organist and Music Director for more than 63 years. Gord Allgeier, our new organist and Music Director at St. Andrew's, is pictured here (above right) with the Rev. Mark Wolfe and three elders: David MacKenzie, Ivan Buchan and Judy Buchan.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in New Glasgow, N.S., celebrated their 204th anniversary on October 22. Guest minister the Rev. Barb Fotheringham and St. Andrew's minister the Rev. Dr. Joon Ki Kim are pictured cutting the anniversary cake.



Pictured here are the bakers for the Fall Fair that took place at Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont.



St. David's Presbyterian Church – Toney River, N.S., recently held Vacation Bible School under the leadership of Karri Ann Noel and Becky Hollis. Seventeen children attended and 14 teens served as helpers. It was an amazing time and the congregation was so pleased that many of the “older” youth came back to help out. What a testament to the wonderful memories they made when they were the “younger” set!



Members of the Loyal Orange Association in Canada met in Saskatoon, Sask., to open Diefenbaker Memorial Loyal Orange Lodge #1748. The Rev. Roberto DeSandoli, Minister of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Saskatoon, invited the group to participate in the Sunday morning service on July 9, 2023.



The congregation of Knox Presbyterian Church in Red Deer, Alta., celebrated their 125th anniversary on Aug. 6, 2023. Pictured are Colin Murray and Barb Cormack with a special anniversary cake.

The church hall at First Presbyterian Church in Pictou, N.S., was all decked out in tartan (Nova Scotia and Hector tartans), chinaware and heather, for the Scottish Tea to commemorate the 250th Anniversary of the landing of the Ship Hector in Pictou, bringing Scottish settlers to “the birthplace of New Scotland.” Although Hurricane Lee upset many of the planned events, a good cup of tea out of the wind and rain was greatly appreciated, including by descendants of the original passengers of the Ship Hector, who came to Pictou to take part in the festivities.





Forbes Presbyterian Church in Grande Prairie, Alta., is excited to announce the arrival of the Rev. Elkanah Shekari along with his wife, Leah, and their three children: Elyon, Aaron and Elise. The Search Committee had been active for the past 15 months searching for a new minister and are proud to introduce the Rev. Shekari to the congregation and community. The Forbes congregation welcomes the opportunity to help the family in the transition to Alberta and to work and worship together. May the ministry at Forbes be blessed.



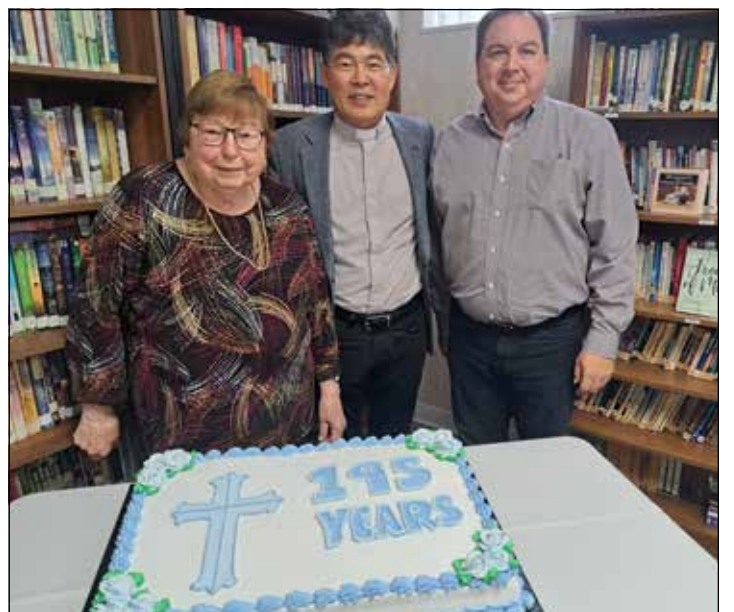
Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., hosted children and youth from the community for a week of Compassion Camp, July 3–7, 2023. Through an overarching theme of compassion, the kids engaged with stories, played games, created art and sang songs all week long, with help from some great counsellors!



The “Wanna Dance?” program continues at West Vancouver Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, B.C., introducing dances from different cultures once a month on Saturday afternoons. Pictured here are participants in the Western Line Dance on Sept. 9, 2023. The program invites neighbours to join in.



St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Orillia, Ont., celebrated their 66th anniversary on Sunday, October 15, 2023. Following the service everyone celebrated in true Presbyterian fashion—with cake!



On Oct. 22, 2023, First Presbyterian Church, North Pelham, Ont., celebrated its 195th anniversary. Pictured (left to right) are Donna Bachur, the Rev. Jacob Lee and Kent Reynolds.



These photos are from the Backyard Mission 2023 project at First Presbyterian Church in Chatham, Ont. The Backyard Mission is a joint project of First Presbyterian Church and First Christian Reformed Church, also in Chatham. Volunteers work together over the course of two days to make repairs to the exterior of a house of a deserving homeowner in the city. The volunteers also do landscaping work, as well as build fences or anything the homeowner needs. The materials are donated and the work done at no cost to the homeowner. The project was on hold for three years due to the Covid pandemic, but resumed this year on August 11–12. The weekend concluded with a joint service of both congregations.



When the Rev. John Borthwick completed his service as Interim Moderator at Knox Presbyterian Church, Crieff, in Puslinch, Ont., he was gifted a handmade stole. This one-of-a-kind creation was designed and sewn by church member Gillian Murphy (far right). John and Gillian are pictured here with Session members Debbie, Rochelle, Judy and Linda. John has taken up a new position at Knox College in Toronto as Director of Lifelong Learning.



The Canadian Society of Presbyterian History (CSPH) was founded in 1975 and is dedicated to the study of Presbyterian and Reformed history. In September, the annual conference was held as a hybrid event, in-person at Knox College in Toronto and online. Pictured (top right) is Zander Dunn delivering his presentation, and the Rev. Dr. Stuart Macdonald, CSPH President.



Pictured are members of the First Presbyterian Church Soup Group, in Pictou, N.S. The group was very proud to be recognized and thanked by the Honourable Karla MacFarlane, MLA Pictou West, and by the Nova Scotia House of Assembly in April of this year. An excerpt from the Hansard record reads: “Mr. Speaker, First Presbyterian Church in Pictou has been serving weekly hot lunches at no cost for close to 20 years. The members recognized a community need and church volunteers stepped up to the task. Today, there is a core group consisting of Chris MacDonald, Janette Davidson, Cathy LeBlanc, David Munroe and Cindy Pettipas, who ensure there is a hot lunch served in the church hall every Thursday from November to April. The meal is free of charge, the food is delicious and companionship is priceless... Mr. Speaker, I ask the members present to join me in thanking these volunteers. Their dedication to their church and greater community is to be commended.”



Coquitlam Presbyterian Church in Coquitlam, B.C., held a wonderful Welcome Back Corn Roast for church members and friends in the community on September 10, 2023, with fresh Chilliwack corn, square dancing, hot dogs and games for all ages. Pictured here is Interim Moderator the Rev. Dr. Ross Lockhart serving as “Corn Captain,” along with Meghan Adrian (children’s minister), Laura Lockhart and Lori Berry (Worship Director).



Caledonia Presbyterian Church in Caledonia, Ont., held an evening of fun and music called Memories of Motown and More. Recruiting the singing voices of many choir members, the community enjoyed an evening sharing over 20 songs as they travelled down memory lane with music. Shown here is pastor Janice Doyle with several choir members as they gave a rousing rendition of “I Will Follow Him” from the movie *Sister Act*. Plans are already in the works to share another evening of music and memories.

St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church, Caintown, in Mallorytown, Ont., celebrated its 147th anniversary with a concert at the church on September 30. Entitled “Caintown Sings!” the concert featured the Caintown Choir and Chorus, the bluegrass group “Covey Country Connection” and a hymn sing. Approximately 60 people from the congregation and community attended, and gathered for a reception following the concert. A freewill offering was taken in support of the Brockville and Area Food Bank.



The semi-annual Textile Recycling Drive at Caledonia Presbyterian Church in Caledonia, Ont., was held Oct. 14, 2023, and once again the community responded with great enthusiasm and generosity. Shown here is a sampling as they prepared to load the truck after a successful venture. Over a metric ton was diverted from local landfills!



Knox Presbyterian Church in Victoria, B.C., has hosted a number of Knox Cafés reminiscent of the coffeehouses of the 1960s. These evenings of fellowship offer music provided by the Café Trio, along with tasty treats, and of course coffee and tea. They bring together members of the local Presbyterian congregations as well their friends, families and neighbours. Each evening has a theme, like “Songs of Peace, Love and Protest,” “Songs of Love and Regret” for Valentine’s Day, and “Songs of the Dead—a musical” to explore the Christian season of Allhallowtide, which is the root of Halloween. Proceeds from these evenings support the humanitarian work of PWS&D.



Following worship on Sept. 24, 2023, Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church (RHPC) in Richmond Hill, Ont., hosted a thank-you luncheon for Assessor Elders David Banfield, Dennis Mooney and their wives Jennifer Banfield and Bonnie Mooney. David and Dennis had been RHPC Assessor Elders for 6.5 years. Their term came to a close at the end of September. The Session is very blessed to have benefited from their expertise, wisdom and dedication. May God be with them. Pictured cutting the cake are, left to right, Bonnie, Dennis, David and Jennifer. They are also pictured (above left) with the Session.



St. James Presbyterian Church in Stouffville, Ont., invited the community to safely view the partial annular eclipse on Oct. 14, 2023. The Rev. Joan Masterton (right) and Charlene Mason took a look using solar glasses provided by the church.



Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., recognized Orange Shirt Sunday on September 24 by gatherings together in-person and online.



On a rainy Saturday, October 14, the Fall rally for the Atlantic Mission Society, Pictou County, was held at St. David's Presbyterian Church – Toney River, N.S. Groups attended from Pictou Landing, Scotsburn, Durham, River John, Hopewell, New Glasgow and Toney River.



The Rev. Henry Hildebrandt and the Rev. Laura Hargrove, minister of First Presbyterian Church in Brandon, Man., conduct church services on the second Sunday of every month, at CANKAGA OTINA TIPI WAKAN (Birdtail First Nation Mission). On Sunday Sept. 10, 2023, they brought 30 school kits for the Sunday school children. The Mission & Outreach Committee put the kits together with the support of the congregation.



On June 28, 2023, St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Orillia, Ont., held a wonderful Strawberry Lunch and Silent Auction. The proceeds of the Silent Auction went to the Sharing Place, Orillia.



On Oct. 14, 2023, the Presbytery of Seaway Glengarry held a full-day Lay Worship Leaders workshop. The workshop, presented by the Rev. Dr. Sarah Travis from Knox College in Toronto, was designed to assist laypersons in preparing and leading services in their congregations. Over 40 attendees from four presbyteries (Seaway-Glengarry, Ottawa, Lanark & Renfrew, and Kingston) learned more about structuring worship around themes, different styles of worship, choosing scriptures and music, and writing prayers and liturgies. It was clear from the questions, table discussions, fellowship and feedback, that this is a topic of great interest to many in the church seeking to develop their leadership skills and enhance worship services in their home congregations. Many thanks to the Rev. Dr. Travis for her informative presentation and to St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Kemptville for their hospitality!



The 10th year anniversary celebration of ARISE Ministry took place on Oct. 20, 2023, at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont. ARISE is an organization that empowers individuals involved in the sex trade to reclaim their lives. The event was a fundraiser with a silent auction.



More than 200 musicians and vocalists from six Stouffville schools performed for a standing-room-only crowd during the St. James Presbyterian Church 28th Student Music Scholarship Concert at Stouffville District Secondary School on Oct. 19, 2023. The event, which was last held in 2019, has raised more than \$143,000 for local school music programs. Six schools took part this year, and audience members donated generously to the Little Free Pantry at St. James. Event founder and chair Jim Thomas, 94, (pictured in the red vest directing guests) thanked fellow committee members Pat Welch and George Smart and the many volunteers from the congregation. The Rev. Joan Masterton presented the \$1,000 scholarship to student Hannah Musselman.



On Sept. 17, 2023, Point Edward Presbyterian Church in Point Edward, Ont., held a special hot dog and corn roast event. Pictured here are the cooks.



The summer reached its zenith with an explosion of music and joy during the concert of the youth choir at Communauté Chrétienne Siloé Canada, in downtown Montreal on Aug. 26, 2023. The harmonious voices of the young singers filled the air with praises and inspiring melodies. This concert was more than a musical performance; it was a testament to the creativity and passion of Siloé's young members, showing that faith can be expressed dynamically.



Bells were ringing at Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church (VAPC) in Calgary, Alta. The church was the host site for a hand bell discovery conference by the Alberta Guild of English Hand Bell Ringers (ALGEHR) from October 13–14. The guild holds a conference every four years and 2023 marked their 40th anniversary. For two days, VAPC was the location for workshops, demonstrations and learning opportunities led by some of the best and most innovative ringers in western Canada. Participants of all ages attended from across the province, demonstrating and performing in styles that ranged from traditional to contemporary. The conference received coverage on Calgary's Global-TV and ended with a well-attended Saturday night concert by the combined bell ringers.



A new fellowship and crafts group started in October 2023 at Point Edward Presbyterian Church in Point Edward, Ont. It was an initiative of the Rev. Dick Eric van Dorsten. He showed participants how to repair a wooden picture frame, while others brought their knitting and quilts, and some brought rocks to paint. The group is pictured here at one of their Thursday meetings.



The Wednesday morning coffee group at Iona Presbyterian Church in Dartmouth, N.S., meets from 9:30 to 11:30. The group works on projects and enjoys a cup of tea or coffee. Wool donated to the church is used to make blankets of many colours for those in need of a warm hug. Each member has a special talent in making these lovely blankets together. Pictured are Irene Rose, Debbie Mason-Bourque, Christine Burden-Arseneault, Dorothy Graham, Ellie Mellville and Peggy Mason.



On Nov. 5, the congregation of Zion Presbyterian Church in Charlottetown, P.E.I., paid tribute to John Barrett (right) for his many years of service to the church. A cake large enough to feed the congregation was enjoyed following the morning service, which was conducted by the Rev. Will Henbest, shown here holding his daughter Alice. John served as Deputy Clerk of Session to Clerk Dorothy Taylor for two years prior to serving for 15 and a half years as Clerk of Session. The good news is he is continuing to serve as a Zion church elder. And just recently, he has assumed a new role with the Presbyterian Church as Clerk of the Synod of the Atlantic Provinces.

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PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

Good Health: The Foundation for Life



Over the course of almost 10 years, a PWS&D program in Afghanistan supported health services and training for maternal and child health.



Even before the Towards a World Without AIDS campaign, launched in 2004, PWS&D was working to support people with HIV/AIDS in Malawi.

By Guy Smagge, PWS&D Director

“But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds” (Jeremiah 30:17).

Good health is the foundation to much of life’s enjoyment. When we are healthy, we don’t think about it much, but when we get sick the idea of good health is cherished. PWS&D has named “health” as one of its key development priorities. As such, we work with partners who focus on improving community-based health where it is most needed. The following articles talk about how we make a difference for people affected by leprosy in Nepal and in Malawi with a focus on HIV and AIDS.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed

us where weaknesses exist in our health systems and where injustices lay. Two years into the pandemic, only 8% of people in Malawi had received a COVID vaccine. Alternatively, when I met the Rev. Carlos Emilion Ham from Cuba, he told me that their country had proportionately five times fewer deaths from COVID than Florida—a much wealthier place. Universal access to health services makes a difference.

I was personally appreciative of the incredible attention that my late wife, Barbara, had while she lived with cancer for nine years, as I witnessed the high quality of care provided by experts at the Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto. Everyone everywhere should be able to access such

services when they need them. No one wants to be sick, to have cancer or AIDS or leprosy.

Over the last decades, PWS&D’s partners have helped people to live healthy lives and to access health services, whether in Haiti, Malawi, India, Nepal or Afghanistan. I encourage you to read the section on health in PWS&D’s book *Practical Compassion*, where you will find the background on our community health work going back 70 years when Pauline Brown was first sent to India by The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

We continue to have a strong focus on women’s health. Healthy pregnancies and healthy deliveries are key to a good start in life for all.

As you may know, PWS&D had

a maternal and child health program in Afghanistan that wrapped up just before the Taliban reclaimed power in August 2021. Unfortunately, the clinics that had been built over the course of the program were forced to close, but the training that was given to so many community health workers provided them with knowledge that even the Taliban can’t take away. This is why so much of our partners’ work focuses on training, on the invaluable transmission of knowledge.

But their work begins first with saving lives. By ensuring that trained health workers attend childbirth in Afghanistan, by providing antiretroviral AIDS treatment in Malawi, or by providing therapeutic feeding to young

children in Haiti, lives are saved.

Today, we continue to support the work of hospitals in Malawi, Haiti, India and Nepal, all focused on rural populations who are underserved by the public health system. Our support helps to fill important gaps, so that the poorest populations can access health care and gain important knowledge on how to stay healthy and to prevent the most common diseases.

Only when one is healthy can one go to school and learn, or go to work at an occupation that serves the needs of the whole family. Thank you for your support that helps PWS&D to engage with partners to improve health in the most remote parts of our world.

A Day in the Life of a Champion

By Emma Clarke, PWS&D Communications

Every week, PWS&D Champions engage their congregations in the work of PWS&D.

Sharyl Eaglesham is the Champion at First Presbyterian Church in Winnipeg, Man., working alongside her church’s Mission and Outreach Committee. Since becoming a Champion, she has

seen her congregation respond to global needs with passion and generosity. This year, her congregation advocated for the Canadian government to help bring about changes to policy so that



Sharyl Eaglesham informs us about the work of PWS&D in her role as Champion at First Presbyterian Church, Winnipeg.

essential aid could reach people in need in Afghanistan.

Why did you become a PWS&D Champion?

I was part of the PWS&D committee for six years, during which time I got to know PWS&D more and became really committed to what they were doing. When my time on the committee ended, I wanted to be able to continue in that area, but, like everyone, I struggled with staying connected

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PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

Transforming Lives in Nepal

By Ram Krishna Humagain, Partnership Office for Shining Hospital INF Nepal Banke, with contributions from Mangal Tharu, Leprosy Incharge Shining Hospital INF Banke and Dhan Maya Gurung, Partnership Manager Hospital and Health Services INF Nepal.

Nepal faces a significant number of health challenges, including a persistent issue: leprosy. Amidst these challenges, the International Nepal Fellowship (INF) strives to be a beacon of hope, working tirelessly to transform lives to bring life in all its fullness to Nepal.

INF Nepal started its leprosy-related work in Nepal in 1957 through Green Pastures Hospital in Pokhara. At that time it was estimated that about 1% of the total population of Nepal had leprosy. The situation was not easy back then. Leprosy-affected people had to endure various forms of abuse, discrimination and humiliation. To support patients to live with dignity, INF Nepal provided treatment, rehabilitation, livelihood training for patients, and awareness raising among families, communities

and local leaders.

The partnership between INF and PWS&D matured over the years, as both organizations shared a common goal: improving the lives of Nepal's most vulnerable populations. Recognizing the vital work of INF, PWS&D has been supporting the Shining Hospital INF Banke (SHIB) since 2019, with the objective of eradicating the leprosy burden in Nepal.

A battle against leprosy

Leprosy is a less infectious communicable disease caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium leprae*. It particularly damages the skin and its peripheral nerves. The disease has been linked to a variety of superstitions in society. As a result, people with leprosy were driven out of their homes and villages, taken to secluded dwellings or forests, and abandoned. Although there has been significant progress in this area, leprosy patients continue to experience severe social stigma.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the global elimination of leprosy as a public health problem (defined as



Soni Kusbandiya, a leprosy patient, after treatment. PHOTO CREDIT: INF NEPAL

a prevalence of less than one per 10,000 population) was achieved in 2000, with most nations, including Nepal, achieving elimination by 2010. Despite this, leprosy patients still exist—Nepal reported 2,394 new leprosy cases in 2021.

INF's response with PWS&D's support

PWS&D's partnership with INF has been instrumental in expanding the reach of our health programs. With PWS&D's financial support, INF has been able to scale up its efforts in combating leprosy. The project has extended its outreach to remote and marginalized communities of Banke, Bardiya and other neighbouring districts of Nepal and some bordering parts of India, as well, conducting awareness, early detection and treatment.

The partnership with PWS&D has not only bolstered INF's health initiatives but also enhanced their capacity to address other development challenges in Nepal. This collaboration has enabled INF to implement projects related to disaster, climate change and livelihood support, fostering holistic development in the communities we serve.

The impact: meet Soni Kusbandiya

Soni Kusbandiya, a 20-year-old resident of Gogri, a village in Dang Nepal, exemplifies the transformative power of this partnership. Diagnosed with leprosy at a young age, Soni faced rejection and isolation from her husband and in-laws. Her husband took

away her two kids and left her on her own soon after he learned that she tested positive for leprosy. However, with INF's support, she received the necessary treatment and rehabilitation services.

Soni has been regaining her physical health as well as her confidence. She is now motivated to raise awareness in her family and community.

The International Nepal Fellowship's history and its partnership with PWS&D has created a powerful force for change in Nepal. As we continue our relentless efforts to combat leprosy and uplift marginalized communities, we are reminded that compassion, partnership and dedication can truly transform lives and break barriers.



Green Pastures Hospital in Nepal. PHOTO CREDIT: INF NEPAL

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and finding opportunities to do anything. And I felt a little disheartened about it.

I saw the opportunity to become a Champion on the PWS&D website. I tried it out and found that it was a really good fit for me.

Being a Champion is just perfect for me. It gives me the information I need and helps me stay connected.

Since you became a Champion, how has your community engaged with PWS&D?

We have a very good Mission and Outreach Committee, and they provide opportunities for the congregation to both give locally, and support the international work of PWS&D. I make sure to thank the congregation for their support, sometimes reading letters of gratitude or sharing stories of impact from the PWS&D website.

Recently, I brought the call to write [the Aid for Afghanistan] letter to my congregation's at-

tention. I didn't really think it was going to have much of an effect, but it really did. People were very enthusiastic about doing that, and they were excited to show me the responses they were getting from their MPs.

It makes me realize people in the congregation are anxious to learn more. And maybe I'm the person who's going to bring that to them.

What is the best or most inspiring part about connecting your congregation with the work of PWS&D?

It's surprising to me the work that God can do, even when it feels like I'm not doing much. Sometimes you try too hard. And actually, it's sometimes just the small things you do that make the biggest impact on people.

I also really enjoyed the opportunity to get involved with Manitoba Council for International Cooperation as a representative

from PWS&D. I probably would have declined the invitation before, thinking I had enough on my plate. But instead, I asked myself, "Well, where's God taking me with this?"

Through my involvement I realized that you're not alone. You have a desire to do some outreach work, and you realize there're so many other people out there who support you.

Is there a quote from scripture that keeps you going as a PWS&D Champion?

We're doing a study on the PCC's Living Faith right now, and one of the scriptures we read is Psalm 8. "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"

It reminds me that we've been given a charge to help each oth-

er, and the environment and the world. We'd better take it seriously.

The PWS&D Champions network is made up of volunteer representatives from PCC churches across Canada, who involve their congregations in the work the church is doing to address pov-

erty, promote justice and build a more sustainable future for all.

They encourage their communities to pray, advocate and share the resources God has provided. To learn more, or become a PWS&D Champion, visit WeRespond.ca/be-a-champion.



To kick off International Development Week, Sharyl attended a gathering of Manitoba Council for International Cooperation. PHOTO CREDIT: MCIC

PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

Addressing HIV and AIDS in Malawi

By *Lumbani Mabemane Chirwa,*
EHAP HIV/AIDS Coordinator

The Ekwendeni Hospital AIDS Program (EHAP) has been working with PWS&D for nearly two decades to address HIV and AIDS in Malawi by increasing understanding of issues of prevention, stigma and transmission of HIV. In target communities, EHAP is working to prevent further spread of HIV and provide continuous care to infected and affected people and families.

HIV and AIDS context

The HIV and AIDS epidemic poses a very serious social, health and economic problem in Malawi and continues to spread despite the efforts of the Malawi government. According to a 2019 UNAIDS report, an estimated one million people were living with HIV, while 13,000 people died from

AIDS-related illness, and 38,000 new infections were reported at a national level. HIV prevalence was higher among women (10.5%) than among men (7.1%), demonstrating that women, who are already vulnerable to other social and economic challenges, continue to bear a higher burden of HIV than men. This requires continuous effort to fight and reduce the spread of the disease.

Statistics at Ekwendeni Hospital show that out of 7,214 people tested for HIV in 2022, 104 tested HIV positive, which represents 1.4% of the population against the 8.9% national prevalence rate. The HIV and AIDS prevalence rate has been on a decline since 2007, when the Ekwendeni Hospital catchment area rate was 9.4%.

EHAP response to HIV and AIDS

In response to the ongoing is-

sue of HIV and AIDS, EHAP has implemented several projects in partnership with PWS&D. These projects are aimed at HIV prevention awareness, stigma reduction, and links to care and treatment for HIV infected individuals.

A key strategy to mitigating the impact of the HIV and AIDS pandemic has been the home-based care approach for patients. The approach involves training community volunteers on home-based palliative care (HBC). Once their training is complete, they form support groups within their communities and meet regularly for group therapies.

The approach has been highly successful in managing disease burden at the community level. Community volunteers can care for patients by providing assistance that helps to keep patients clean and prevent bedsores, prevent malaria, and help patients



Lita Mvula has received care and support through her involvement in EHAP's home-based care program for people living with HIV and AIDS.

overcome the effects of HIV/AIDS-related stigma and discrimination. Home-based care also helps patients maintain their medication regimens.

Lita Mvula, who is 50 years old, tested positive for HIV and began antiretroviral (ARV) therapy in 2019. Although Lita started treatment, she still lived in fear of her HIV status being discovered, so she kept herself isolated. Due to fears of discrimination, should people learn she had HIV when she picked up her drugs,

Lita would sometimes default on her treatment, which affected her health adversely. In 2020, she took part in HBC training that EHAP conducted with support from PWS&D. Lita then joined a support group of people living with HIV and AIDS, where she continued to receive counselling from hospital staff and home-based care volunteers. Lita has joined other people living with HIV and AIDS in educating community members to prevent HIV. "I am now healthy and able to do my work at home which I was not able to do," she shares.

The partnership between EHAP and PWS&D has had a great impact in the communities where the hospital works. The home-based care program has helped slow disease progress among people living with AIDS, including chronically ill people who care for orphans and vulnerable children. Community members have been involved in stigma reduction activities; consequently, attitudes toward individuals with HIV have improved and the spirit of love and community care has increased for all, regardless of HIV status.

Journey for Hope: Uniting for Food Security

By *Stephanie Chunoo,*
PWS&D Communications

This year, 11 teams hailing from three provinces took action against food insecurity by raising awareness and funds for critical food security programs through PWS&D's annual Journey for Hope event.

The fundraiser involved various activities, including cycling, running, walking, a soup lunch and



Team Lightning Bolt has happily supported PWS&D for eight years and loves making a difference.

more. Each team tackled their chosen challenge. Dedication and a sense of purpose quickly attracted the support of individuals, congregations and the broader community, encouraging people to open their hearts and turn their passion into a force for change. Journey for Hope raised almost \$30,000—50% over our initial goal!

Victoria Banfield, team captain of Team Lightning Bolt of Markham, Ont., shares, "Team Lightning Bolt was thrilled to be able to participate in J4H again this year. As a team, we have been riding and walking to raise funds for PWS&D since 2016, and we feel blessed to be able to continue to bring attention to important causes affecting those most in need. This year, our friends and family supported us so that we could bring the total we have raised [as a team], in 8 years, to over \$25,000. We really appreciate having the chance to help others in a tangible way. We love supporting PWS&D, knowing how hard they are working to bring about a just and equitable world."



The Sunday school crew of Team Nanaimo Bars from Nanaimo, B.C., pedalled their bikes all around their church parking lot, spreading joy and raising support for PWS&D's food security projects.

Hearts for the Hungry at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Campbell River, B.C., hosted a luncheon as an opportunity for fellowship and

to raise awareness about food insecurity. Team captain Anne Kerr shares, "Members of the congregation volunteered to make soup and a local grocery store donated buns. Display boards were set up with information on different types of help given throughout the world, depending on circumstances." She adds, "Our team webpage had been set up with a goal of \$1,500. As this was our first year hosting this event, we had no idea how well the congregation would respond. Trinity has always been a mission-minded congregation, but it excelled itself this time around. Over \$4,100 was raised."

The need is urgent

Food security is an essential human right, yet a significant portion of the global population is food insecure, without access to high-quality and sufficient nourishment. Food-related humanitarian crises are exacerbated by conflict and extreme climate conditions. In addition, this issue substantially impacts women and girls, who comprise 60 percent of those grappling with hunger

worldwide. When women are deprived of access to proper nutrition, the implications are severe, resulting in elevated maternal and infant mortality rates.

Your participation and support for Journey for Hope enables PWS&D to actively respond to hunger through food security projects in places like Haiti, Guatemala and Malawi. Funds also help provide emergency food assistance in countries that are extremely vulnerable, including Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Somalia, South Sudan and Ethiopia.

Thank you for your unwavering support. We hope you'll join us next year!



Hearts for the Hungry in Campbell River, B.C., raised awareness of the different types of food security.

Pray for Taiwan: Taiwan Ecumenical Forum

In February 2017, the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan invited its partner churches and ecumenical organizations to discern together the signs of the time and to sharpen its missional focus. Forty-five partner churches and ecumenical organizations sent representatives, including the PCC, to take part in the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum. The Rev. Linda Patton-Cowie currently serves as the PCC representative.

On May 22–23, 2023, the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum held a two-day webinar under the theme “Light after Darkness—Becoming a community of solidarity and resilience.” The following is an adapted excerpt from the event’s concept paper.

The past few years have not been easy for Taiwan. The island is faced with invisible challenges of the worldwide pandemic and disinformation, coupled with invisible threats from authoritarian countries like China and Russia in the Indo-Pacific region.

How has the government of the people of Taiwan faced these ever-changing yet persistent challenges? What was the role of the church and Christians in Taiwan amid these events? How can we, as one body in Christ, support each other—the world in solidarity with Taiwan, and Taiwan as a source of hope and encouragement to the world?

The Russian invasion of Ukraine

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine shocked a world that was still recovering from the extended worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, when Russian president Putin announced its “special military operation” against Ukraine. To date, tens of thousands of Ukrainians and Russians have died and millions of citizens have been displaced, marking the incident as Europe’s largest refugee crisis since World War II.

Since the outbreak of the Ukraine-Russian War, scholars and media have been quick to compare the political situations of Taiwan and Ukraine. As Ukraine is faced with relentless invasion from Russia, Taiwan has also been harassed constantly by military intimidation from China. Evident of the CCP’s (Chinese Communist Party) animosity toward Taiwan: almost daily intrusion into Taiwan’s airspace by Chinese military aircraft

or drones. The CCP’s escalation of military threats against Taiwan not only intensifies Taiwanese people’s concerns toward China, but it also destabilizes the Indo-Pacific region, and intimidates all citizens in the area. Furthermore, the CCP threat extends outside the Indo-Pacific area to anyone who stands in solidarity with Taiwan. To the democratic countries around the world that have sent support or diplomatic visits to Taiwan, the Chinese government is swift to react in protests on social media, press conferences, sanctions, and even intensification of military threats in the region. Joseph Wu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tai-

wan, told the US National Public Radio that the “Taiwanese government is taking the war in Ukraine into very serious internal discussion.” In geopolitical common interest, Taiwan plays an outsized role in the Indo-Pacific region toward regional peace and justice. Therefore, if Taiwan is not safe, it is probable that the countries in the Indo-Pacific region will be affected economically and politically.



To build Taiwan’s resilience against the Chinese military threats, the Taiwanese government announced in Dec. 2022 the extension of compulsory military service to one year from four months, starting 2024. Moreover, several organizations from civil society have taken up the responsibility to provide training on civil defence to locals. These actions are inspired from Ukraine, where its ability to hold off much larger Russian forces enables the international community time to render assistance; therefore, the move to further defend Taiwan is

not to intimidate or threaten, but to be prepared and equipped when adversity comes its way. The PCT urges ecumenical partners to engage in conversation about how national defence policies and resilience can be efficient in countering military threats.

In a time of conflict and threats of war, the Taiwanese churches have been prayerful about the escalated military threats in the region and all those living in fear. The church also sends out resources and medical assistance to the war zone, and continues to pray for our siblings in Ukraine who are experiencing pain and suffering, with our faith found in 2

Corinthians 1:3–4, “...the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.”

The invisible warfare of disinformation

Although Taiwan was rather resilient in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020, at the same time Taiwan was facing another underlying battle: continuous attacks of fake news and disinformation. For example, messages were circulating on social media that the Taiwanese government lied about insisting on the COVID-19 virus to be merely a flu. Other examples discredited the government’s measures to contain the pandemic and provoked the public to hoard and stockpile essentials. Disinformation similar to this cultivates a “cognitive warfare” against Taiwan where the invisible weapons

are used to confuse, distract and polarize society. Despite different sources of disinformation, all are with the similar malicious intention to destroy the public’s trust and confidence toward policies implemented by the government and to cause division among the public.

Nonetheless, the Taiwanese government recently founded the Ministry of Digital Affairs, which strives to address disinformation without censorship or takedown, by building the public’s “immunity” to disinformation, and by using tools to fact-check—a joint effort between civil society and government. The Taiwanese



such attention, Taiwan is grateful that the world has not only taken notice of the happenings in Taiwan, but also to stand in solidarity with Taiwan against the threats and attacks targeted at Taiwan. For example, more than 200 politicians, government officials, as well as members of civil societies from more than 70 countries around the world visited Taiwan during the 2022 World Movement for Democracy, and many more visited from the 2022 Regional Religious Freedom Forum for advocacy of human rights, freedom and democracy. Furthermore, diplomats and parliamentary delegations have also shown their support of Taiwan by visiting the country to discuss topics such as combating disinformation, geopolitical security, trade collaborations and pandemic prevention.

As one body in Christ, we as Christians are called by our Lord to be siblings, regardless of nationality, race or background. In this time of trials and difficulties for Taiwan, with both visible and invisible warfare, we as the Taiwanese churches plead with the world to keep Taiwan in your prayers. As Taiwan was the designated country for the World Day of Prayer this year, we sincerely invite fellow Christians and our ecumenical partners to continue to join in prayers for Indo-Pacific peace and regional justice. As our Lord Jesus said, “Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial” (Matthew 26:41). Likewise, with the pandemic and battles still happening in the Indo-Pacific region and in the world, churches in Taiwan will be persistent in our prayers and support for the world. As it is written in the Bible, “Carry each other’s burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). The Taiwanese church believes that we are called to be prayerful and helpful to all our siblings, and trust in our Lord for deliverance of all those who suffer.

The Taiwanese churches have faith that one day, we, as one body in Christ around the world, will rejoice: “Thanks be to God! He gives us victory through Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:57).

church community has also contributed to educating its members about discerning between facts and lies, and to be wise with the information that they receive, for we are reminded in Ephesians 4:25: “Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members of one another.” The challenge of countering disinformation in the digital age requires global cooperation; therefore, the PCT hopes that the Taiwan Ecumenical Forum can serve as a platform for discussion on how policies around the world and our faith can be tools to resist lies and deceptions in disinformation.

The world and churches united as one body in Christ

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by intensification of disinformation and military intimidation from the CCP, Taiwan has received a surge of international attention. With

Movie Review: *Operation Lights Out*

By Dorothy Brown Henderson, Waterloo, Ont., who was present at the film's debut at Balsillie School of International Affairs, University of Waterloo, in May 2023

Operation Lights Out is a must-see movie for your congregation.

In 1967, Canadians were busy celebrating a centennial, but, across the ocean in Africa, Nigeria was engaged in a horrific civil war that would kill two million people, mainly from starvation.

In the world's largest civilian war airlift in human history, The Presbyterian Church in Canada played a pivotal and determined role in saving the lives of over one million people—mainly children and women. It was, in the view of many, our denomination's finest hour. As one missionary, Dr. Elizabeth Edmunds of New Milton, Hampshire, England, comments in the film, "The church was faithful to her calling and had not passed by on the other side."

The roots of this conflict are complex. The country now known as Nigeria became a British colony in 1914 and consisted of 371 ethnic groups, each with its own language, culture and history. In 1960, Nigeria gained independence and became a republic in 1963. From the beginning, ethnic tensions were palpable and violent. When 30,000 Igbo people were killed in northern Nigeria, two million Igbo refugees fled to the eastern part of the country.

The east declared itself the independent Republic of Biafra led by Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu. The response of the government of Nigeria was swift. It would land-lock Biafra and use force to subdue it. Nigeria was at war against itself.

The critical question for Biafra now became, "How do we get food and medicine to the millions who cannot leave and are living in the middle of a war zone?" It was



The Rev. Russell T. Hall, representatives from the Christian Council of Nigeria and the Red Cross with a vehicle that was offered to the Nigerian Red Cross for emergency relief efforts, 1968. PHOTO CREDIT: PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ARCHIVES

a daunting dilemma. The situation became dire. By the time the conflict was over, two million people would die, mainly from starvation.

The advent of television played a significant role in both the Biafran War and the war in Vietnam. For the first time in history, people could see live footage of the horrors of war. Canadians were stirred by heartbreaking images of Black children with stick limbs, distended, swollen bellies and red hair—a condition called kwashiorkor caused by protein deficiency and starvation. Many teenagers weighed less than 35 pounds. An active promotion campaign began in Canada, raising funds for food, medicine and planes to be flown into Biafra.

At first, the religious coalitions who had been working in Nigeria had no planes, so they formed an unusual and clandestine alliance with a gun-runner pilot. Henry (Hank) Warton would begin the dangerous process of flying sup-

plies into Biafra from the island of Sao Tome, 270 miles off the Biafran coast.

As more planes were added, flights took off from Sao Tome at 20-minute intervals, always at night. The Biafran airport had been bombed, so the landing strip was a highway with a code name of "Annabelle." Pilots flew in with no lights, little communication and zero visibility. Supplies were quickly unloaded and whisked to feeding centres. Always, in the background, were Nigerian bombers. It was dangerous, exhilarating and extremely nerve-racking work.

Why did pilots, ground crews and others do this? At first, for some, it was because the pay was so lucrative; but, as time passed, many became so touched by their involvement with the starving children that they began to donate most of their pay to the cause. They knew that each flight fed 20,000 people.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada's involvement in this story began in the early 1960s, before the war, when the Rev. Edward (Ted) Johnson, Secretary for Overseas Missions, became instrumental in sending 33 people—teachers, doctors, architects and ministers, many of whom had young children—to Nigeria. Dr. Marjorie Ross, one of those who went with her family, describes this as a time of idealism, a time when people desired to help make the lives of others better. A newly graduated young Canadian Presbyterian, Ron McGraw from Saskatchewan,

went to Nigeria as a chemistry teacher. There he met another chemistry teacher from Ireland, Hazel Thompson, who became his wife. The McGraws were to play a major role in the war relief efforts, overseeing many of the 1,437 feeding centres in four major provinces and staying on until the last flight out.

Of equal significance is the fact that the Rev. Ted Johnson had, before the war, made 10 trips to Nigeria and knew strategic leaders on both sides of the conflict. He was in a unique position to broker peace and was trusted by both sides. But even that would not prove to be enough.

As the war raged, pilots returning to Sao Tome rescued 4,000 children who were desperately in need of food and medical care. Missionary staff carefully identified each child and kept detailed records of their home villages. On Sunday, August 3, 1969, a Canair plane crashed, killing all four crew aboard. This was a devastating blow, but, with heavy hearts, relief workers carried on. The four crewmen were: Raymond Frederick Levesque (First Officer); Gary Abraham Libbus (Load Master); Donald Everett Merriam (Captain); and Vincent Wakeling (Flight Engineer). The last living pilot of the entire Canairelief crew is Captain Louie Gyarmathy, a member of St. Paul's Caintown Presbyterian Church. Interviewed in the film he declared, "I'd do it again."

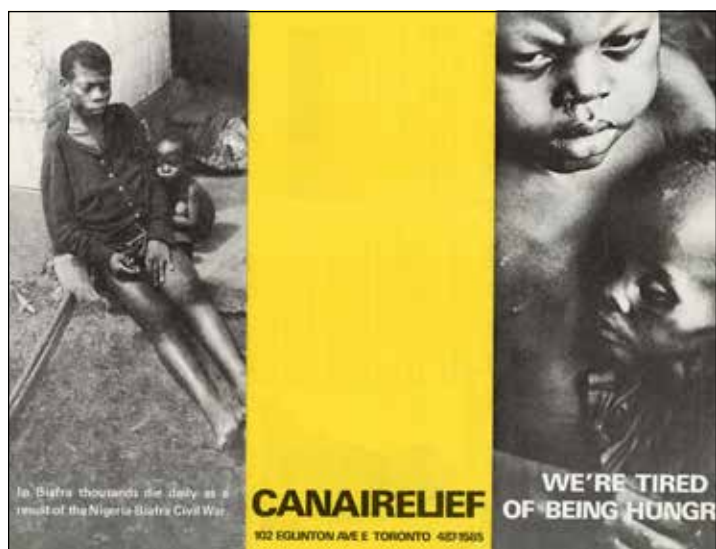
Biafra continued to shrink, squeezed in and pounded by Nigerian forces, and on January 11, 1970, Colonel Ojukwu flew out to

exile. The 2.5-year civil war was over.

It seems unbelievable that the dogged insistence of the Rev. Ted Johnson and generous, wealthy colleagues, with their vision of refurbishing a Super Constellation Nordair plane, spurred thousands of ordinary Canadians to donate large sums of money to fly food and medicine to a starving population. The first plane cost \$108,000 and had to be refurbished and repaired in only four weeks. The Presbyterian Church in Canada donated \$50,000 to that cause. Later, three more planes, which came to be known as Canairelief, became part of a much larger Joint Church Aid airlift operation dubbed the "Jesus Christ Airlines." It was formed in 1968 by 27 agencies from 17 countries. It was a story of heroism, sacrifice, daring and persistence. The logo on the planes was a depiction of two fish—a biblical reference to the feeding of thousands—with yellow representing the Roman Catholic Church and blue representing the World Council of Churches or Protestant churches.

There are both miracles and questions arising from this remarkable story. How has this story become lost to many? One of the film's executive directors and the host, a Nigerian-Canadian, Angela Nhenne Onuora, confesses that even she was not aware of the details of the Biafran War before her research. It was her father-in-law's (Dr. John Obiora Onuora) search for his former teacher, Ron McGraw, that led her to this exploration.

Even more curious is the fact that, officially, the government of Canada took no helpful position nor granted funding for this humanitarian work despite the efforts of many, including the Rev. Honourable Walter McLean who encouraged two members of parliament to fly into Biafra. When they returned, strongly committed to this humanitarian effort, they actively advocated for the cause. In the film, the Honourable David McDonald describes a conversation he had with then Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau. France's President, Charles De Gaulle, had just visited Québec and supported the separatist movement in his famous "Vive la Québec libre" speech. The Liberal government responded from a strong federalist position and when Trudeau commented to McDonald that a break-away province in Africa



Mission Staff to Nepal

By the Rev. Lora Nafziger,
PCC mission staff with United
Mission to Nepal

I keep a journal of poetry, and one of my favourite poets is Mary Oliver. She has been an important companion to me, along with her instructions for life: “Pay attention/Be astonished/tell about it.” And her description of these three things we need to be able to do: “love what is mortal/and hold it against your bones knowing/that your own life depends on it/and when the time comes to let it go/let it go.” These have been important guides to me.

These words also describe the decision that my spouse, Mitch, and I made to accept positions with the United Mission to Nepal

(UMN) in Kathmandu, beginning in January 2024. We heard almost simultaneously an invitation to consider an appointment with UMN from The Presbyterian Church in Canada to provide pastoral care and counselling to the expatriate community working for UMN, while Mitch learned that the school he had been teaching in for over 20 years was closing. Those two events opened new space and possibility within us.

We began taking next steps: checking in with our kids and my dear pastoral colleagues, with our families and a few close discerning friends. We walked through each open door, and every hurdle was gently put aside until we arrived at a place of trepidation and delight with job offers, housing

options and funding pieces all lining up in unexpected ways. There is so much gentle confirmation of the rightness of this for us, even amid the difficulty of leaving a community that has loved us so deeply it is painful to say goodbye. I do think this means that our hearts and spirits are working well, loving well, and paying attention well.

We would be joining a journey that I would say is a part of a larger Christian journey. The expansion of the “people of God” in the Hebrew Bible was primarily enacted through biological reproduction. But those relations are not the ones we expect—always there is someone outside, always a relative on the margins, and Jesus continues that expansive model of kinship, and one is adopted into the family of God through decision and actions. And so, in our leaving and our arriving, we adopt each other literally and figuratively.

The community of faith and connection grows. And the Reign of God comes to pass, if we only pay attention and tell about it. We come to see the Reign of God present and in those around us. But it is something to work toward, a



The Rev. Lora Nafziger and her family.

longing and ever-present movement toward a world where the structures of evil and division no longer exist—a new earth and a new heaven, where Peter’s vision comes to pass and we know that the commandments to love one another result in mutuality and justice as the norms for living, and are not only ethics of the idealistic or the weak. It is the world where

God flourishes and is apparent in the moments of the incarnation, in relationality and communion, in coming together in diversity. This is what we hope for in our leaving and our coming. May we in our place, and you in yours, be part of the ongoing work of God.

And may we remember to “Pay attention/Be astonished/tell about it,” wherever we find ourselves.

United Mission to Nepal

Established in 1954, UMN is a long-standing partner of the PCC. It is a cooperative effort between the people of Nepal and a large number of faith-based organizations from nearly 20 countries on four continents. UMN strives to help all Nepalis achieve a fuller life through medical and community development programs.

A story to be remembered

Continued from page 37

was Nigeria’s problem, McDonald said, “But Pierre, if thousands of people in Québec were being bombed, were dying and being starved by their own country, would you want the rest of the world to just stand by?”

Operations Lights Out is a little known but inspiring story—a true, gritty, Good Samaritan response that saved over a million people. It’s a story to be remembered, to talk about, to change us.

How to watch the film

Operation Lights Out may be rented for a small fee from Vimeo, an on-demand video service. It is 1.5 hours long and the executive producers are Angela Nnenna Onuora, the Rev. Dr. Richard Fee and Dr. John Obiora Onuora.

Possible discussion questions

- The film’s host, Angela Onuora, grew up in Nigerian schools and claims that the story of the Biafran War was deliberately excluded from history class. Why do you think this happens? Can you think of parallels in our own Canadian history?
- What motivates people to fight for others who are vulnerable and suffering? What evidence is there of suffering in today’s world and in our community? How can we move from concern to action?
- The Rev. Dr. Richard Fee comments on the unusual alliance between a group of Christian relief workers and a gun-runner pilot, which blurred the line between humanitarianism and militarism. Is it wise and ethical to use dubious methods for a



A war victim in a Biafra hospital in 1968. There was a tragic scarcity of bandages, disinfectants and medicines of all kinds, which the churches attempted to help with through airlifts. PHOTO CREDITS: THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ARCHIVES

greater good?

As a result of the Biafran War, several non-governmental agencies, including Doctors Without Borders, arose and put in place international protocols of standards for the protection and care of vulnerable populations in times of war and disaster. When you remember disasters—either small or large—where have you seen good arise from tragedy?



Damaged buildings after an air raid on a town in Biafra, 1968.

JUSTICE

Young People Using the Courts Seeking Climate Justice

By *Katbarine Sisk,*
Justice Ministries

Across Canada, and the world, people face the terrible impacts of ecological destruction and the climate crisis. Specific impacts vary widely by season and region. Forest fires, smoke, floods, droughts and severe storms are some of the impacts that many people across Canada have recently faced, and are the kind of environmental disasters that will only become more severe and deadly as global temperatures continue to increase. Decades of global policy negotiations have failed to create a binding agreement to curb the dangerous rise in greenhouse gas emissions driving the crisis. The physical, psychological and spiritual impact of the crisis can be overwhelming. What can we do? How can we respond?

Many groups facing injustice and seeking to change the policies of their governments have done so through the courts, when other pathways to change have failed. Following that tradi-

tion, some young people who care deeply about the current and future health of Earth's ecosystems, and who are unsatisfied with the state of climate policy in their region, have launched legal challenges to affect change—and some interesting results are emerging.

This past summer (2023), 16 young people and their legal representatives in Montana successfully argued (*Held v. Montana*) that a state law forbidding the state and its agents from considering the impacts of green gas emissions or climate change in their environmental reviews for fossil fuel project development violated their state constitutional rights to “a clean and healthful environment.” With this decision, in the future, Montana must consider potential climate impacts when deciding on fossil fuel projects. While Montana's office of the attorney general has said it will appeal, the ruling itself is the first of its kind in the United States.

Another case is emerging in Ontario, where seven young peo-

ple are plaintiffs in a case arguing that a 2018 law which lowered Ontario's greenhouse gas emissions reduction target “inadequately addressed the dangers posed by climate change, thereby infringing upon the rights of Ontario youth and future generations.”* Without over-simplifying complex legal cases unfolding in very different legal landscapes, what is abundantly clear is that there are young people who believe they have a right to live in a world with a healthy and sustainable future, and who are willing to fight for that future.

We must not overlook the intergenerational and future-generational consequences of the climate crisis. *Living Faith* reminds us that we must act in a way that uses power and resources responsibly, and for the common good. As it says in section 2.4, “Though life is a gift from God, human life depends on the created world. Our care for the world must reflect God's care. We are not owners, but stewards of God's good earth. Concerned



with the well-being of all of life we welcome the truths and insights of all human skill and science... Our stewardship calls us to explore ways of love and justice in respecting God's creation and in seeking its responsible use for the common good.” Our collective care for the earth has not met that bar, and creation is suffering.

What can we do?

- Learn more about what the church has said and done regarding the climate crisis; explore the Social Action Hub's ecological justice page, presbyterian.ca/ecological-justice.
- Talk to your church about the need for climate justice. For the Love of Creation has resources (“Faithful Climate Conversations”) to help guide different kinds of conversations, beginning with those who have never talked about climate change in a group setting before, to an action

discernment process to assist those who are already part of a group that has a collective commitment to working for climate justice together (forthe loveofcreation.ca/resources).

- Become involved in the 2024 climate justice campaign Give it up for the Earth, led by Citizens for Public Justice (cpj.ca) with For the Love of Creation. Campaign materials will be ready in January. Contact Justice Ministries for more information (justice@presbyterian.ca).
- Connect with youth-led climate justice initiatives and ask how you can support them.

* *Jennifer Fairfax, Ankita Gupta, Joaquin Arias, “First justiciable climate claim in Ontario – Mathur v. Ontario,” June 5, 2023, at osler.com/en/resources/regulations/2023/first-justiciable-climate-claim-in-ontario-mathur-v-ontario*

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WOMEN

Milestone Anniversary for WMS



Eva Murray cut the anniversary cake.



A miniature display of the church and school in Malawi that WMS and church donations have built.

By Kathryn Tew, Auxiliary Secretary, New St. James Presbyterian Church in London, Ont.

The Women's Missionary Society (WMS) at New St. James Presbyterian Church in London, Ont., celebrated its 130th anniversary—and we celebrated in style!

On Friday, Oct. 20, WMS auxiliary members hosted a lunch followed by worship and a program for 50 guests from across the London Presbytery and Synodical of Southwestern Ontario.

A highlight of the day was having our most senior member, Eva Murray, 98, cut a cake to mark the occasion. Table favours for all included a mug designed with the WMS logo plus anniversary date, as well as a coaster made of fabric from Malawi.

Displays at the event featured articles and photos through the years of the group at New St. James. Also on display were items gifted to the group from mission partners, such as models of a church and school in Malawi and cloth items. These were accompanied by samples of items supplied to our mission partners for their health, education and improved living conditions.

The program for the day included a hymn based on the WMS purpose written by Helen Hogarth for our 100th anniversary.

Several members described the history of the group and its evolution in mission over the years. It was a Mrs. Talling who introduced the WMS organization to the London church in 1893, and it quickly became a significant part

of church life. Elizabeth Harris, a former WMS president who was present for the 100th anniversary, gave insights into the group 30 years ago and encouraged opening up to the community in these times when we need peace.

Another special moment was the presentation of a beautiful handmade quilted banner fashioned with images of Malawi that were significant to Cathy Reid, our current WMS president. It was gifted in recognition of her tireless dedication, commitment and inspiration to the WMS and our partners in Malawi.

It was a lovely compliment to the WMS that the Women's Council provided another celebratory cake for the coffee hour after the church service on Sunday, Oct. 22. That group had also kindly



Kathryn Tew as Mrs. Talling, describing the beginning of the WMS Auxiliary in 1893.

catered the lunch for our Friday celebration.

The work of the WMS at New St. James continues to be vital, meaningful and effective with our mission partners. May it continue for another 130 years!

WMS Presbyterian Fall Rally



WMS President, Cathy Reid, was gifted with this beautiful banner from members of the WMS. The banner contains images and items from her many trips to Malawi.



Speakers (left to right) Anne Matheson, Jane Ashenden, Lisa McLaughlin.

By Deb Melnyk, WMS Paris Presbyterial

On a rainy October day, a group of women met at Knox Presbyterian Church in Woodstock, Ont., to celebrate "Falling back in love with Jesus"! We heated up the hall with praise, pause, prayer and time to play. Shirley Miller opened the meeting, the Rev. Dr. Dong-Ha Kim warmly welcomed us to Knox, and Judy MacIntosh brought greetings from WMS Synodical.

A meaningful worship service was prepared by Marybel Brenneman. In addition to the custom business meeting, led by President Shirley Miller, three

members—Jane Ashenden, Lisa McLaughlin and Anne Matheson—shared personal testimony about how they have connected to this theme. Jane discussed the Front Door Ministry at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Simcoe and how this has enriched her life. Lisa shared the mountain top and valley events in her life, and Anne Matheson shared the energy of Embro's Vacation Bible School program focusing on loving Jesus.

With Becky Stewart on the keyboard guiding us, we sang many old familiar hymns that we have enjoyed over the years. Small groups formed to discuss the theme and then prepared

Fall shapes to be added to a group banner. The four Auxiliaries—Embro, Paris, Simcoe and Woodstock—all had a banner to take home and share with others. We had decided on a brown bag lunch to limit the amount of preparation needed. By having our own members as speakers, it was wonderful to remember that we all have powerful energy and life events to share within our own ranks. Sometimes, keeping it simple creates a learning opportunity and joyful experience for all.

The day was a wonderful opportunity to do a little introspection and think about a time when each of us wanted to or needed to Fall back in love with Jesus. Oh, what a friend!



A completed banner by Marie McGregor and Elaine Stevens.



Banner making time.



PROFILE

The Rev. Dr. Robert C. Spencer

First Resident Director of Crieff



The Rev. Dr. Robert C. Spencer.

The Rev. Dr. Robert “Bob” Spencer died on June 28, 2021. In his youth, Bob was active in the Presbyterian Young People’s Society (PYPS) at St. Enoch Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont. It was here that he met the love of his life, Maureen. And it was also in PYPS where his growing faith in Jesus Christ and his keen interest as a student of scripture was first noticed by church leadership. St. Enoch’s minister at the time, the Rev. Dr. Mariano Di Gangi, asked him if he had considered going into ministry. He hadn’t, but he began to reflect on it seriously, with Mariano as his mentor. Bob sensed a call to the continuation of Christ’s ministry as a Minister of Word and Sacraments while at Camp Iona in Bala, Ont., where he would later spend a few years as Camp Director.



The blessing of the vestments on Sept. 26, 2021, before the Rev. Blair Bertrand took them to Malawi. Pictured (left to right) are Bob’s eldest son, Mark Spencer, Paul Spencer, Maureen Spencer, Barb Di Ilio, the Rev. Blair Bertrand and David Spencer.

After graduating from McMaster University, Bob then went on to Knox College in Toronto. During his studies, Bob served as a student minister at St. Enoch, Hamilton and Glebe Presbyterian Church, Toronto. After ordination in 1964, Bob was called to St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Assiniboia, Sask., where he served for three years. He was then called to St. Andrew’s, Arthur and Gordonville, Ont., where he spent the next 8.5 years. Bob

was then called to a new type of ministry as Resident Director of Crieff Hills Community Retreat and Conference Centre, a 250-acre estate in Puslinch, Ont., owned by The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

During his time at Crieff, Bob was also a member of the North American Retreat Directors Association, and a representative with the World Council of Churches. This work saw him travel throughout North America, Asia, Europe and Africa. As an example of his well-known tireless energy, during this time he was also elected and served 11 years as trustee for the Wellington County Public School Board and was chairperson for two of those years.

In 1999, after 24 years of service, Bob left Crieff, now that it had a growing complement of staff and volunteers and a rich offering of lay leadership programs. During that year, a Minute of Appreciation was adopted by the General Assembly of the PCC to acknowledge that: “By the grace of God, Crieff Hills is undoubtedly ‘the place that Bob built.’”

After leaving Crieff, Bob established a lay leadership training service called Laòs Ministries. He also spent the next 10 years as interim minister to five congregations in transition and that were seeking new guidance or coming to terms with the changing needs of their congregations. At the age of 60, Bob began a Doctor of Ministry program at McMaster University, which he completed. After full retirement, he spent several years as Minister in Association at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Guelph, Ont., helping

wherever he could continue to serve.

In addition to being a gifted preacher, Bob loved singing. He became a voice remembered and often celebrated in the many places where he served. His musical gifts added much to the programs at Crieff, as well as to his church ministry. His solos and his duets with Maureen were eagerly anticipated. During the late ’70s and early ’80s, he was lead singer and occasional bassist of a Presbyterian musical group called “The Lost and Found Department,” made up of seven Presbyterian ministers who toured Ontario, Western and Eastern Canada, and Jamaica. Their theme song was “Amazing Grace.”

Later in life, Bob kept busy as a member of several men’s choruses around Southern Ontario as well as the St. Andrew’s Guelph church choir. Coming to barbershop quartet singing somewhat later in life, over the past 30 years Bob was a proud member of the Royal City Ambassadors, and later the Tri-City Gospel Chorus, as well as the bass in an award-winning barbershop quartet, Heartland Express.

Bob was the treasured husband of Maureen (nee Linton) for 59 years and beloved father of Mark (Ksenia), Paul (Katie), Barbara Di Ilio (Joe) and David (Cynthia). He was a loving grandfather to nine children.

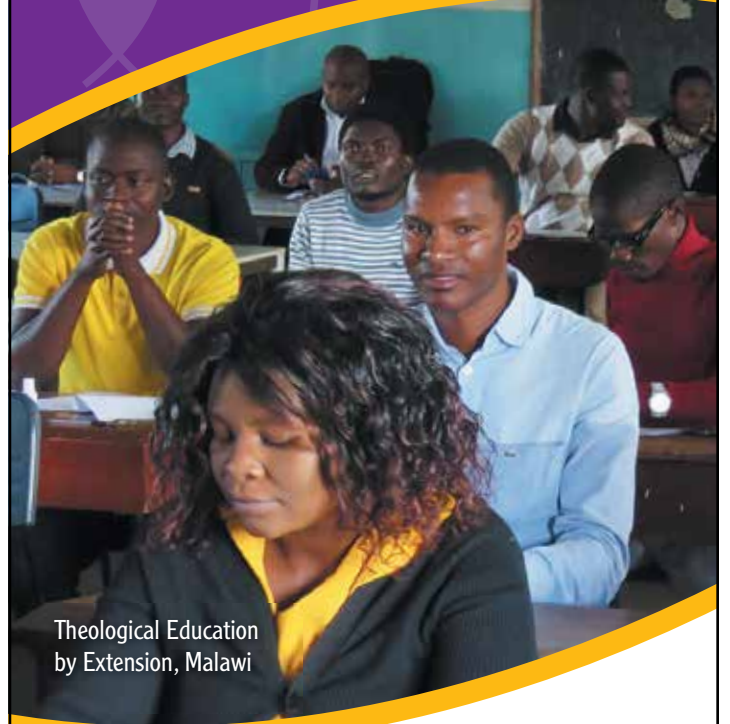
Bob’s life and his service to God and his community were both heard and felt. He is deeply missed. A service to celebrate Bob’s life was held at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Guelph in July 2021.



The Rev. Dr. Blair Bertrand, PCC mission staff in Malawi, distributed vestments and many coloured clerical shirts that once belonged to Bob. In this picture is the Rev. Oswald Chinyama, a minister in the Blantyre Synod (part of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian) and also currently a MTh student at Zomba Theological University. His congregation, Mt. Olive CCAP, is in the commercial capital of Malawi, Blantyre.



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BOOK REVIEW

An Excerpt from *Christianity: An Asian Religion in Vancouver*

Christianity: An Asian Religion in Vancouver

Written by Jason Byassee, Albert Y. S. Chu and Ross Lockhart
 Cascade Books, June 20, 2023

The Rev. Dr. Ross Lockhart, Dean of St. Andrew's Hall and Professor of Mission Studies at Vancouver School of Theology, along with colleagues the Rev. Albert Chu (Director of the Centre for Missional Leadership at St. Andrew's Hall) and Jason Byassee (Senior Minister at Timothy Eaton Memorial Church and former VST professor) recently published their research from an ethnographic study of Asian Christian lay people in the Lower Mainland.

Christianity: An Asian Religion in Vancouver builds off earlier research published as *Better Than Brunch: Missional Churches in Cascadia* and challenges the default secularization thesis that suggests churches are inevitably declining in membership and influence. Too often, however, this assumption of decline is based on only studying mainline denominations that were "church plants of Western Christendom" in North America over the last several centuries. But what if, in addition to decline, God is actively at work *changing* the face of the church in Canada today?

The findings of this study note, through a mixed-methods approach including interviews and participant observation exercises, that many churches in Vancouver with predominantly Asian composition are growing both in size and influence. That prompted the question of what Christians might learn about God's transforming power by looking to Asia rather than Europe to predict the future of Christian witness in the Pacific Northwest of North America.

The following is an excerpt of the publication, pages 58–61.

"Banana," is a slang term for an Asian person who is "white on the inside and yellow on the outside." This was a common term

that one of the authors (obviously Albert!) was often called growing up in Canada. Although he looks Chinese, the perception was that he had been fully acculturated into mainstream North American culture. Not surprisingly, many understand this term to be pejorative.

More recently, another slang term (also understood to be pejorative), that is used among Cantonese-speakers is the term "Jook-sing." Jook-sing is a Cantonese term for an overseas born Chinese person. The origin of the word relates to the bamboo rod. If you were to take a careful look at the stem of a bamboo plant, you would notice that the stem of the bamboo plant is hollow and compartmentalized. Thus, water poured in one end does not flow out of the other end. The metaphor then is that Jook-sings are not part of either culture; not truly Asian, nor truly Canadian. Even more disparagingly, because they are neither truly Asian or Canadian, some would say that Jook-sings are hollow and ungrounded.

What then if you were to add someone who also identifies as a Christian into the discussion? Is a "Jook-sing" Christian even further compartmentalized? Not truly Asian, not truly Canadian, nor truly Christian either? Or is the foundational claim of Galatians 3:28 actually true, and baptism gives us an identity that gathers up our lesser ones in him?

Jotaro Kawabata, when asked about his identity as a Japanese Canadian Christian, argues against this notion. Instead, he comes with another helpful description. Jotaro sees his identity more like a Venn diagram. He sees these three core identities not as competition, but instead simply as descriptors of who he is. As Jotaro states: "I'm Christian, I'm Canadian. I'm Japanese. It's all mixed up. It's not one over the other. It's not mutually exclusive." Much like how someone may have a hyphenated name, Jotaro and many other Asian

Canadian Christians have come to fully accept their hyphenated identity.

This does not suggest that there is no tension. The typical Asian Canadian Christian must negotiate between not two, but three worlds, hoping to find a balance between family, church, and Canadian society. For Jotaro, it is the struggle between his Japanese heritage and Canadian culture that causes the most tension and stress. Interestingly, it is his identity in Christ that helps reconcile this tension. As Jotaro states,

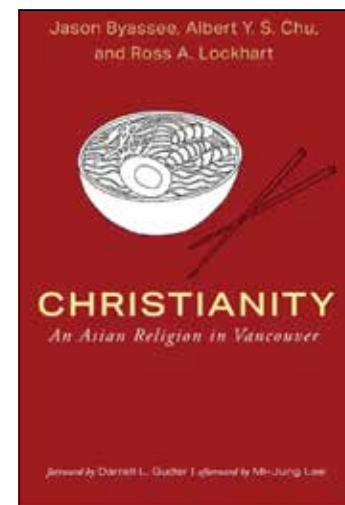
This is why Vancouver is so unique. I needed a grounded identity, which I found in Jesus. I was so lost in my identity as a Japanese Canadian. Even to this day, I struggle with it. The Japanese culture is to give to others, to work hard for others, but in the Canadian culture, that may not be highest priority. Even to this day, I still struggle with it, but time and time again, I realize that Jesus is the one who wants to centre me to make sure I have balance between the other two.

Although Jotaro didn't use the words, he is pointing to something that is found throughout Scripture, a recurring emphasis for the people of God to place their ultimate allegiance and primary identity upon Christ.

Lesley Chung has taught math and French at Terry Fox Secondary High School in the Vancouver suburb of Port Coquitlam for the past 20 years. Born and raised in a Buddhist family, she had numerous good Christian friends in elementary school who persistently invited her to church. Lesley would say "No, I'm Buddhist, why would I?" These friends were so persistent that Lesley, while in grade six, even went with them to a Billy Graham crusade, but "nothing came of it except they kept pushing me to the front. No, I don't want to go up!" Nevertheless, her friends would not give up, and continued to be persistent. From time to time, Lesley would get picked up in the

church van, filled to the brim with kids, to attend Vancouver Chinese Evangelical Free Church. One Saturday, Lesley remembers quite vividly, in her room as a thirteen-year-old with the sun streaming through the window, she decided to pick up the Gideon Bible that she received a few years earlier. While reading the Bible, and in particular the biography of Gideon founder John Nicolson, she was "overcome with deep emotion, really profound emotion, started crying, and for whatever reason, got on my knees and prayed, 'Lord if you would bless me, I promise I will read the Bible every day,' which I did."

As a teacher who has worked with immigrant students over the course of 20 years, she has seen how "immigrants have one foot in different places all the time." For instance, she has talked and walked with numerous Iranian and Iraqi Muslim female students, who have struggled with the wearing of the traditional veil or hijab. Hijab wearing is certainly a very visible outward expression of one's ethnic and religious identity, and one that causes not only an internal struggle of whether to wear one or not, but an external tension with society. In Quebec, Bill 21, which prohibits provincial employees from wearing religious symbols, has certainly been a topic of much debate in Canadian society in recent years. As Lesley reflects on this in relation to her own life, growing up in a place in which parents and family expected her to be a certain way, the church another way, and Canadian society a third way, she admits that this "tri-influence has been difficult." However, she states, I care for my freedom, but it's hard when I'm being tugged in different places. Canadian culture has its beauty, but I'm glad things keep me grounded. Christian faith has been so instrumental to form me into who I am. I'm so thankful... If anything, the church has instilled in me the sense of awe and wonder at God, of fear in this



almighty God, that also influences how we are, how we ought to live, that reflects awe and glory of God. It helps me not to go toward Canadian culture that pushes and pulls in so many directions.

It's interesting that Jotaro and Lesley both use the word grounded when it comes to the role of their Christian faith in forming their identity. It is out of "being rooted and established in love" (Ephesians 3:17), that these two Jook-sings are finding their true identity. Under secularity, the church no longer finds itself in a position of privilege, and thus Christians find it increasingly difficult to maintain a distinct identity. In response, some Christians advocate for a withdrawal from the world. Other Christians advocate for a different response, accidentally capitulating to the values and norms of the society in which they are located. Instead, we ask, what does faithful engagement with a secular society, specifically from a minority position, look like?

As authors, we wonder if Asian Canadian Christians have an advantage to this endeavour, as Asians in Canada have always found themselves in a minority position. Immigrants and newcomers to Canada are constantly needing to find ways to maintain their culture and ethnicity. Even Jook-sings are constantly needing to both affirm and challenge certain parts of their ethnic culture. What values should one keep and from which culture? Could it be that this daily negotiation of what it means to live as an ethnic minority provides Asian Christians with the tools and skills to better sustain a distinctive Christian identity in a secular setting?



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REFLECTIONS

Reflections from Time as Moderator

By the Rev. Dr. Alan McPherson

In 1994, the Moderator, the Rev. Dr. George Vais, presented the thoughtfully developed “Confession of The Presbyterian Church in Canada” to Phil Fontaine, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, in a ceremony at the Forks in Winnipeg. As Moderator of the General Assembly the following year, I was asked to visit the Mistawasis reserve near Prince Albert, Sask., and to present the Confession to the community there.

It was and is a heartfelt apology for the part our denomination played in helping the government subdue and control the life and liberty of Canada’s Indigenous peoples. We had “agreed to take the children of Aboriginal peoples from their own homes and place them in residential schools” where, as so many news stories

since have made very clear, they were deprived of their traditional ways to try and achieve their assimilation with Euro-Canadian customs and values. And too often treated very badly.

So, on an October Sunday morning, my wife and I joined the congregation in the little church on the Mistawasis Reserve. And when it was time, I read the whole text of the Confession to the congregation, and presented it to Laura Bird, one of the senior elders. While others had suffered from the distress and ill-treatment that so many experienced, her experience had not been so painful, and her faith was strong. “Can I read something to you?” she asked. She opened her Bible at Ephesians 4 and read the final words of the chapter: “Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.”

It was a moment I will never forget. When I told a General Assembly about it a few years later, the *Presbyterian Record* magazine reported that I was overcome with emotion. But there is another lasting memory from that long ago day. The conduct of the service was shared with a young Indigenous woman from the reserve, who served there as student minister. I made a note of her name on the schedule that guided my travels through Northern Saskatchewan. Although we were never in personal contact, I kept track of her as she entered Vancouver School of Theology and was later ordained. The name I had quickly scribbled down was “Mary Fontaine.”

In June of this year that young woman, widely respected for her



The Rev. Mary Fontaine, current Moderator of the PCC, and the Rev. Dr. Alan M. McPherson, Moderator of the 121st General Assembly (1995).

ministry serving Indigenous people in the Vancouver area, became the Moderator of our General Assembly. My wife, Maureen, and I made sure we were in Halifax to attend the opening of the Assembly and witness Mary Fontaine’s

election as Moderator.

With all the demands on her, we only had time for a brief conversation about that long ago occasion, but I was glad to be able to reconnect, and offer her my support.

FALL 2023

THE PRESBYTERIAN HISTORY NEWSLETTER NEEDS YOU!



Presbyterian History, a twice yearly e-newsletter of the PCC’s Committee on History, is looking for topics to cover in upcoming issues.

Does your congregation have an interesting story or bit of folklore that you think your Presbyterian friends across the country would find interesting? What about a minister, director of music, educator, or missionary of note? Does your building have a story about its art and architecture that’s worth sharing?

Storytelling and sharing are important as congregations face uncertain futures and as the PCC adapts to a changing world. These stories bind us together with the communion of saints who have gone before us and with those who will come after us.

For more information, contact Ian McKechnie, editor, at ianmckechnie@trentu.ca. The Committee on History strives to make its newsletter a vehicle for us all to share in the rich heritage of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

REFLECTIONS

Imagining Your Church's Future

By the Rev. Mark Tremblay,
Calgary, Alta.

The church is in a transitional period. We are experiencing a multi-generational reconfiguration of spirituality and religion around the world. It is a time of discomfort and disruption. But it is also a time that is full of opportunities for how the church might continue Christ's ministry in the world and in our communities.

Making decisions and discerning God's will proves to be more challenging at this time as it is difficult to understand where the church is going. It is like standing at a crossroads and not knowing which path to choose. Instead of thinking that our choice is between two possibilities only, we need to remember that the crossroads has at least four choices. Professional Futurist Jim Dator has recognized four archetypes of which future might unfold. Church communities could use these, collectively, to discern their own future.

These four archetypes or categories are *growth*, *constraint*, *collapse* and *transformation*. In her book, *Imaginable: How to Create a Hopeful Future*, Jane McGonigal defines each archetype as follows:

Growth is a story about more of what is already being experienced. Current trends and conditions, both good and bad, continue to grow as they have in the past, but now at a faster rate.



Constraint is a story about accepting new limitations. We respond to a threat or problem by agreeing to new restrictions and new kinds of self-discipline. Desperate times call for desperate measures! This is a story of individual sacrifice for the greater good.

Collapse is a story about a sudden shutdown or tragic failure. It occurs when something we take for granted is no longer reliable or available—its absence leading to shock and sometimes chaos. Major social systems become strained beyond the breaking point, causing new kinds of suffering and social disarray.

Transformation is a story about system-changing innovation or breakthrough. It stretches our imaginations, challenges our assumptions, and suggests that what was once considered impossible can now be realized. Transformation is often aspirational, setting a new course for individuals and organizations.

McGonigal recommends creating scenarios to help us imagine the future. A scenario is a virtual safe space created to explore the future. It is a "detailed description of a particular future" that could happen. Scenarios can be used to imagine what it would be like when circumstances change, and they

should be inspired by real things that are happening now. To help create a scenario one must gather current clues, called signals, that are manifesting to suggest that things are already starting to change today. Signals represent concrete, specific, vivid indicators of how the future might look.

They indicate technologies and habits of the future that are being tested, experimented with and invented today. These clues provide the basis of possible changes to explore in a scenario.

In addition to clues, we might also find future forces, trends or drivers of change, that will or are making a disruptive or transform-

ative impact on the way things are. For example, one of the future forces McGonigal identifies is "efforts to combat social isolation." Loneliness has motivated many people and groups to find ways to counteract it and to create activities to prevent it. Loneliness has huge implications for our psychological, physical and spiritual health. Is this not an invitation waiting for a response?

Any decision-making about the future can be explored through each of these archetypes by creating a scenario that can be traversed for the kind of future each path yields. With a small group of people, learn more about how to spot signals and recognize forces to be able to imagine possible future scenarios. The futurists' mantra is that foresight about what lies ahead can provide insight for decision making and actions today. Clarity, not certainty, is needed.

When thinking about the future it is important not to try to predict the future and decide ahead of time which pathway is the right one. Creating and exploring possible futures must be done by identifying real clues and recognizing forces. Imagining scenarios based on those clues and forces is a safe way to explore what the future could be like and at the same time holding our "normalcy bias," our innate expectation that the future will be like the present, in check.

The Present Crisis: Vengeance

By the Rev. Philip J. Lee, retired minister living in Fredericton, N.B., author of the blog, "The Present Crisis," which is published at medium.com/@pjlee_39329

"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, for leave it to the wrath of God" (Romans 12: 19).

At a recent rally of the Conservative Political Action Conference, former President Donald Trump muttered the word *revenge* and then went on to assure his audience: "I am your justice; I am your retribution."

Revenge, justice, retribution—against whom? Presumably against Democrats, leftists, the United States Department of Jus-

tice? His admiring listeners seem to know because they responded with loud approval.

Trump's promise, despite his support from about 80% of white Evangelical Christians, is at an opposite pole from the Apostle Paul's admonition to the Church in Rome. Paul warns them that revenge will not work, that we flawed human beings are not wise enough to mete out a proper vengeance to our fellows.

Of course, we need to have laws, we need to elect or appoint officials to carry out the laws, to punish those who violate laws. Paul was certainly not an anarchist. In another letter he urges that "all things should be

done decently and in order" (I Corinthians 14:40). The motive for "decency" and "order," for the good governing of human affairs, can never be associated with *revenge*. If "honesty is the best policy," *revenge* may be the very worst policy.

Again, the Apostle tells his fellow Christians to leave "vengeance to the wrath of God." The "wrath of God" is Paul's term for God's justice. He goes on to quote Jewish law. The full text of his reference is: "You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:15).

The "wrath of God" is closely connected with the "law" of God. God's justice is normally exercised within the context of law. If there is a legitimate grievance, if some action is so atrocious and unfair that it requires punishment beyond the scope of the legitimate courts, then leave it to the One who is all knowing and all discerning. Only God's outrage can be equated with justice.

By "leaving it to God" we are not by any means advocating a sort of Christian quietism. What comes to my mind as a good example of political action influenced by Christian ethics would be the Allies' action following World War II. After the surren-

der of Nazi Germany, there were two dominant responses by Allied nations in dealing with their defeated enemies. One was the Nuremberg Trials in which the surviving chief perpetrators of war crimes were tried in accord with existing military and international law. The other was the Marshall Plan, which, rather than punish the German people, helped them restore their economy and move toward establishing the stable democracy they now enjoy.

Did the United States and the other Allied nations dispense an adequate *revenge* against Germany for the Holocaust and all

REFLECTIONS

How Well Are We Gathering for Worship?

By the Rev. Brian Fraser,
Brentwood Presbyterian Church in
Burnaby, B.C.

We Christians do this every week, at least once: we gather for worship. Usually, it's sometime on a Sunday. Sometimes, like for Brentwood Presbyterian Church's Jazz Evensongs, it's on a weekday night. But we do it, and often. It's our primal communal spiritual discipline as a Christian church.

It's more like "we are gathered" than "we gather." The Initiator of this gathering is the Spirit of the Creator's Christ, Jesus of Nazareth. We normally shorten that trinitarian naming to "God." That's what we'll do for the rest of this opinion piece.

As we are engaged in the multiple levels of preparation for being gathered into worshipping well, it might be inspiring and instructive to engage in dialogue with folks who are respected reflective practitioners of the art of gathering and convening. Two books that recently came to my attention and give us easy access to much of that wisdom are *The Art of Convening: Authentic Engagement in Meetings, Gatherings, and Conversations* by Craig and Patricia Neal, with Cynthia Wold, (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2011) and Priya Parker's *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why it Matters* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2018).

Both books break down the dynamics of getting together for a purpose without making it a task

to perform, or a system to manage, or an event to control. Think carefully. How many of those agendas are infecting your worship planning? It's not that performance, management and a degree of control are not important, but if they dominate your work on this, you may be missing the inspiring energy that enables the joyful and playful soul of our encounter with God in worshipping.

In *The Art of Convening*, the authors created a "Convening Wheel" to help us imagine ways of configuring the flow of meeting together well. Their purpose is to enable authentic engagement that connects and energizes people through the meaning generated by the gathering. In worshipping, that meaning is generated by God in partnership with all those involved.

In *The Art of Gathering*, Parker notes that one of the first things that happens in communities "descending into authoritarianism" is that the right to assemble and significant participation in those gatherings are restricted or prohibited. She envisions the real benefits of good gatherings: "to put the right people in a room and help them collectively think, dream, argue, heal, envision, trust, and connect for a specific larger purpose ... places and people and what happens between them [are] at the centre of every coming together" (pp. ix, xi).

Parker provides sage advice on these elements—deciding why you are really gathering, discerning who might be invited, being



constructively active as the host, creating a temporary alternative world, attending to the logistic, encouraging "sprout" speeches rather than "stump" speeches, causing good controversy and ending well.

As I continue to explore and experiment with how this wisdom can inspire and instruct our Christian worshipping, I recognize that I make three basic assumptions about the God/others/self relationship as it works in our gatherings for worship:

1. God invites us to be creative partners in the act of imagining and implementing our gatherings for worship;
2. In this partnership, we are ambassadors of God's forgiving and reconciling love for the whole world, and worshipping, at its best, nourishes our souls to flourish in that missioning;
3. Worshipping is a joyful dance with our Creator in which we learn new steps to redemptive melodies, rhythms and harmonies of blessing.

With that understanding of the dynamics at work in worshipping, what benefits might our attentive dialogue with the wisdom of con-

vening and gathering yield and what questions might you consider to improve those benefits?

First, continually clarify the purpose for which you are being drawn into worship: it is to be nourished and to flourish as blessings in God's world. Is the whole flow of your gathering designed for a call-and-response encounter with God that inspires and instructs your community?

Second—and this one poses a serious challenge to the ways most of our worshipping is designed—make worshipping more of a conversation about the invitation from God to be just with kindness and humility (Micah 6:6–8) and to provoke love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). Imagine and design worshipping to be part of a broader suite of conversations that make up your church. What can you do to increase the space for dialogue in your worship gatherings, giving God, others, and self an opportunity to contribute a voice to the encounter?

Third, consider making your worship more like a jazz gig. Monty Alexander, one of my favourite jazz pianists, once described the dynamics of a jazz performance

this way:

"[A jazz gig] at its best is a situation in which the participants willingly support each other, working together as one and going along with the 'driver's' directions, each player bringing virtuosity, optimism, mutual respect, good will, and, of course, the desire to 'make it feel good' for all human beings in the general proximity. ... There should be that intangible ideal 'to take flight.' The marvellous gift of increased camaraderie comes about from this shared ideal."

I am firmly convinced that worshipping is meant by God to generate the same good feelings, to inspire and instruct its participants in how "to take flight" in their calling to be blessings (Exodus 12:3b) in the care of creation.

There are lots of examples of this kind of convening and gathering in congregations that I know. I won't give them here. Rather, I invite you to assess what's going on in your congregation and ask how you can use some of the ideas in this article to improve the hospitality through which you partner with God in generating hope and healing.

Continued from page 44

the other horrors brought about by Hitler's regime? Certainly not. Can anyone imagine what that revenge might entail? Who is wise enough to administer such vengeance?

Perhaps an even more striking example of non-vengeance would be the 1995 Truth and Reconciliation Commission appointed by Nelson Mandela, President of

South Africa, and chaired by his appointee Archbishop Desmond Tutu. The Commission, rather than extracting vengeance for all the monstrous acts of former white regimes, brought perpetrators and victims together for contrition and formal pardon. This event surprised the whole world in avoiding the bloodbath nearly everyone expected.

Jesus, for Christians, is the perfect example of this wisdom when from the Cross he acknowledges that God alone can rectify this awful atrocity taking place. Jesus moves even further away from vengeance when in his prayer he asks God NOT to take vengeance. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34).

Vengeance and its always present partner, hate, are what lead finally to such awful consequences, as we are presently witnessing in the Middle East. The murder and kidnapping of the innocent in the kibbutzim, the shelling of hundreds of Israelis, the present siege by deprivation of water, food, electricity of millions of Palestinians, the bombing of hospi-

tals, all make it clear that we sinful humans cannot be trusted to turn our wrath, our vengeance, into justice. Leave that to the One who has the ultimate love and wisdom to accomplish that transfiguration. "I am the Lord."

Christians, Jews, people of all faiths and humanists of no faith must unite behind a better policy, a hopeful alternative.

REFLECTIONS

A Journey to George Floyd Square

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

This past week I attended a Presbyterian church conference in Minneapolis. I had never been to Minneapolis and knew little about the city or state. But at some point, a memory tweaked and Google confirmed what my memory was trying to tell me: I was in the town of George Floyd, and the epicentre of global protests that followed his murder by a law enforcement officer in 2020.

After the conference ended, I had a free afternoon with a friend who wanted to visit George Floyd Square.

I wasn't particularly enthused by this option. I was told that the memorial intersection had been cordoned off previously by residents of the neighbourhood. And while I had only been in the city a few days, the racial disparity was evident.

Our pilgrimage to the square (we made our way by foot) took us past downtown businesses, then apartment buildings, then old Victorian homes. Some of these homes were maintained and guarded with security cameras. Others were dilapidated with weeds covering the front yards.

After an hour, we reached the gateway to our destination. In the



Steve with Angela Harrelson, George Floyd's aunt, at the memorial to George Floyd.

middle of the road was a marker, a pillar, an upraised fist draped with what I learned to be the "Pan-African flag" (a tricolour consisting of three equal horizontal bands of red, black and green). As well, a list of names were painted in block letters on that same road. These were the names of people who had lost their lives to police violence. The list stretched an entire block.

As we approached the memorial intersection, we slowed. There were a few people milling about, but it was unclear whether we should be there. We paused at a storefront that was covered with

posters of the protest. We were trying to judge the situation and assess the environment we had walked into.

Then a voice rang out from inside the storefront: "Come on in!"

Pushing through the screen door we were met by a man named KingDemetrius Pendleton, who shook our hands. He told us it was a good day for us to visit and introduced us to a woman first sitting on a couch, then standing up to greet us. It was George Floyd's aunt, Angela Harrelson. She greeted us warmly and asked us where we were from. We told her we had come

to pay respects and she thanked us with hugs. Angela and KingDemetrius then began talking about George Floyd, the protests, the trial of Derek Chauvin, and their own experiences with racism.

Angela exuded warmth and hospitality. She told us that when they said "Black Lives Matter" they weren't saying that white lives didn't matter. They were protesting the fact that the many rights and privileges that white people freely enjoyed weren't being shared; they had to fight for them.

Angela escorted us across the road to the memorial, which had been cordoned off with concrete road dividers and was awash in flowers. She showed us the place where Floyd died after having a knee on his neck for over nine minutes, despite gasping that he couldn't breathe. It was solemn to hear the story recounted in that place. We lingered. Then we walked over to see the murals and the list of twenty-four community demands.

We took a different route back to the hotel, which was in many ways more destitute than the pathway we took to the memorial. We passed a parking lot next to an abandoned shopping mall where day labourers were waiting for employment. We watched people openly consuming drugs. We

passed one man sorting through garbage while screaming at the heavens. The journey back was objectively more dangerous than the journey there and yet I was somehow less afraid.

So what had happened? Somehow my fears were lessened by the short time I shared with KingDemetrius and Angela. This conversation didn't erase our very different life experiences; in fact, it highlighted those differences. But having a conversation, shaking hands, and sharing hugs somehow established a connection that spanned that divide.



A pillar of a raised fist with the "Pan-African flag."



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Eunice Marion Bisset
Deceased November 7, 2023
Goderich, Ont.

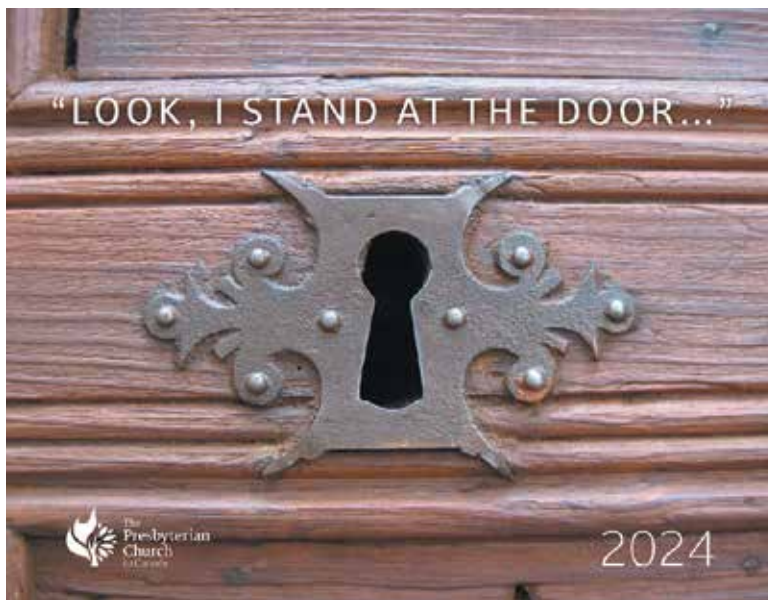
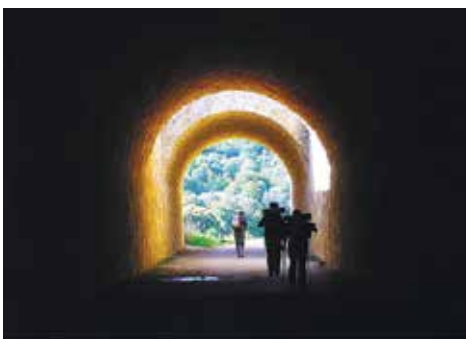
Joyce Pollock
Deceased September 24, 2023
London, Ont.

The Rev. Dr. Robert Kneen Anderson
Deceased October 7, 2023
Woodstock, Ont.

The Rev. Evelyn Carpenter
Deceased August 24, 2023
Alberton, P.E.I.

The Rev. Judee Archer Green
Deceased October 6, 2023
Hamilton, Ont.

2024 Wall Calendar



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 encounter with Jesus.



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