



## Love and Hate in a Time of Fear

By Allyson Carr, Justice Ministries

We live in challenging and fearful times. It is natural (even reasonable) to be afraid given all the dire news about war, climate change and its life-endangering effects, economic uncertainty and the potential for nuclear catastrophe. So long as fear doesn't control us, fear isn't even necessarily always bad; when fear is rational, it can be a strong motivator for needed changes or actions that help keep people safe.

But fear isn't always good for us, especially when it continues for long periods of time. When humans are under longer-term or existential threats (like war, devastating natural disasters and prolonged economic insecurity) fear can override empathy, leading to impulsive and atypical actions that go against a person's core beliefs or values.

Since fear is such a powerful motivator, there are those who use it to drive wedges in society, polarizing people against each other and creating more conflict to consolidate their own power. It is easier to manipulate someone who is afraid.

History has given us too many examples to count of fear being used in this manipulative, polarizing way—and there are plenty of current examples in ongoing conflicts that could be named as well. Any number of groups promoting hate will be only too happy to supply a scapegoat for people to aim their anxiety and anger at and mobilize against. It may be immigrants or refugees that such groups place blame on. It may be people of a different skin colour than your own or people with a different gender expression or sexual orientation than your own. It may be someone of a different faith or from a different area. But in each case, the language that groups who promote hate use will be similar: *they are taking what is ours and they will keep doing it*



*unless we stop them.* Such language leads people to question the relationship between their rights and others' rights: If others get additional rights and privileges that I already have, will I actually have fewer? Will I lose out?

Whatever the target (and often it's a combination of several targets), groups who thrive on hate have a tried-and-true road to power—and power is their ultimate goal. They prey on people's understandable fears about a personal matter (their own safety, their children's lives, their home or future) to turn people against a vulnerable scapegoat the group has identified. Drawing on misinformation or oversimplifications, they claim this scapegoat is the source of the threat to you, your family, your future or even sometimes the nation. (That is the route nationalism tends to take, for example.)

Often groups promoting hate will use language that is innocuous or even good in other contexts. They will say they support "family values," "freedom," even "faith" to describe themselves and make it more difficult to spot the hate and harm they are promoting. They will say they are "protecting your rights." But anyone who treats rights as a zero-sum game—where if others who are different from you are powerful or safe or have their needs met, it only comes at your expense—is not walking a path of loving their neighbour. Neither are they demonstrating a love of God, no matter how many faith-related words they use; God did not and does not direct us to "Love the Lord and look out for yourselves." When Jesus gave the parable of the Good Samaritan, he did not add, "But only love your neigh-

bour if they look or act or think like you."

It's easy and tempting to think that "we" (whoever each of us is) are too smart to be manipulated by fear, but we are all fallible creatures and we are all vulnerable to it. Looking at our national statistics, one can see the alarm bells: Anti-Semitic and Islamophobic hate crimes are rising; anti-immigrant sentiment is starting to creep into public dialogue; hate crimes against People of Colour remain high. These are all products of scapegoating allowing hate to take root. Scapegoating has never yet made anyone safer, and when hate is being offered as the solution to our fears, deadly violence is not far behind. We have seen this again and again and it is not the way we are called to live.

So, as we read or listen to the news, as we talk with our friends

or family, as we consider the actions of our politicians when it comes time to vote, or the places where we spend our money and time—even when we worship—it is important to listen closely to what is being said and to weigh it. Am I, with my action and my inaction, participating in loving my neighbour? Or am I allowing, even encouraging my neighbour to be marginalized and targeted? Am I contributing to love or hate (or apathy, which can be just as harmful)?

In times like these, it is even more important to remember what Christians are called to. The only way to counter hate is through fulsome love, service to the vulnerable and marginalized, and caring—those same values we see embodied in the gospels, in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

## MESSAGE FROM THE MODERATOR

# Moderator Fall Visits

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

Many generous, hospitable and gracious Presbyterians in Montreal, Que., London, Ont., and the town of St. Marys, Ont., went out of their way to prepare for and accommodate the moderator's visits. They demonstrated respect for Indigenous culture by arranging for Sharing Circles and by making sure an Indigenous drum was available for worship. Some requested Hummingbird Ministries videos and presentations to learn more. This demonstrates a spirit of peacemaking with Indigenous people.

Presbyters have also introduced me to Indigenous elders and cultural keepers in their respective regions. Don Barnaby (Mi'kmaq), Shauit (Innu, Que.), Kevin Deer Ka'nahsohon (Kanienkehaka, Mohawk), Arnold Boyer (Mohawk) and Tom Dearhouse (Mohawk/Ojibway) are among those willing to be interviewed for a Hummingbird Ministries film project. These connections are very helpful and very much appreciated.

### Montreal: Sept. 26 – Oct. 1

The Rev. Susan Brasier from The Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul in Montreal (A&P), Jill Foster and the Rev. Dr. Lucille Marr planned and organized the events and tours. The Rev. Susan arranged

the Orange Shirt Day ceremony on September 30 and the worship service at A&P. As well, she hosted two restaurant dinners and put together a heartwarming homemade dinner, complete with homemade bread. But the hospitality team from A&P—including Gwen and Michael, Keith Randall, Maureen White, and many others—took me on tours and events.

Jill, whose ministry is healing and reconciliation, was my constant travelling companion, giving us the opportunity to share stories and much laughter. She organized the visit to the Montreal Friendship Center event, where I was introduced to Tom Dearhouse, an Indigenous leader. She also arranged the visit to the Communauté Chrétienne Siloé, a French-speaking Cameroonian Church, where we enjoyed a warm welcome, an excellent dinner and much joy, expressed through their vibrant choir who danced for the Lord as they sang. The congregation is very happy to have acquired the old church building to worship in, but they definitely need more funds to complete the renovations. I was presented with a beautiful bouquet of flowers.

The Rev. Lucille Marr, along with ecumenical students and Rolanda Murphy-McPhee, an Anishinaabe woman, welcomed Jill and me to the Presbyterian College. The chapel was set up for a Circle and,



The Rev. Mary Fontaine and the Rev. Susan Brasier at the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul in Montreal, Que.

as promised, an Indigenous hand drum was available for my use in worship. I gave the sermon and shared about Hummingbird Ministries. I treasure the Rev. Lucille's gift, a copy of *First Nations Version: An Indigenous Translation of the New Testament*. (I was pleased to receive a letter from the Rev. Dr. Roland DeVries sending regrets for his absence during my visit to the Presbyterian College.)

Jill Foster and I toured McGill University and the Indigenous students' study and housing centre. The students, seated around a large table, reading and writ-

ing, reminded me of my student days at the University of Alberta Native Studies Centre. There's something hopeful and uplifting about this learning environment. The students welcomed us and we had an informative visit with the director of the centre. They are grateful for the space, but more housing and study space is needed.

The Rev. Susan and her crew put much energy and effort into the September 30th Orange Shirt Day at A&P; it was indeed a special peace-building ceremony. Two powerful Indigenous speakers/singers Shauit and Don Barnaby took part in the service. It was a sea of orange with almost everyone wearing an Every Child Matters T-shirt. All were invited to participate in a candle-lighting ceremony of 215 candles. Elder Don Barnaby honoured me with the gift of a beaded *Every Child Matters* necklace.

After worship at A&P on Oct. 1, we shared lunch before a group of A&P members saw me off at the airport. (Later I was honoured to receive a letter from the Rev. Dr. Glenn Chestnut, the senior pastor of A&P, who apologized for his absence during my visit and mentioned his congregant's appreciation for the sermon I preached on Oct. 1.)

Special thanks to A&P elders Gwen and her husband, Michael, who arranged for my visit to Ema-

nuel-Beth Shalom Temple, where Elder Kevin Deer Ka'nahsohon was a guest speaker. I had an opportunity to visit with elder Kevin, and I look forward to an interview with him.

Thanks to Keith, A&P elder, for a tour of downtown Montreal, including insights into the historical relationship between the Presbyterians and Catholics, and for special tours to the Kahnawake Cultural Centre and the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake office. The Cultural Centre was special, given my interest in peacemaking and the Iroquois Confederacy, also known as the Treaty of the Great White Pine, circa 1190. Urged by the Great Peacemaker, Dekanawida, five Haudenosaunee nations signed a peace treaty symbolized by the Great White Pine, beneath which they buried their weapons of war. This tree is the only pine with five needles all connected. To protect the treaty, an eagle sat at the top to ward off any danger. The treaty has been described as one of the greatest examples of diplomacy, and its concepts adopted as the basis for the American constitution. The presenter at the cultural centre described the peacemaking process and how the Wampum Belt was used to mark agreements among and by their nations.

At the Mohawk Council office, we learned that the Grand Chief is



Mary with elders at Chalmers Presbyterian Church.

**MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY**

# Why We Worship As We Do: Preaching of the Word, part 2



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

Question 35 of the Larger Catechism says, “[The] covenant of grace was and still is to be administered in the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments...; in which grace and salvation are held forth in more fulness, evidence, and efficacy, to all nations.”

St. Augustine said it was the duty of interpreters and teachers of scripture “...to teach what is right and to refute what is wrong, and in the performance of this task to conciliate the hostile, to rouse the careless, and to tell the ignorant both what is occurring at present and what is probable in the future” (St. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*).

Preaching has been a consistent feature of Christian worship from the earliest days of the church; it’s a gift we receive from our Jewish heritage. Over time, the sermon has been in different places in the order of service. Sometimes the sermon is in the middle of the service, while at other times and places it was nearly the last thing done in worship. Preachers alone are responsible for selecting the passages they preach from. In the past, some preachers followed John Calvin’s custom of preaching and proceeded sequentially through a single book of the Bible from beginning to end over many Sundays. Some Presbyterian ministers chose readings that ad-

ressed emergent circumstances affecting the congregation. More recently, many preachers opt to use a rotation of readings called the lectionary, which provides at least four readings a Sunday over a three-year period.

In *Together in Ministry: The Theology and Practice of Ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada* (p. 55) it says that:

“Preaching is the act of proclaiming the gospel with all its words of judgement and of grace.

This is done through explaining the biblical narrative, reflecting on what it means in biblical and theological terms, and pointing the listeners to connections between their lives and the biblical text. Classic Presbyterian sermons contained three basic elements:

“1. ‘Opening’ or understanding the biblical text itself. What are the contextual, linguistic and interpretive features that are essential for understanding the text? It is important to note that Presbyterian

preaching has always been rooted in an exposition of scripture.

“2. ‘Dividing’ or theologically reflecting on the text. Where does it fit into the larger doctrine and understanding of Christian faith?

“3. ‘Application’ or ‘uses’ of the text. What does the text have to say for us today? Application was the most important part and, as can be expected, the most controversial depending on how the preacher was applying the text and its teaching to the particulars of his/her time and place. But application was also the climax of the sermon, without which no sermon was complete.”

But the responsibility for effective preaching and teaching does not belong solely to the preacher. Question 160 of the Larger Catechism asks: “What is required of those that hear the Word preached? Answer: It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine: What they hear by the scriptures; receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the Word of God; meditate, and confer of it; hide it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.”



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**Moderator of the General Assembly:**

The Rev. Mary Fontaine

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



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a woman, which is not surprising, given the Kahnawake are a matriarchal society. However, their ancient peacemaking system has been affected by colonialism and the English French War. A monument acknowledges the warriors who fought in these wars.

**Ontario: November 24 – December 1**

The visits to Chalmers Presbyterian Church in London and St. Marys Presbyterian Church in St. Marys, Ont., were organized and planned by the Rev. Sharon LaPier, the Rev. Gwen Ament and Clerk Caroline Mills, with the help and support of the Rev. Keith McKee and the Rev. Andrew Thompson. But it was a team effort by gracious and enthusiastic presbyters from the Presbyteries of London, Huron Perth and Lambton-West Middlesex who made the visit so positive. Several reconciliation presentations and videos, including Hummingbird's, followed by informed questions, revealed awareness of regional residential schools, colonialism and a genuine interest in healing the relationship with Indigenous people. Gloria Thomson, a Métis woman, was one of the presenters.

A table full of brochures and books on reconciliation with Indigenous people, displayed in the foyer, got a lot of attention. The main course at lunch was catered by a local Indigenous family, Mike Doxator, his sister Janet and his niece, who served Bannok tacos.

After lunch, a group of about 70 people, including the Rev. Andrew Thomson, gathered in a Circle. I was moved by some who shared from their hearts, genuinely willing to heal the relationship with Indigenous people.

St. Marys Presbyterian congregation were grateful that a moderator had come to celebrate their 175th anniversary with them, as moderators don't normally visit churches with no pastor (their pastor has just retired). I preached, shared a Cree drum song and a story with the children. They were curious and interested, two repeating the Cree words perfectly. Others demonstrated the gifts of voice, dance, acting; while one told a story and asked questions like a little preacher. I love children and these ones were special. God bless them.

Thanks to the Rev. Gwen Ament, retired pastor who chauffeured me from London to St.

Marys and Crieff Hills for the Assembly Council meeting. Before taking me to the Riverside B&B, Gwen took me to view the beautiful and creative Christmas light display, a project the town of St. Marys is proud to say they created together. Thanks to St. Marys Presbyterian Church members and Marie and John Stevens at Riverside for their kindness, hospitality, stories and meals.

After Assembly Council, it was Toronto, and a flight to Edmonton to attend the National Indigenous Ministries Council before heading home to beautiful British Columbia.



Mary with the children at St. Marys Presbyterian Church.



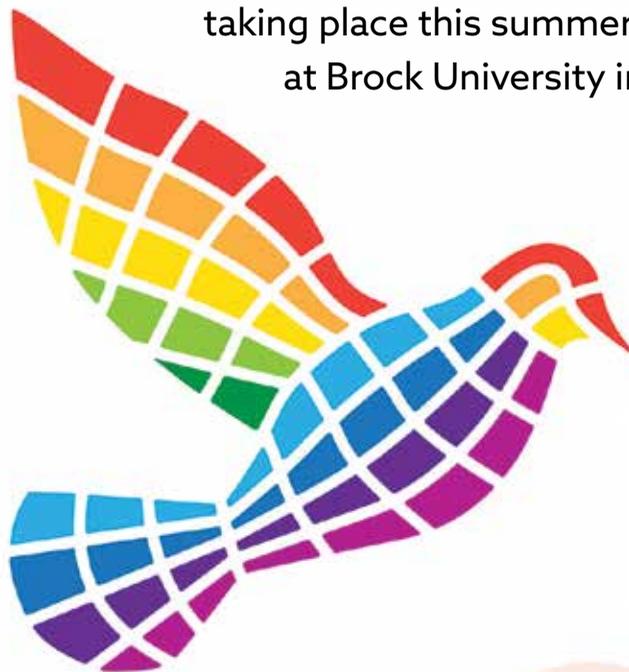
The Sharing Circle at Presbyterian College.



Registration  
begins  
April 15

To learn more,  
visit  
[presbyterian.ca/lift](http://presbyterian.ca/lift)

The Presbyterian Church in Canada  
has partnered with the United Church of Canada  
for **lift 2024**, a youth event  
taking place this summer, July 3-7, 2024,  
at Brock University in St. Catharines, Ont.



**Audacious  
HOPE**  
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As with previous youth events (formally "Canada Youth"), there will be three streams: Youth (Grade 9, 18 years of age), Young Adults (19-25 years of age) and Leadership (18 years and over). Each stream will focus on that group's unique needs and faith expression, exploring **Audacious Hope** through activities, learning, worship, prayer, relationship building and fun.

# Worship as Faithful Habit

By the Rev. Dr. Emily Bisset

While there is something shocking and immediate about encountering God, many of us may not experience God in our lives quite in this way.

For many of us, God may come quietly into our lives, take up residence in our routines and simply become a part of the very fabric of our existence. If that is true for you, you are probably in the habit of worship.

Most of the time, when we talk about habits in our culture, we talk about how to break bad habits. All of us have bad habits that we would like to overcome. Our lives are full of habits. A habit is anything that you do regularly that gives your life shape and

order. Some of those habits are unhelpful, like eating a big bowl of ice cream every night before bed. Some of those habits are helpful, like brushing your teeth before you leave the house in the morning. Behavioural scientists say that, on average, it takes 21 days to form a habit—helpful or unhelpful. And once you are in the habit of doing anything, it is much easier to keep on doing it.

A friend commented to me that it used to bother her when people in the church she was serving said, “I have just fallen out of the habit of worship.” She said she felt as though they were treating worship too lightly—as just a habit. And while, on one level, it is not desirable to go to church *only* because it is “something you just

do,” on another level, that is what worship is...and even should be.

My father often says that if it weren’t for my mother, he would probably never have gone to church much as an adult. He has a lot of questions about the church and the church’s teaching. But my mother insisted, and he agreed. He sings in the choir at church every Sunday. Because of that commitment, he probably goes to church more than the

average person—singing at two services on a Sunday sometimes or helping lead the worship service at the nursing home. He has been in the habit of going to our church for 30 years.

One night, we went out for a walk and got on the topic of God and church. He talked about still having lots of questions about faith. In fact, his questions and critiques of the church are as important for shaping and deepening

his faith as the things he enjoys and agrees with. But more than all that, he goes to church every week and listens and participates. And doing that has shaped his life. Just as we were coming back to the house, he said, “You know, I think I am being reached.”

Worship is a faithful habit that you can cultivate or lose. It is something you do every week. When you don’t go, you miss it. Someone said to me once, “I didn’t make it to church this week, and it makes the weeks in between feel so long.” But when you get in the habit of going to worship, it shapes your life, gives order to your week, and infuses your life with pattern and meaning. It’s a helpful habit. It is a life-giving habit. Because of that, one of the most important things we can do for our children is take them to worship. When worship becomes part of the fabric of your life from the time you are very young, the habit tends to stick. And if it doesn’t and you wander away, old habits have a knack for returning.



# How Do We Know We’re Being Inclusive?

By Carragh Erhardt,  
Program Coordinator,  
Sexuality and Inclusion

There is a conversation that often arises in my work of helping congregations to become more inclusive of LGBTQI2+ people. “I think my congregation is inclusive, but it hasn’t been tested. How can we know if we’re fully LGBTQI2+ inclusive?”

This is a great question, and to answer it, I find that it’s helpful to start by exploring what we mean by the word inclusion. Many people hear “full inclusion,” and their first thought goes to policies about marriage and ordination that allow for same-sex marriage and for openly LGBTQI2+ people to serve as ministers and elders. Marriage and ordination are important aspects of the church’s ministry, and it is good for Sessions to clearly communicate their policies about these matters within their congregation and their wider community. However, these are only two of the ways that the church’s ministry interacts with the lives of people in our congregations and our wider communities.

Lily Zheng, a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion expert, defines inclusion as, “The achievement of an environment that all stakeholders, especially underserved and

marginalized populations, trust to be respectful and accountable. Inclusion is achieved through actions that explicitly counter present-day and historical inequities and meet the unique needs of all populations.”<sup>1</sup>

This definition, while being specific about qualities like trust, respect, accountability and intentional actions, is broad in terms of identities. Lily understands that inclusive organizations recognize and meet the unique needs of everyone they intend to serve. Some of those needs might seemingly compete, but Lily believes that it is worthwhile and possible to come up with solutions where everyone benefits.

Lily’s definition of inclusion reminds me of what one of our subordinate standards, *Living Faith*, has to say about how we understand love. *Living Faith* describes God’s love as a source by which we are nurtured daily—a warm and gentle compassion. We respond to the love of God, who is love, by loving in return. Love is the service of others; it is the road to Christian maturity and is the way of seeing others as God sees them. Love follows the example of Jesus Christ.

Respect reflects due regard or care for the feelings, wishes, needs and rights of others. In

*Living Faith*, we profess that justice—which follows the section on love—involves protecting the rights of others. Accountability means taking responsibility for the impacts of a person’s actions. As Christians, we know that when we cause pain or harm, accountability involves a process of repentance, restoration and making amends. Christian expressions of love necessitate respect for and accountability to all our neighbours.

To ask whether a congregation is LGBTQI2+ inclusive is to ask whether it has created an environment that all stakeholders of all genders and sexual orientations, especially LGBTQI2+ people, trust to be respectful and accountable. You might ask: Are we meeting the unique needs of gay people in our community? How about the needs of transgender people? Likewise, are we meeting the unique needs of straight and cisgender people? Are we meeting the needs of people who are single as well as people who have children? These identities and life circumstances influence what each of us needs at different times in our faith journeys.

It may seem impossible to meet the variety of needs present in a church community. The work of inclusion is not to achieve all of this overnight. It is an ever-evolving



process that varies depending on the context. There are steps that all congregations may take, regardless of their policy on same-sex marriage. Inclusion work requires asking lots of questions, and taking great care in the discernment of what we may need to change to better serve our communities. This work can involve uncomfortable conversations and challenge us to reconsider aspects of ministry that we thought were working just fine. It can also draw us closer to God and one another, help us imagine new possibilities and

strengthen our faith.

*Congregations seeking assistance on how to become more inclusive of LGBTQI2+ people can contact Carragh Erhardt for conversations, speaking engagements and help reviewing policies at [cerhardt@presbyterian.ca](mailto:cerhardt@presbyterian.ca) or 1-800-619-7301 ext. 278.*

#### FOOTNOTE

1 Lily Zheng, *DEI Deconstructed: Your No-Nonsense Guide to Doing the Work and Doing it Right* (Oakland: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2022), pp. 50–53.

# Online Ministry: Social Connection for Families Living with Dementia

By Alice Post, Coordinator of Side by Side Online, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta.

In Christian community, we have a deep understanding of the importance of connection, shared experience and mutual support. Part of how we grow in faith in community is through time spent together in worship and in service. Social connection is important for our emotional, spiritual and mental health, and our overall well-being.

Many people living with dementia experience social isolation and loneliness. Changes in brain health make it more difficult to navigate social situations, so many opt out of social activities they previously enjoyed. At St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., Side by Side Online



is one way that we offer supportive and understanding interaction to families living with dementia.

Side by Side Online incorporates a variety of engaging social activities in a one-hour online meeting once a week. We begin with a conversation time to check in with how people are doing. We listen to music together, including both secular and sacred

songs. Participants can request favourite songs. A devotion time provides opportunity for meaningful encounters with scripture. We laugh together over a game and/or a word search before our time together ends with a favourite song.

It's obviously not the same as meeting in person, but we have realized that an online format has

its own set of gifts and advantages, including small things like song lyrics being easier to read on a computer screen. In addition, we can easily use images on a PowerPoint presentation to facilitate our devotion time discussion and make it more concrete and meaningful for someone living with dementia.

More obvious advantages are that people can join from anywhere, and there is no commute! These features have meant that we can keep in touch with families longer, even when the person living with dementia has moved into care.

While some participants living with dementia are able to join an online gathering on their own, many do need assistance from their care partner. One of the significant gifts of online ministry

has been the opportunity to get to know more of the family!

The ultimate reality of online ministry is that something is better than nothing. It's not complicated; even an hour of weekly social time can enable meaningful relationships and make a difference. When it's the only connection available, it can mean a lot.

If you or a family member are living with dementia, St. Andrew's Calgary invites you to a weekly Side by Side Online online gathering from the comfort of your home. Those who feel called to make a faithful response to those living with dementia are also invited to join.

For questions, or if you're interested in taking part, please contact Alice at [sidebyside.online@standrewscalgary.ca](mailto:sidebyside.online@standrewscalgary.ca) for the Zoom link and meeting details.

# Presbytery of Ottawa Fall Retreat

By the Rev. Liz Chan, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Kars, Ont., and Osgoode Presbyterian Church in Vernon, Ont.

Listening to God's voice; listening for God's invitations. When you hear this phrase, what do you think of?

Maybe you think of laughing around the breakfast table with people you'd previously only seen online before. Or maybe you think of small group *lectio divina*, holy reading of scripture for personal spiritual formation. Perhaps it reminds you of conversations around the question, "How have we seen God act in the past in our church?" Or maybe it takes you back to when you were worshipping authentically with someone you'd disagreed with at a business meeting.

The ministers and elders in the Presbytery of Ottawa gathered at Galilee Retreat Centre in Arnprior, Ont., in November 2023. Approximately 30 ministers and elders attended. The Rev. Dr. David Sherbino from Tyndale University led us in ways to listen to God's voice in our lives, together and individually. As a presbytery, we read the book *When Church Stops Working* (2023) and had authors the Rev. Dr. Blair Bertrand and Dr. Andrew Root take us through discussion and questions.

We were together from Sunday dinner until Tuesday dinner. David spoke with us in the areas of spiritual practices, leading us each morning with worship and communion, followed by teachings on solitude, silence, *lectio divina* (divine reading) and praying for each other. Andy and Blair addressed themes from their book, particularly how to continue seeking God's action in our church communities rather than focusing anxiously upon decline in resources, finances and membership.

One of the goals of this retreat was to bring the members of the presbytery together to get to know each other outside regular meetings, and in person. Another desire was to encourage us in God's mission in the world together as Jesus' followers. These goals were fulfilled in different ways, which is encouraging for us all.

Some comments from those who attended:

"I learned how to pray in a different way."

"I didn't really want to go but I'm so glad I did. I really enjoyed getting to know people at presbytery better. Now they aren't so scary."

"I grew in my faith in God and want to learn more about solitude and breath prayer."

"I learned so much about how to relate to my congregation



Photos from the Presbytery of Ottawa fall retreat.

and Session, so I am ready to begin to rely on God more."

"It was great to get to know other presbyters and to hear their stories. I hope it will improve how we disagree with each other at presbytery."

"The retreat helped me to hear



God inviting me into closer connection, to listen deeply to his voice."

Psalm 133 was used as one of the morning reflections, and it

sums up the retreat time: "How good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!...For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore"

# Q&A with the Rev. Dr. Richard Topping

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

The Rev. Dr. Richard Topping was recently the guest preacher at Grace Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., for the “Preaching Grace” event. Preaching Grace is a weekend with multiple in-person and online sessions, held every year through the generosity of the Montgomery family. This year’s event had the theme of “Scripture: Play and Possibility.” Details on the 2025 event will be posted in the Fall at [gracechurch-calgary.com](http://gracechurch-calgary.com). The following is a Q&A with Dr. Topping about the event’s theme.

The Rev. Dr. Richard Topping, President and Vice-Chancellor and Professor of Studies in the Reformed at Vancouver School of Theology (VST), and other curious Christians explored the question, “Can we play with scripture?” at Preaching Grace, an annual weekend series that looks at big questions in Christianity. In this Q&A, Dr. Topping shares his perspectives on play in scripture, faith and how playfulness can open us up to God.

## What does “scripture: play and possibility” mean?

Scripture is full of play. There are many examples of playfulness in the Bible. Women become pregnant in their nineties, Jesus talks of impossibilities (it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter Heaven), Eutychus, whose name means lucky, falls asleep while Paul is preaching, drops out a window into the street and is injured, is healed and sent on his way, lucky fellow. The Bible is God speaking to us. It is a living word, and the playfulness in it

opens us up to God and the Holy Spirit.

The nice thing about play: it means that when preachers prepare to preach, or Christians read the Bible, we’re at home with what we’re doing and we’re not so nervous about the right procedures. We’re engaged in taking up a conversation. You can be playful when you know the rules and they are inscribed on your life. To play jazz, you must be classically trained. Otherwise, it’s a mess. When you have been formed—now you can be playful. You can be open to the alternatives that the Bible is offering. You can engage without constantly referring to the right way. It gets written on your life and now you can do improvisation because you know where the keys are.

Being playful means engaging—trying it on for size; finding delights in the Bible and even with a sense of humour and love. Reading something and thinking, “There’s a possibility I hadn’t considered,” rather than shutting it down. You’re seeing things you had never imagined before.

## How do you think about scripture and play?

When I hear the word *play*, I think of a play, a drama. We do that in church in a liturgy. We have a script that we follow, and we’re used to it. There is a real sense of movement. People are standing and sitting, scripture is read in a certain pattern. We’re listening to texts that offer us a world that we don’t live in yet.

The disruption of that is incredible. Sometimes in church when a script is read where things are so out of keeping with the way the world is, you look up and you see everybody smile. There’s a kind

of delight in this real weirdness in the script we’re reading. An example is Advent. We often read about how sober and alert and awake we should be as Jesus is coming soon—at the same time, people are going to office parties. The disjunction is delightful if you are open to it. It’s outrageous.

## How does scripture allow for play between people of different eras, locations and generations?

Something that happens when you sit down to read the Bible, whether by yourself or in a group, is that it allows playfulness with others. You never read the Bible alone. Even when you sit by yourself and read it, you read as the person you have become. There’s the influence of your parents, communities you may have worshipped in. Sometimes you consult other books, which I think of as a communion of the saints. You are always reading together with others who have read this before.

You can read about views and commune with others. When you commune with a Medieval person, such as Bernard of Clairvaux—also known as Saint Bernard—he described the Bible as the wine cellar of the Holy Spirit. He must have found it intoxicating. His view was that this was why people want to spend so



The Rev. Dr. Richard Topping.

much time there. He obviously found joy and delight in the reading of the Bible, not as an artifact from the past, but as a living reality. When you read it, you can commune with Bernard. If you think of the Bible as the wine cellar of the Holy Spirit, you have to ask yourself, “Okay, so how do I now interact with it?” You want to spend your time there. It’s all-consuming. It leads you to be open to God.

## How do you see playfulness in the Bible?

The Bible allows you not only to be playful, and playful with others, but shows the playfulness of God and the Holy Spirit. Both are active when we read the Bible and help us see things we cannot see.

When we read, we often place ourselves in different roles. We like to put ourselves in the role of the hero. This is when you read the Bible and see yourself as always being the good person while others are always the bad person. You are the Good Samaritan while someone else is the person who passes by on the road.

The Holy Spirit makes the point, well, no, let’s move these parts around. You might be the person who passes by on the other side. When I read the Good Samaritan, I get all playful and think about what I might do as a religious person. Maybe I pass by but when I get to the next town, I start a committee for the homeless and those beaten up by the side of the road, rather than getting engaged. Put yourself not in the hero’s place, but in all the roles.

There is a playfulness at work in the Bible with God that shows it not as dead letters but as living written word.

## How can we be more playful?

We can be playful when we realize that not everything is up to us—it is in God’s hands. We can be free to be human knowing God is at work in the world, and we are part of that work. Sometimes, playfulness leads to serious change. We might say something offhand that we instantly forget, but later learn that someone else heard it in a way that profoundly impacted their life. This is God at work.

In the Bible, there are many acts of impossibility—Jesus tells the disciples that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than a rich man to go into heaven. Scholars got into discussing the eye of the needle as a small entrance into Jerusalem, and this shows you how Biblical interpretation works. The disciples got it right away—it was impossible. They asked Jesus who they could possibly save. Jesus says you can’t, but God can do it. God can do anything.



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# VST Sunday

*By yaxšiqiml (Natika Bock) on the Traditional and Unceded Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc within the Secwépemcúl'ecw. The Secwépemc maintain a spiritual and reciprocal relationship with the land, water, air, animals, plants and all things needed for life. Natika is a Master of Divinity student at Vancouver School of Theology/St. Andrew's Hall and is a member of Trinity Presbyterian Church in New Westminster, B.C.*

VST (Vancouver School of Theology) Sunday is an annual event in which the VST community of students, staff, faculty and alumni are invited into local churches to represent VST by preaching or leading worship and/or being available to share resources and VST swag—the pens are always a hit!

VST Sunday 2024 took place on Jan. 28. This year, there were

38 sermons delivered by the VST community, and another 14 churches that agreed to share our promotional and educational materials. Of the 50 or so participating churches, seven were Presbyterian while others were different denominations, and most of these churches were centralized within the Greater Vancouver Area. We also wanted to include the multitude of church communities outside our typical VST catchment, so we directly reached out in request of prayers for the day. So, why do we do this?

The purpose of VST Sunday is threefold. First, it's a statement and a reminder for the VST community that we exist for the service of God's church and for the world that God loves. Second, to remind participating churches that they play a vital role in the spiritual-theological formation of



The Rev. Jane D. Gingrich, pastor at Hills of Peace Lutheran Church, and Natika Bock.

VST students. Finally, VST Sunday is a way to encourage congregations to come alongside us on this theological journey as we are forming and being formed into thoughtful, engaged and gener-

ous Christian leaders.

This VST Sunday, I preached at Hills of Peace Lutheran Church, located on the unceded and ancestral homelands of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc within

the Secwepemcúl'ecw (Kamloops, B.C.). Like the rest of us who chose to participate, when I said yes, it was with enthusiasm! I said "Of course," before the reality and enormity of the winter semester set in. I said "Yes!" without payment or the benefit of a letter grade enhancement. I enlisted because I like visiting other churches; I tend to do better when Christ-serving is interactive and embedded in direct practical experience; and I'm interested in pursuing new worshipping communities that are rooted in dialogical liberation, holacracy and decolonial love.

This year, as I prayed and reflected on my sermon, I had a strong sense to speak on the Gospel of Mark and inclusive language. On this VST Sunday, I was glad to be able to pass along a message from our Reconciler to those who have been praying on it for some time.

E'er embosomed and lullabied by our Mother of All, hear what the Spirit is saying.

# Diversity Award in London

*By Kathy MacDonald, Office Administrator, Oakridge Presbyterian Church in London, Ont.*

The Mission and Outreach team at Oakridge Presbyterian Church in London, Ont., was recognized by the City of London with a Diversity, Race Relations and Inclusivity Award.

On Nov. 28, the Rev. Tim Archibald and members of Mission and Outreach attended a reception and ceremony at London City Hall for the presentation of the awards. Four other organizations were also recognized. The Rev. Tim gave an address highlighting our congregation's ministry, and our partnership with 12 other agencies (including Oneida Nation of the Thames, Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Mission Services, Ark Aid and SW Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre) in distributing dry soup mix and



Folashade Fadiya, Sook Chang, the Rev. Dr. Tim Archibald (back row), Diane Staines, Lois Lake, Mayor Josh Morgan and Doug Jamieson.

volunteering to feed the hungry. In the past year, over 180,000 servings of soup have been dis-

tributed through OPC's ministry. Special thanks to Doug Jamieson and Sharon Deebrah for their

leadership in helping to establish our partner relationships. And most especially thanks and praise

to God for opening these doors for us to serve and be Good News for people in our city.



## HELPFUL ONLINE RESOURCES

For Members, Treasurers, Presbytery Clerks & Clerks of Session

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

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

# Truth and Reconciliation in Montreal

*By Keith Randall and the Rev. Susan Brasier, Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul in Montreal, Quebec.*

On the evening of September 30, a day when thousands of orange-shirted Montrealers filled the streets and Mount Royal trails to honour the sad memory of those lost in residential schools, the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul hosted its second annual inter-spiritual Truth & Reconciliation Service.

As it did last year, the service highlighted Indigenous participants, including Innu singer-songwriter Shait and PCC Moderator, the Rev. Mary Fontaine, who had a busy few days in the city with a visit to Presbyterian College, a joyous evening with la Commu-

nauté Chrétienne Siloé, and a tour of nearby Kahnawake's Cultural Centre, as well as a long conversation with Mohawk Councillor Arnold Boyer. And she preached the following day in the World Communion Sunday service.

In her Truth and Reconciliation sermon, the Rev. Fontaine said that listening is a synonym of love. "Listening affirms people. By listening, you're saying 'I care. I love you. You're important.'"

Those who listened to Kahnawake Elder Don Barnaby's reflection will long remember a generous gesture of reconciliation. He had been hesitant to accept the invitation. "It is hard for me to be here," he began, gazing around the massive neo-Gothic church before recounting



The Rev. Dr. Fontaine (left) and the Rev. Susan Brasier share the Call to Worship.

his Mi'kmaq youth on the shore of Chaleur Bay, with a mother who was abused in residential schools, his early adult challenges, and the embrace of his Indigenous identity and spirituality. Don is now a well-known dancer at powwows across the continent, and, with his wife, Candia, operates Healingstitches, a successful company producing traditional string skirts.

Others taking part included former moderator the Rev. Dr. Robert Faris, who offered Prayers of the People, and a choir of regular and volunteer singers led by conductor Léa Moisan-Perrier and organist Jonas Apeland, whose gentle touch was perfect for the occasion.



Shait sings of Pashiku, a lake in Mistassini, Québec.

"Some may have experienced the event as a failure that ran way longer than our usual Sundays," said the Rev. Susan Brasier, Associate Minister for Community Connections and Care, as all enjoyed post-service Bannock, Labrador tea and conversation. "But our Indigenous guests viewed it as our greatest success. Wanting to take the time necessary to respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to learn about our history, to share stories and be in each other's company is a real mile marker in our progress to reconcile and bring healing."

*The Truth and Reconciliation Service can still be seen on St. Andrew and St. Paul's YouTube site.*



Don Barnaby.

# New Minister in Cape Breton



Pictured (left to right) are: the Rev. Lydia MacKinnon, who delivered the charge; Joanne Coull; the Rev. D. Coull; the Rev. Peter MacDonald, Moderator of Cape Breton Presbytery; and the Rev. Corrie Stewart, who delivered the message at the Induction Service.

*By Charles Greaves, Clerk of Session, Bethel Presbyterian Church in Sydney, N.S.*

The Presbytery of Cape Breton met on Sunday afternoon, December 17, in Bethel Presbyterian Church in Sydney, N.S., to induct the Rev. David F. Coull as minister of Bethel Church.

The Rev. Coull was ordained on December 2 by the Presbytery of

Vancouver Island. David served as an elder in that presbytery before completing his Master of Divinity at Vancouver School of Theology. David is originally from New Zealand, came to Canada and taught chemistry before joining the Canadian Armed Forces where he served for 15 years, the last several of which he worked closely with an Army chaplain. Through this experi-

ence, David realized a calling to Christian ministry. David and his wife, Joanne, felt called to travel from the West Coast of Canada to the East Coast, and accepted a call to Bethel Church in the Cape Breton Presbytery. Bethel has welcomed David and Joanne and pray that their ministry here will be a blessing to them and the Cape Breton area.

## Leading with Care Policy Updated

The PCC is committed to providing safe environments within its ministries

Learn more about the updated Leading with Care policy at [presbyterian.ca/lwc](http://presbyterian.ca/lwc)



## BALLOT FOR THE MODERATOR

Each year, presbyteries nominate people for the church to consider electing as Moderator of the General Assembly. Members of presbyteries (ministers/diaconal ministers and representative elders) vote to appoint the Moderator-elect in advance of the General Assembly, which takes place in early June. For a name to appear on the ballot for

Moderator, each candidate must be nominated by a minimum of two presbyteries.

This year, four names will appear on the ballot to elect the Moderator of the 2024 General Assembly. On Tuesday, April 2, the Committee to Advise with the Moderator will meet and confirm the vote count before the name of the Moderator-elect is

announced to the church. The Moderator-elect's name will be presented to the General Assembly in June, and commissioners will then decide to confirm the Moderator of the 149th General Assembly.

Candidates for Moderator of the General Assembly are asked to submit their biography along with answers to a series of

questions that all candidates are asked to answer in order to help the church come to know the candidates better. Below is a lightly edited and abbreviated version of each candidate's biography and their answers to only some of the questions they addressed. **Learn more about the nominees at [presbyterian.ca/nominees-2024](https://presbyterian.ca/nominees-2024).**



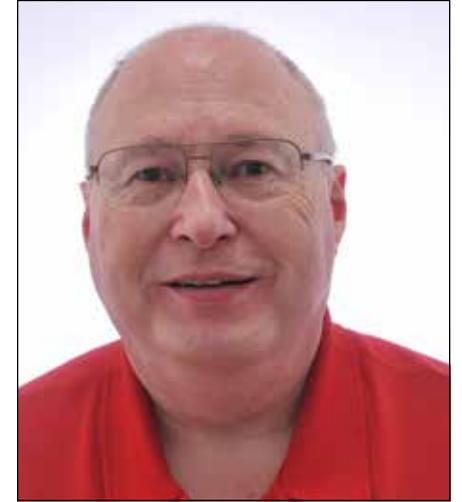
The Rev. Harry Currie



The Rev. Dr. Patricia Dutcher-Walls



The Rev. In Kee Kim



David A. Robinson

### The Rev. Harry Currie

The Rev. Harry Currie graduated from Knox College, Toronto, in 1983, and went to Armstrong, B.C., for his ordained mission appointment. In addition to serving congregations in Arthur/Gordonville and Oshawa, Ont., Yorkton/Dunleath, Sask., and Summerside, P.E.I., Harry has served at First Presbyterian Church in Edmonton, Alta., for the last 20 years. He is currently the clerk of the Synod of Alberta and of the new Presbytery of the Northwest that amalgamated three presbyteries and covers two-thirds of Alberta, the northeast corner of British Columbia and two of the three Territories.

#### What are some key moments of your faith journey and how have they informed the person you are today?

I grew up attending a Methodist church in England and then a United Church of Canada congregation when we moved back to Canada when I was ten. As a child I didn't really think much about God or talk to God. Going to church was something I and my brothers did because our mother made us go, even when I wanted to watch Batman on TV on a Sunday. But my mother would make us go to church.

When I was about 13, my mother changed churches and took us to a Baptist church. It was there that I first really started thinking about God and made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ. After a few years, I joined a large Pentecostal church that had a big youth group, a choir, a band, a gospel group and the pastor's daughter, who I wanted to date.

What I learned from those evangelical days was foundational for my relationship with Jesus. Although I have grown in a different direction, those were good days with lots of fun, times of prayer, exuberant worship and learning about what it means to

have a relationship with Christ.

It was first at a church camp that I felt called to ministry and spent a year in Bible college after high school. One time visiting my father in Ontario, I went to Knox Presbyterian Church in Cambridge and somehow God spoke to me. It was like I heard a voice saying that this is where I could be a minister.

In some ways I came home to a similar tradition with which I grew up, but with a new sense of sharing about Jesus Christ. I met the minister, the Rev. Bob Jackson, who helped me in the discernment process, and I went to Knox College.

Knox College was not easy for me. I had been a mathematician and now I had to write essays. It was also difficult theologically, coming from an evangelical background and being forced not to accept a party line but to think for myself, and being faced with all kinds of theologies I had not even known existed.

Doing an internship at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Kitchener, Ont., helped put a lot of things into focus, as I was able to talk things out a lot with the assistant minister. I was introduced to some theologians, to good books, to practical experience and to more thinking and discerning.

That whole process at Knox College and this internship changed me and made me a thinker, a preacher, a learner and a person who wanted to follow Jesus wherever Jesus was leading me.

#### If you were elected Moderator, what interests would you bring to the role?

One interest I would like to bring to the role is that of spirituality. In a time of much change, when the church is changing rapidly and there is a plethora of different theologies, and in a time when many have turned away from the church, I think that

spiritual health is an important factor.

About 25 years ago, a retired Presbyterian minister from the United States was chaplain to ministers in the Synod of the Atlantic Provinces. Charles Taylor introduced me to the daily office and to a practice of daily scripture reading and prayer. I wonder if we could emphasize for all Presbyterians the value of spiritual practices, prayer, scripture, meditation... but not just those classic practices, rather practices that give people peace and that connect them with the divine, such as silence, story, nature, walking, healing, embracing one's pain, service and other practices.

Along with spiritual health, I think we could also do more with emotional health. The PCC health and dental plan has increased the amount for our people to get professional help, but emotional help can be valuable in situations before there is a crisis. I am wondering if churches, presbyteries and synods could pick up on valuable educational opportunities to bring in professionals and have workshops on various kinds of health issues, and especially emotional health issues, like communication, conflict, family dynamics, the importance of play and fun, listening, being calm, making decisions. Whenever we bring a bit of health to one part of the system it brings health to the whole system.

### The Rev. Dr. Patricia Dutcher-Walls

Patricia Dutcher-Walls is an active Session member and minister-in-association with Trinity Presbyterian Church, a three-congregation amalgamation and transformational ministry in New Westminster and Burnaby, B.C. She retired as Professor of Hebrew Bible and Dean of the Faculty at Vancouver School of Theology on July 1, 2021. During her vocation as a profes-

sor, Pat published five books on the social world and interpretation of the Old Testament, authored several scholarly articles and presented numerous papers at academic conferences.

#### What are some key moments of your faith journey and how have they informed the person you are today?

Growing up in a Presbyterian family, I recall the quiet, thoughtful faith of my home church through the example of our minister whose sermons communicated that one's faith deserved intelligent engagement. In the high school youth group of that same church, when I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour, I discovered the joyful enthusiasm of believing. As I matured in faith, both of those youthful experiences taught me how authentic faith could be understood and lived in different ways, integrated within the life of a follower of Christ.

At university, I became involved with a Christian group on campus that was inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and participated in an anti-racism campaign and protest. That experience shaped my life-long commitment to living out my faith in ways that embody Christian values of justice and compassion. This commitment has carried through in my continued activism on social issues, such as affordable housing, and in my most frequently taught course, in which the strong words of the prophet Amos encourages students to create their own biblically based responses to current social justice issues.

As a ministry student, I discovered with amazement and joy how much fun it is to read Hebrew and do my own translations. A language shapes the world, and learning Hebrew opened the ancient world of the Hebrew Bible in ways that still inspire me to this day. Understanding the Bible

## BALLOT FOR THE MODERATOR

becomes an encounter with a living God who speaks into our hearts, minds and lives through the words of ancient texts. Preaching from that living word and helping faithful people listen well to the Bible have been the heart of my vocation as a teacher and preacher.

Motivated by a desire to learn and be an ally for Indigenous people, throughout my years in Vancouver I have volunteered with Hummingbird Ministries Council, the group that has sustained the Rev. Mary Fontaine in carrying out her ministries of healing and reconciliation. Mary became a mentor for me as I listened to the stories of Indigenous elders and learned how to support her work of truth telling, peace-making and healing. This engagement has shaped how I think about the gospel interacting with culture, as I have yet much to learn about my own complicity in harm caused to Indigenous people and ways I can contribute to justice and healing.

### **If you were elected Moderator, what interests would you bring to the role?**

Two endeavours where I find myself investing my energy these days draw from my experience and would-be efforts I would enjoy contributing to the wider church as Moderator. First, I would love to share my enthusiasm for lively Bible studies that bring new insights to scripture and empower people to read the Bible well—and have fun doing it! The Bible is the witness to God's love for the world through the stories, psalms, prophetic writings, wisdom, traditions, gospels and letters of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament; it is the heart of our faith. Learning more about the times of its writing and ways it communicates its truths can enliven and energize the people of God. Second, I would be glad to bring whatever encouragement I could for exploring ways the church can imagine new futures for itself. The cultural changes of Canadian society have presented challenges for congregations, but there are lots of possibilities for new life in reimagining what the church could be. It would be fun to learn about what congregations are already experimenting with and to encourage stories of witness and service for the neighbours whose lives we touch.

### **The Rev. In Kee Kim**

Born in Seoul, Korea, the Rev. In

Kee Kim immigrated to Canada in 1977 with his mother and younger brother. He graduated from Knox College with the Master of Divinity degree in 1987 and was ordained at the Toronto Korean Presbyterian Church. In 1992, In Kee felt called to serve at a new start-up church, Living Stone Church. The congregation joined The Presbyterian Church in Canada in 1995 and went on to amalgamate with North York Church. With the vision of church unity, the name was changed to St. Timothy Church. In Kee is the senior pastor within a multi-staff context. In Kee played a key role in the creation of the two Han-Ca Presbyteries and was the first clerk of the Presbytery of Eastern Han-Ca.

### **What are some key moments of your faith journey and how have they informed the person you are today?**

I can see two key moments in my faith journey. The first one was when I was in university. I was involved in the Korean Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. This involvement helped me tremendously by giving me a sense of belonging and a purpose for life during the difficult years of living as an immigrant in a foreign country at a young age. During this time, I received a calling to go into ministry. In this phase of my faith journey, I experienced the mysterious work of God that controls human history. I wanted to be a part of it.

The second one was when I was in the final year of studies at Knox College. I came to the realization that Jesus' life had very much to do with the marginalized people of his time. This idea of marginality profoundly affected me. That discovery propelled me to explore my immigrant experience in a critical way. Jesus' teaching was not just to comfort and pacify my suffering but also to empower me to embrace my marginalized existence and to be in solidarity with those who were marginalized in different ways. Jesus' teaching was not just to help me to adjust and adapt to this society but also to transform it. The new realization liberated me in a profound and powerful way. I started to see myself not simply as a victim of my harsh reality but as God's instrument in bringing about change. As my eyes were opened, the scripture was also opened up to me. I saw the liberating power of the Word of God. I started hearing the marginalized voices in this society.

This shaped my theology, my ministry and my life.

### **If you were elected Moderator, what interests would you bring to the role?**

Diversity is what I like to see in this church. We should not fear diversity. We can learn so much from those who are different from us. Diversity makes a picture complete. We cannot define ourselves in isolation. Solipsism is not a healthy way of looking at ourselves. We are all connected. We are connected with each other, and we are connected with God. That's why Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love your neighbour as yourself and love your God. Loving your neighbour is the same as loving yourself because we are all connected.

As Moderator, I would like to build a strong bond to connect all of us. From west to east, from north to south, regardless of where you come from or where you are, we are all sisters and brothers in Christ. That was what St. Paul realized after meeting Christ in a meaningful way. "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). We need to reach out to each other. We need to appreciate each other. We need to honour each other. We need to build this church together. That is what I am interested in.

### **David A. Robinson**

David A. Robinson was first elected a ruling elder at the Kirk of St. James in Charlottetown, P.E.I., in 2002. He has been re-elected twice and has been appointed Clerk of Session in all three terms and also serves as Sunday School Superintendent. He is on the leadership team for a \$1.2 million capital campaign, which exceeded its goal. He was instrumental in resettling three refugee families from the Middle East and is now providing extensive support to a family that fled repression in Iran. He is currently helping guide his church through The Presbyterian Church in Canada's New Beginnings congregational renewal program.

### **What are some key moments of your faith journey and how have they informed the person you are today?**

When I left an abusive father to live with my mother, I was 12 years old. We began to attend the

local Baptist church. After one year of Sunday School classes, I asked if I could be baptized. I found the stories of a Saviour who knows you, loves you and protects you very compelling. I wanted to tell the world that I was going to follow that wonderful heavenly friend.

At university, my campus had a very active Anglican chapel. I immediately joined the congregation, participating in the Server's Guild and leading evening prayer services. That was my introduction to lay leadership in the church. I thoroughly enjoyed delivering evening prayers—so much so that I considered the possibility of a career in ministry. As a strong student, however, I was being encouraged to consider a career in academia, and that is what I opted to pursue.

In 1998, when my public service career led me to Charlottetown, my family joined the Kirk of St. James. Both my wife and I actively volunteered and within a couple of years, I was elected an elder. The service of ordination, committing me to a life of leadership and service within the church, was profoundly moving. It opened my eyes to the possibilities for ministry without becoming a teaching elder. In short order, I was asked to become clerk of session. I was tremendously honoured to take on this role and redoubled my work within the church. I became more aware than ever of opportunities for mission and ministry and began to feel that I was fully living into a life in Christ.

In 2021, I assisted a local church that was going through difficult times. I provided summer pulpit supply there for two years and immensely enjoyed the experience. It reinforced the idea that there are less traditional leadership roles that ruling elders can play. It also further confirmed my sense of vocation to mission and ministry that had first blossomed at university.

So, my faith journey has included increasing opportunities for service, an expanding role for leadership and a greater sense of personal vocation to ministry and my Saviour. The church has invited, embraced, sustained and fulfilled me. I have truly been richly blessed!

### **If you were elected Moderator, what interests would you bring to the role?**

As a ruling elder, I would advocate for and promote the purposeful role that ruling elders can

play. My experience of eldership has convinced me that these lay leaders play a pivotal role in the life of the denomination and that they can do more. We are not producing as many teaching elders as we once were. Many congregations are without a minister and many interim moderators have insufficient time to look after all of the needs of vacant congregations. The constant in these vacant congregations is the presence of ruling elders, who know their members well and often have the capacity to deliver pastoral care, lead worship or represent the congregation in the wider community. Some have taken special training in order to preside at communion or have taken lay leadership training at our theological colleges. These individuals are able to step into greater leadership roles in their churches and presbyteries. I would encourage ruling elders who wish to participate more fully in the life of the church to do so.

Reconciliation is a very important issue for me. Within The Presbyterian Church in Canada, there are three reconciliation imperatives: Indigenous reconciliation, reconciliation with LGBTQI people and reconciliation with those who have experienced racism within the body of Christ. We must strive with good faith and sincere efforts to advance all three reconciliation agendas.

Finally, I would want to bring attention to mental health issues. Many church workers, leaders and congregants are coping with fragile mental health. Burnout, stress and depression are widespread. I personally experienced profound and life-threatening depression. When I first fell ill, I prayed that God would heal me. Then, as healing seemed far off, I prayed that God would use me, despite my illness. Now, reconciled to my disability, I pray that God will use me because of my illness. God has purposeful uses for the broken. Christ fulfilled his greatest destiny on the cross, by being entirely broken for us. Paul had to be broken on the road to Damascus before he could take up life as an apostle. There is abundant life and possibility in brokenness. I am more understanding, patient, empathetic and worshipful now than I was before my illness. These are all traits that I believe have made me a better elder and leader. I would want to share my experience and help increase mental health support within the wider church.

# The Presbyterian Church in Canada



## in Ministry Together

780

congregations

102,000

members and adherents

1,254

ministers

11,000

children and youth

Languages and cultures from Taiwan, Korea, China, Ghana, Nigeria, India, Latin America, South East Asia, Indigenous Communities, Quebec and many more are reflected in congregations across Canada.

*(From statistical reports submitted by congregations in 2023)*



### What we believe

The teachings in scripture, read in its historical context, seen through the light of the life of Jesus Christ, and understood with the presence of the Holy Spirit, guide the faith and life of Presbyterians (*Living Faith*). We strongly value biblical and theological education for both clergy and lay people (*PCC Strategic Plan, 2016*).

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has adopted several creeds and confessions over time and made theological and social statements on a variety of issues, which can all be found at [presbyterian.ca](http://presbyterian.ca).

### Where we come from

The Presbyterian Church in Canada was formed in 1875. In 1925, 60 percent of congregations joined Methodists and Congregationalists to form the United Church of Canada; the remaining congregations continued as The Presbyterian Church in Canada. In the 20th century, immigrants from countries with a strong Reformed heritage, including Guyana, Korea, Taiwan, Hungary, Ghana and Nigeria, formed vibrant new congregations.

### What we do

Relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, we

#### Gather

to worship, celebrate the sacraments and learn to be followers of Christ.

#### Study scripture

to discern God's guidance for today and tomorrow.

*(PCC Strategic Plan, 2016)*

#### Work together

to proclaim the love and good news of Jesus Christ through our words and actions.

## What's important to us

Telling the biblical story in ever-new and creative ways.

Pointing to Christ's redemptive work and the Spirit's life-changing presence.

Serving others with the love of Christ.

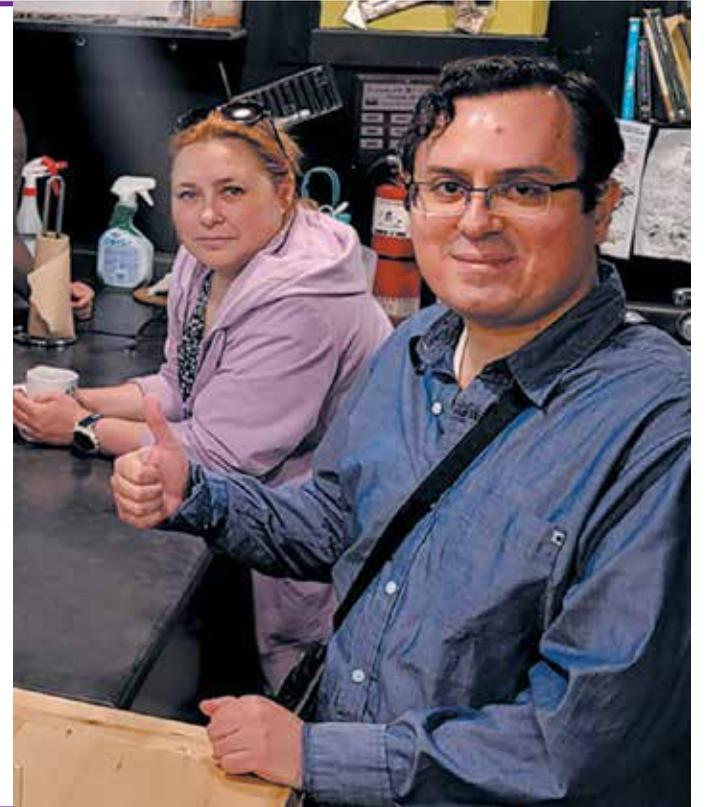
Striving to use God's gifts wisely and fairly for the good of all.

Providing places of sanctuary, tranquility and renewal.

Calling for personal righteousness, justice, and healing and reconciliation in the church and the world.

Learning from people of different denominations and faiths and working together to heal the nations.

*(extracted from Acts & Proceedings of the 121st General Assembly, 1995)*



## How we work together

Presbyterians participate in mission and ministry together by participating in and sharing in the care and oversight of congregational ministry and supporting ministries and outreach at regional, national and international levels. We work together at four different levels, with ministers and elders sharing in leadership at all levels. In 2024:

**780**  
congregations

Members and adherents can participate fully in the life of a congregation. Sessions oversee the overall ministry of congregations, including pastoral care, worship, Christian education, stewardship and mission.

**43**  
Presbyteries

Presbyteries oversee congregations and ministries within its bounds.

**8**  
Synods

Synods bring together presbyteries to work together in mission, supporting learning opportunities and camping ministries.

**1**  
General Assembly

General Assembly receives and discusses reports, overtures and appeals from committees, congregations, presbyteries and synods. Trusting the Holy Spirit, the Assembly makes decisions to guide the ministry of the church at all levels. General Assembly is the highest decision-making body of the church, made up an equal number of ministers and lay leaders representing congregations in presbyteries from across Canada.

## Committees

The work of the denomination is overseen by committees consisting of people nominated by presbyteries and congregations from across Canada. Through committees and working groups, the General Assembly advises the moderator, confirms church doctrine, participates in healing and reconciliation, and supports congregations, Indigenous ministries and more. In 2023, there were over 245 people serving on over 30 committees and working groups. Each year around 200 commissioners from congregations across Canada form the General Assembly to determine the church's direction.

## Boards and Agencies

There are a number of independent boards and agencies that report to the General Assembly and whose mandates support The Presbyterian Church in Canada. They provide theological education and building loans to congregations, administer pension and benefits, run the Presbyterian Church Heritage Centre, provide summer camps and more.

# Using our gifts



to share in God's mission

## How ministry is funded

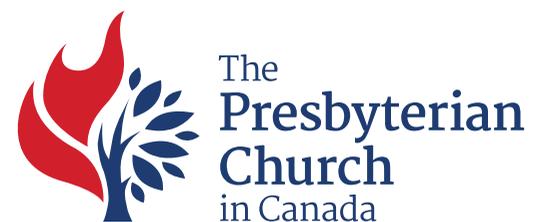
Members and adherents support congregations through offerings and special gifts. According to the statistical reports congregations submitted to the PCC in 2023, \$113 million was given to congregations across Canada to do mission and ministry. From those gifts, congregations conduct vibrant ministry in their communities and share in ministry through presbyteries, synods and the denomination.

Congregations cover ministry costs for their communities and share the expenses of presbyteries and synods through an assessment system set by those bodies and they contribute to Presbyterians Sharing—the operating fund of the denomination—based on a recommended allocation set by the General Assembly. Gifts from individuals, groups and businesses, and through numerous legacy funds established by past generations, augment the gifts from congregations.

In addition, congregations and individuals support development, relief and refugee work through Presbyterian World Service & Development and special international and Canadian funds of the Life & Mission Agency. These funds support a wide variety of work, including creative ministry with children and youth, international mission staff, Indigenous ministry in Canada, experimental ministry or projects, short-term training for lay leaders and support for worship leaders.

The Atlantic Mission Society and Women's Missionary Society also raise funds to support the work of PCC partners in Canada and around the world. Presbyterian camps are run by presbyteries and synods and rely on registration fees, fundraising and special grants from the denomination. Three theological colleges—Knox College, Presbyterian College, St. Andrew's Hall/Vancouver School of Theology—are supported through gifts to Presbyterians Sharing and by raising additional funds from individuals, governments and foundations.

Donate at [presbyterian.ca/donate](https://presbyterian.ca/donate)



In 2023, over

**\$11.5 million**

was given to support the mission and ministry we share together as The Presbyterian Church in Canada:

**\$5.3 million**

was given to **Presbyterians Sharing**

**\$2.9 million**

was given to **Presbyterian World Service & Development**

**\$0.37 million**

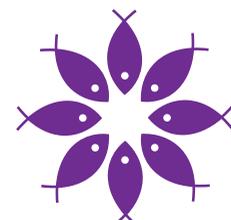
was given to **PWS&D's account** with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank

**\$0.65 million**

was given to other **PCC mission funds** (Indigenous, international, justice and more)

**\$2.3 million**

was given in bequests to **PCC mission and ministry**



*(Preliminary figures as of Feb 1, 2024; still undergoing final verification and audit.)*

Congregations serve and bring people together in their communities for worship and service. Presbyteries, synods and the denomination support congregational, regional, national and international mission and ministry. The ministry of all levels of our church complement and build on one another. Together, we provide funding for ministries and spaces for young people to deepen their faith. We appeal to governments to act and speak for those who have been silenced and marginalized. We commit to caring for God’s world, responding to natural and human-caused disasters and working to address the systemic causes of poverty.

By working together, through the power of God, we accomplish far more than we can ever imagine.

## What our Presbyterians Sharing gifts do

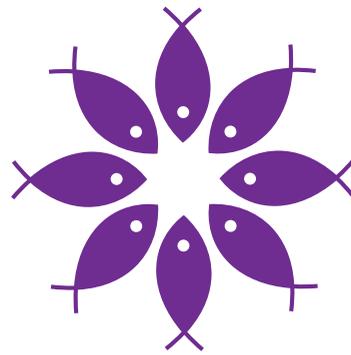
Our gifts to Presbyterians Sharing provide the foundation for what we do together as a denomination. The budget is passed by the General Assembly to support the work the church decides to undertake, seeking to further God’s mission and continue Christ’s ministry in the world.

**Together,** we provide funding for ministries with vulnerable people and appeal to governments to take action and prioritize funding to protect our planet, stop racism and discrimination, eliminate poverty, address missing and murdered Indigenous women, end the overdose and housing crises and more. We acknowledge our footprint on the planet and commit to greening congregational buildings, reducing travel and phasing out single-use plastics. We commit to working for affordable housing for all.

### Out of every \$100 given to Presbyterians Sharing



- \$65 equips ministries in Canada** by providing grants for congregations, camps, theological colleges and other ministries, producing educational resources, hosting webinars and events and supporting governance and justice work.
- \$14** accompanies **mission partners** sharing the good news across the globe
- \$12** supports ministries with **Indigenous people**
- \$9** provides **good stewardship** of gifts with effective finance and administration



**Together,** we equip staff and volunteers to work on national and international programs and provide space and financial management for PWS&D, the Women’s Missionary Society and the Presbyterian Church Building Corporation. We invest and steward long-term investments for congregations and ministries across Canada.

**Together,** we help congregations navigate challenging times and equip leaders through theological colleges, conferences and webinars. Coaches and mentors walk alongside congregations as they seek out new directions. Grants help launch new faith communities and renew established ones. National and regional staff and volunteers help congregations courageously follow where the Holy Spirit is leading.

**Together,** we equip leaders to serve and lead the church around the world and work with international partners to share the good news of Christ. We bring Presbyterians from across Canada to the General Assembly, where they spend time in worship, prayer, reflection and dialogue and seek God’s direction and leadership as decisions are made about how we will work together.

**Together,** we speak up for children’s rights and the protection of refugees, asylum seekers, migrant workers and their families. We fight racism and discrimination. We provide spaces for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to walk together on a journey of healing and reconciliation.

**Together,** we are building a church where all are welcome.

## None of this is possible without your generosity

Thank you for giving to congregations, Presbyterians Sharing, PWS&D and other PCC ministries. When we put our gifts in God’s hands, God does remarkable things.



On Nov. 4, 2023, the Rev. Elkanah Shekari was officially inducted as minister of Forbes Presbyterian Church in Grande Prairie, Alta. Edna Tunke, Moderator of the Presbytery of Peace River, led the induction/ordination service. The service was attended by members of the presbytery and congregation. A lunch and social time followed. The congregation welcomed the Shekari family and look forward to sharing together in worship, prayer and friendship, and in spreading the gospel to others.



Knox Presbyterian Church in Agincourt, Ont., celebrated its 175th anniversary on November 12, 2023. Pictured here is everyone at the 175th Anniversary luncheon and the cake cutting. Greg Olsen served as the event emcee. In the group photo (left to right) are Hugh McGreechan, Bill Adams, the Rev. Sandrah Mashingaidze, Chris Scott and Don Stanbury.



During November, the Women's Missionary Society (WMS) at Knox Presbyterian Church in Tiverton, Ont., held a collection for Evangel Hall. Items collected included toiletries, new underwear and 45 pairs of socks, many sweatshirts, jeans and pants, sweaters, scarfs, toques and coats.



The Lawrie Cormack WMS of Knox Presbyterian Church in Oshawa, Ont., put together Nativity Luminaries. Pictured (left to right) are Lynda Reid, Katherine Allen, Shirley Kedzierski, Susan Slabbert and Loreen Gambell.



Burning Bush Atlantic Mission Society (AMS) members at Bethel Presbyterian Church in Pictou Landing, N.S., prepared "blessing jars" that contained a daily blessing or inspirational quotation. The jars were distributed to the congregation and members of the greater community as a way to start 2024 positively—by letting the community know that the church family was thinking about them daily. Pictured (left to right) are Mary Condon, Connie MacDonald, Ruth Hopkins, Linda Sangster.



Vancouver School of Theology held a workshop/conference in November to share and learn together. Mentors were invited, including many Presbyterian clergy. The event was a success. Pictured here are Presbyterians the Revs. Rebecca Simpson (left) and Paddy Eastwood (second from left), who had attended. Also pictured is the Rev. Mary Nichol (United Church of Canada) and the Rev. Helen Dunn-Wilson (Anglican Church of Canada).



The Knox Frox sewing group at Knox Presbyterian Church in Bobcaygeon, Ont., received a very generous donation from Trentside Baptist Church in the form of a gift card for a local fabric store. In the past, the sewing group has provided quilts to assist in local outreach projects. This picture shows off the quilts that were recently donated to their local Christmas outreach for families in the area. Pictured here are two members of the sewing group, Ellen Roberts from Trentside and Myra Coene from Knox; on the right is Lucy Burke, Trentside Outreach Coordinator. Two other members from the sewing group were unable to be in the photo. The Knox congregation was so happy to partner up and show God's love, while assisting Trentside with their local projects! Also, throughout the year, the Knox Tea and Talk Mission group donates to the local school breakfast program, the local food bank, the Salvation Army Christmas drive, and provides quilts and financial aid to the Women's Resource Center and the Pregnancy Centre, both in Lindsay, Ont.



Two members of Burns Presbyterian Church in Feversham, Ont., were recently inducted as elders on Nov. 12, 2023: Pat Knott and Barb Shier. Pictured here are (left to right): Joan Muir, Barb Shier, the Rev. Jim Wyllie, Pat Knott, Mary Hale.



In June 2023, Kirk Dunn, an elder at Morningside–High Park Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., and known as the “Knitted Pilgrim,” journeyed to Crieff Hills Retreat Centre near Guelph, Ont., to install one of his rainbow “yarn bombs.” More than eight feet tall, the massive rainbow was wrapped around a sugar maple tree at the front entrance. It was a beautiful and eye-catching art installation that spoke of warm hospitality to guests arriving at the retreat centre, as well as to everyone driving by.



On Sunday, Oct. 8, 2023, Glencoe Presbyterian Church in Glencoe, Ont., held a special service for the ordination of new church elders. Pictured in the back row (left to right) are Laurie McGill, Robert McDonald, Clerk of Session Chris Morton, Lu Brule and new elder Jennifer Ryan. In the front row are Rosemary McDonald, new elder Elizabeth VanBilsen, the Rev. Deb Dolbear VanBilsen, Joan Puspoky and Lyn Moniz. Absent from photo, elder John Cameron.



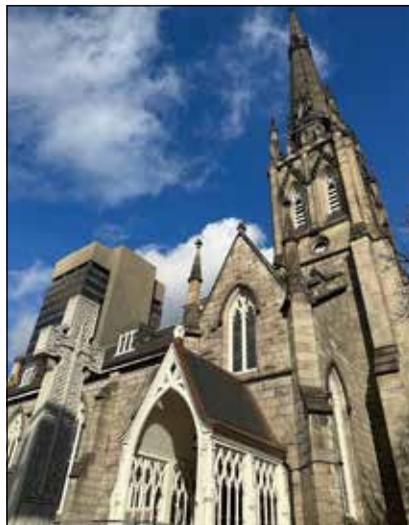
Stamford Presbyterian Church in Niagara Falls, Ont., recently celebrated their 240th anniversary. A special celebration was held on Sunday, Jan. 21, 2024—with cake, of course! The Rev. Ernest van Eck from Knox College in Toronto was the guest preacher, accompanied by his wife, Maryka. Pictured next to him is the Rev. Anita Van Next with her husband, Trevor.



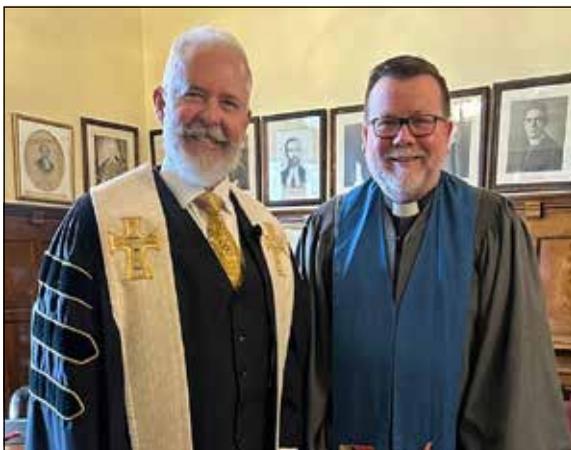
Dec. 3, 2023, was a special day in the life of Clairlea Park Presbyterian Church in Scarborough, Ont. The Rev. Dr. Kevin Livingston welcomed 16 new members, either by transfer certificate or profession of faith into the church family. What a blessing!



A few years ago, the Rev. Dr. Lynda Reid from Knox Presbyterian Church in Oshawa, Ont., invited worshippers to make “Chrismons” for Knox’s tree. Chrismons are Christmas decorations with Christian symbols on them. Now, every year, Knox’s tree is decorated with works of art. Knox also has Toronto’s first female firefighter (retired, pictured below, far right) in their midst, and she is not afraid to stand on a tall ladder. Some of those who were part of the Chrismon project are pictured (left to right): Alexis Cooke, Susan Slabbert, Loreen Gambell, Sharon Sullivan, Lynda Reid, Dianne Graham.



The Christmas Eve Candlelight Service at St. Mark’s Presbyterian Church in Orillia, Ont., was a wonderful event. The church was full, and the children enjoyed it when the Rev. Linda Patton-Cowie read the story of Mortimer Mouse.



On Sunday, Nov. 12, 2023, the congregation of St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont., celebrated its 190th anniversary with the Immediate Past Moderator the Rev. Dr. Robert Faris as the guest preacher. Even though the congregation is 190 years old, it has found new life in mission. In 2022, St. Paul’s became host and partner to the Hamilton Urban Core Consumption and Treatment Site for people struggling with opioid addiction. The site hosted 21,500 visits in 2022. In October of 2023, St. Paul’s became the host for the Hamilton Safer Supply Program. In September, St. Paul’s became the home of The Al-Amal Learning Center for children newly arrived from Syria and Afghanistan who are seeking help with their schoolwork and adapting to Canadian society. The congregation is excited to find innovative new ways to serve God and the community even after 190 years of worship and mission! Pictured above are the Rev. Dr. J. Mark Lewis and the Rev. Dr. Robert Faris. Pictured in the photo of the anniversary cake are Sylvia Pirie and Heather Pirie. PHOTO CREDITS: MARK LEWIS



Despite a fire that devastated St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Barrie, Ont., in February 2023, its congregation carries on as best they can. On Sundays, the congregation worships at a funeral chapel, and coffee hour on Friday mornings is held at Collier United Church. Christmas traditions, such as the mitten tree, also continued. The “Fun Friday” Christmas edition was a hit with the congregation’s own brass quartet accompanying a Christmas Carol singalong again. And a visit from Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus took place at Collier United Church.





St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Kingston, Ont., welcomed visitors on Christmas Eve with a specially staged mini-production along with the traditional offering of carols and readings. A Victorian-style tableau performance, depicting the Nativity scene in the stable in Bethlehem, was choreographed to the hymn *Angels from the Realms of Glory*, and was accompanied by the choir along with Music Director John Hall at the piano. The cast were all members of the congregation. The St. Onge family took on the roles of Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus. Shepherd: Michael Pizutto. Wise King: Patrick Coderre. Christmas Star Angel: Laura Tyner-Clement. Set design: Janet Payne. Costume design: Eva Barnes. The Rev. Barry Carr presided. As the new incoming minister, this was Barry's first Christmas at one of Kingston's oldest historic churches that dates back to 1817.



Visitors who celebrated Christmas Eve at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Kingston, Ont., were delighted and surprised by the appearance of two tiny angels-in-training and a little black-and-white Nativity lamb in costume for the service. The lamb and angels joined the youngest children in the congregation for the singing of "Baby Jesus We Love You," complete with expressive movements. Members of the choir provided music and encouragement.



The Presbyterian College, together with partners from the Montreal School of Theology, organized a group of students and friends for a trip to Cuba in January 2024, where they were hosted by partner Seminario Evangélico de Teología, in Mantanzas. While there, the group met with churches, community organizations and students, as they explored the culture of Cuba and learned some of its history.



This beautiful photo is of Bethel Presbyterian Church in Pictou Landing, N.S., and it was taken on Christmas Eve following the Christmas Eve Carol Service. At one point in the service, Clerk of Session Bill MacPherson recited *One Solitary Life*, by the Rev. James Allan Francis—which he has done for the past 50 years or so! To quote many a member of the congregation: "It is not really Christmas until Bill reads *One Solitary Life*."



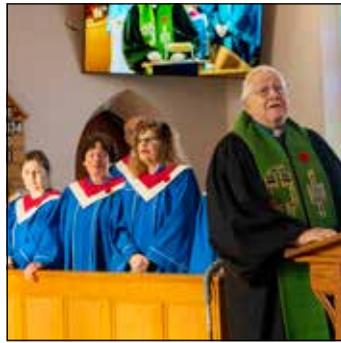
Just as Mary and Joseph gathered items for their journey to Bethlehem, the congregation at Burns Presbyterian Church in Milverton, Ont., collected food, warm clothes, toiletries and baby items over the four weeks leading up to Christmas. Due to the generosity of the congregation, two carloads of donations were delivered to the local food bank and the Emily Murphy Centre in Stratford, which supports women and children in crisis. The Rev. Megan Penfold and Clerk of Session Denise Smith happily delivered the much-needed donations.



On Sunday, Nov. 4, 2023, the congregation of Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont., was pleased to welcome the arrival of its new choir director, Imre Oláh. Imre was born in Hungary, where he studied music in Budapest. He specialized in organ performance, choral music and choral direction. Since moving to Canada in 1989, Imre has served as music director and organist in many churches around the Toronto area. He has been part of the musical life, presenting organ recitals and accompanying choirs and soloists. He has also performed in Hungary, Germany, Italy and the USA. Imre is the artistic director of the Organ Vespers at the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Roman Catholic Church, and conductor for the St. Elizabeth Scola Cantorum.



On Sunday, November 12, at Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church, the Richmond Hill Royal Canadian Legion (Branch 375) and the Rev. Robert Hayashi invited the community to attend a special Remembrance Day worship service and the No Stone Left Alone Campaign, which works to honour the service and sacrifice of Canada's military by educating and inspiring youth to place poppies on veterans' headstones. A ceremonial parade from the cemetery to the church building preceded the service. In attendance were President Terri O'Connor and members of the Legion; Parade Marshall Padre Clive Simpson; Sgt.-At-Arms Brad Spragg, Captain Herman Lee and Cadets from the Royal Canadian Air Cadets Squadron 8 Globemaster; honourable veterans; Member of Parliament Majid Jowhari; Member of Provincial Parliament Daisy Wai; city Mayor David West; Deputy Mayor Godwin Chan; local Councillors Simon Cui, Scott Thompson and Michael Shiu; Fire Services Chief Bryan Burbidge; Deputy Chief Joe Bennett; and President of the Richmond Hill Historical Society Jim Vollmersausen.



Florence Mair, member of Point Edward Presbyterian Church in Point Edward, Ont., turned 102 on Jan. 3, 2024! Florence is a remarkable woman who, whenever she can, says "Yes!" to opportunities presented to her. Recently, she and others who lived in the same retirement home lost most of their possessions in a fire. However, Florence said that things didn't matter—what mattered was that she and others survived, and that they were more valuable than possessions. With the help of her walker, Florence still walks every day. She is interested in life and others around her. Congratulations to Florence on her 102nd birthday!



First Presbyterian Church in Brockville, Ont., celebrated its 212th anniversary during worship on October 29. Guest preacher the Rev. Barry Carr gave an inspiring message entitled, "A Jesus-built Church." Communion was celebrated during worship, with a light luncheon following. The congregation is enthusiastically looking forward to what God has in mind for its future!



The Rev. John Borthwick hit the ground running in August 2023 as the Director of Knox College's newly created Centre for Lifelong Learning. He travelled to the Synod of the Atlantic Provinces where he facilitated conversations on building confidence for lay worship leadership. He also preached at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in New Glasgow and Little Harbour, N.S., at the invitation of the Rev. Joon Ki Kim. He hosted virtual book conversations on Dr. Brian Irwin's book, *After Dispensationalism* and Dr. Sarah Travis's *Unsettling Worship*. The Ministry Forum hosted the Rev. Dr. Grace Ji-Sun Kim's book signing and sponsored a conversation with Korean students. Each student received a copy of Dr. Kim's book. Follow the adventures of the Centre for Lifelong Learning by subscribing to their regular email at [ministryforum.ca](http://ministryforum.ca).



On Sunday, Dec. 3, 2023, the congregation of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont., recognized and congratulated their Custodian, Ruperian Sydney, for his 30 years of dedicated service. Syd not only keeps the interior and grounds of the National Historic Site spotless, but he also makes an effort to get to know every one of its members. In the photo, Syd is shown with elder and member Jean Donaldson. PHOTO CREDIT: MARK LEWIS

Wanting to show its appreciation for one of its outstanding members, on Sunday, Dec. 17, 2023, the congregation of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont., celebrated the long and faithful service of their Organist and Music Director, Blair Havers. Blair's music has helped lift the voices and spirits of the congregation each Sunday for the past 27 years, and the congregation hopes for many more years of Blair's joyful music to come! The photo shows Blair with chorister and church member, Beth McJannett. PHOTO CREDIT: MARK LEWIS

On Nov. 5, 2023, at Knox Presbyterian Church in Bobcaygeon, Ont., a large crowd gathered for the induction service of the Rev. Ian Marnoch. The congregation also welcomed Ian's wife, Hannah, and their two children, Micah and Pauline.



First Presbyterian Church in Brockville, Ont., held a surprise party to celebrate the Rev. Marianne Emig Carr's 10 years of ministry. The congregation hosted a luncheon after worship on November 19, and presented the Rev. Marianne with flowers, cards and donations to various charities in her honour. She was very surprised, indeed!



An amalgamation service was held on Oct. 29, 2023, with South Gate Presbyterian Church and Trinity Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont. Pictured here (left to right) are South Gate's former minister, the Rev. Charmain Sebestyen, most recent Clerk of Session Mary Pomfret, Minister Emeritus the Rev. Bob Geddes, and former Clerk of Session Brenda Podio. The South Gate and Trinity congregations are excited about working together to continue God's work in the Hamilton community.



For the first time, Crieff Hills Retreat Centre in Puslinch, Ont., hosted a men's retreat in November. Led by the Rev. Dr. Blair Bertrand, lecturer at Zomba Theological College in Malawi and at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, the laid-back weekend offered the opportunity to explore "Creating Relationships of Resonance in Mid-Life." Randell Neudorf, known as the "punk monk," offered music, and participants had plenty of time for hiking, exploring the farm, enjoying hearty local food and sharing laughs. The men found it such a great experience that it will now become an annual event.



Arlene, Byron and Heather James stand beside the Celtic Cross, which had hung in the South Gate Church sanctuary ever since its dedication in 1972. It had been donated by Florence James in memory of her husband, Ernie, an elder from 1953 until his death in 1971. Since the South Gate and Trinity congregations in Hamilton, Ont., have merged, the cross is now being proudly displayed in Trinity Presbyterian Church's sanctuary.



During the evening service on December 24 at St. Giles Presbyterian Church in Ottawa, Ont., children from the Sunday school, along with teachers and friends, concluded the service with a traditional Nativity tableau. The word tableau originates from the French *tableaux vivants* or "living pictures," but the concept may go back much further to the early Christian period some 2,000 years ago. A Christmas tableau is different from a Christmas pageant, because there is no acting or movement. Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, kings, angels and animals simply take their places quietly before the scene is illuminated, as if it were a painting or carving. In that moment, we are able to travel back in time to witness the Birth of Christ.



The Cameron Christmas Concert at St. Giles Presbyterian Church in Ottawa, Ont., was held on Dec. 1, 2023. As the regimental church of the Cameron Highlanders, St. Giles has hosted this annual event since early 2000s. It is also a benefit concert where the funds raised go toward supporting the Centretown Community Food Bank. This most recent event featured the Pipes and Drums of the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, the Vocestra Chorus, and the Band of the Governor General's Foot Guards.



There was a joyful celebration at New St. James Presbyterian Church in London, Ont. On November 26, the congregation was delighted to welcome many new members. Pictured are new members alongside Bruce Curtis (Clerk, second from left), Charlene Beynon (Deputy Clerk, third from right) and the Rev. Dr. David Clark (far right).



The youth group and some adults from Thornhill Presbyterian Church in Thornhill, Ont., served their annual Christmas dinner at Evangel Hall in downtown Toronto on December 17. Due to food insecurity and the number of people struggling these days, almost 200 meals were prepared and served by members of the congregation. The group is pictured here with their minister, the Rev. Dr. Heather Vais.



The congregation of Braeside Presbyterian Church in St. Albert, Alta., along with friends of the bride and groom, celebrated the marriage of Petra McNeill and Douglas Storm during worship on Dec. 31, 2023. The wedding topped off a month of celebrations as the congregation continues to settle in to their new location. Braeside Presbyterian Church had recently sold their building and land in order to relocate to a storefront location in St. Albert. On Dec. 3, the first worship service was held at the new location. One baptism and seven new members were celebrated on that day. A short video interview with the Rev. Janet Taylor, about the move, can be found at [tinyurl.com/3442nuu6](https://tinyurl.com/3442nuu6).

**PRESBYTERIAN  
WORSHIP RESOURCES  
& MORE!**

PRESBYTERIAN.CA/WORSHIP



On Sunday, Nov. 4, 2023, the congregation of Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont., held a farewell thank-you for Carole Priestley for her 12 years of service to the church school and Youth Advisory Team.

**PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT**

# Compassion in Action

By Guy Smagge,  
PWS&D Director

A new year has begun, offering us the opportunity to look back at all that has been accomplished in the past year. It seems like we've been dealing with one humanitarian crisis after another. Wars are taking place with little or no consideration for international humanitarian laws and conventions, which were established to protect civilian populations from the atrocities of wars. How can churches be prophetic voices for peace in these times?

As followers of Christ, we are called to promote peace, justice, reconciliation and the other principles of the kingdom of God that Jesus preached and called us to seek and work for.

One of Gandhi's famous quotes was, "An eye for an eye will make

the whole world blind." As we witness the escalation of violence in the Middle East, it is easy to see that this wisdom is being largely ignored, as scores of civilian lives are sacrificed. Amid these challenges, PWS&D finds ways to reach out.

A key achievement for PWS&D in 2023 was to see the fruits of our advocacy efforts as the Government of Canada finally carved out an exception in its sanctions against the Taliban. This exception allows for humanitarian assistance to be given to populations in need, without jeopardizing our charitable status.

As soon as that door opened, we worked with our long-standing local partner to begin a food assistance project in Bamiyan province, targeting the most vulnerable populations, mostly women and children. PWS&D also supported



In Haiti, project participants receive food distributions in response to increasing levels of food insecurity. PHOTO CREDIT: ADRA.

populations affected by the earthquakes that struck Herat in October 2023. We hope to scale up our humanitarian response in Afghanistan in the coming months, with the support of our allies at Canadian Foodgrains Bank, and with matching funds from the Government of Canada.

Looking back at 2023, with your support, PWS&D responded to many other humanitarian crises in the world. We continued to respond to the needs created by the war in Ukraine. We responded to the devastation of Cyclone Freddy in Malawi. We

provided food assistance and nutrition relief in Haiti. The crisis in Syria was worsened by the Syria-Türkiye earthquake, so our assistance there had to be scaled up as well. We supported our partner in Nepal to assist people affected by last year's earthquakes. We provided relief in Somalia, in the context of a prolonged drought in the Horn of Africa, which created a hunger crisis.

We can see that humanitarian crises triggered by natural events are getting worse every year due in part to the climate emergency and natural disasters. Humanitarian

crises triggered by human geopolitical agendas could be avoided, but they continue to occur, and we are called to respond to alleviate the suffering that is often just described as "collateral damage."

Thankfully, with its partners and with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and the ACT Alliance, PWS&D can respond along with many others, with the hopes of a more peaceful world where solidarity and compassion may rule. We are also deeply grateful for the role Presbyterian congregations and individuals play—your prayers and gifts make these humanitarian responses possible.



A project participant in Malawi received a cash distribution to purchase food following Cyclone Freddy. PHOTO CREDIT: CARD Malawi.

# Refugee Sponsorship: Intense and Humbling



Members of the St. Andrew's refugee committee eagerly wait for the family they have sponsored to arrive.

By Ruth Barwell, member of  
St. Andrew's PC refugee committee  
in Owen Sound, Ont.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Owen Sound, embarked on a refugee sponsorship journey beginning in March 2022. The war in Ukraine had just begun. At our church's Annual Meeting, someone asked, "How are we going to respond to so much need in the world?" Refugee sponsorship became one answer.

Sponsoring a young family, originally from Sudan, has been satisfying, intense, humbling, busy, enriching, wonderful, team/

friendship/community-building, full of learning, fun and more. These are the descriptors used by our Refugee Committee to describe the experience. Similarly, the newcomer family, using their brand-new English words, said it has been "intense, busy, safe and good." They feel attached to members of the committee. We feel great affection and admiration for them.

There have been multiple stages in this journey.

First, we learned about the complexities of Canadian refugee and immigration programs. We didn't even know that the PCC had staff to help with this!

Thank you, Sevan and Biniam from PWS&D, for helping us select the right program—the BVOR (Blended Visa Office Referred) program—and getting us through all the paperwork. A BVOR sponsorship helps bring pre-screened refugees to Canada, with costs shared between the Canadian government and the sponsorship group—each provides six months of support.

Second, fundraising! You'll need more than the government tells

you that you'll need. We engaged our broader community to help. Kudos to the businesses and people who supported our cause and were not even connected with St. Andrew's. It takes a village!

Third, prepare for arrival! Uncertainty and excitement abound, and there is so much to sort out. Housing is in short supply and expensive everywhere. Daycare has a nine-month waiting list. Who offers English as a Second Language (ESL) training that meets the needs of this family? Thank God for a loving Syrian couple who worked with us and have lived experience as refugees and speak Arabic.

Fourth stage—arrival on March 3, 2023. So exciting and such a frenetic stage! Being rural, our community doesn't have robust transportation services. We needed lots of volunteers—to drive, translate, teach and set up computer services, provide child care, complete paperwork, and facilitate school registration and daycare subsidy, ESL, employment, and so much more! The family has been incredible in adapting to all of us interjecting



The newly arrived family and members of the congregation's refugee committee.

into their lives.

Fifth stage—routines. The children are functioning well in school and daycare and their English is quite advanced. Parents are attending ESL classes four half days a week and have jobs, each working 20–25 hours each week. In this stage, things are less task oriented and more fun, like going to the beach, kids' soccer nights, setting up a Christmas tree, etc. The parents walk miles in a day getting to and from their activities because they are just learning how to drive. They have an amazing attitude toward the challenges

that come with settling into a new culture, language and friendship group.

Finally, we hope the family will feel they're on good footing and self-sufficient by spring 2024. There will still be new learning—income tax completion, getting a car someday, and full-time jobs. But, most importantly, we can't wait for this new relationship to turn into a long-time friendship, as the family continues to be part of our community.

To learn more or get involved, visit [WeRespond.ca/get-involved/refugee-sponsorship](http://WeRespond.ca/get-involved/refugee-sponsorship).

## PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

# Update: Gaza Response

By Stephanie Chunoo,,  
PWS&D Communications

Persistent airstrikes over Gaza have demolished buildings, left tens of thousands of casualties and given rise to a staggering number of displaced individuals.

Amid so much loss, PWS&D is supporting the Middle East Council of Churches' Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR). DSPR continues to stand witness to the devastation and mourn the destruction. Tragically, one dedicated DSPR staff member and her family were also lost to the violence.

The humanitarian crisis that is unfolding is unacceptable on so many levels. The lack of access to Gaza due to border controls makes humanitarian assistance very difficult. Yet, despite the challenges, the dedicated staff members of DSPR continue to respond, whenever possible, to the urgent needs of the people in Gaza.

The constant explosions, accompanied by the distressing scenes of the wounded and dead, have the potential to prompt lasting trauma. In the south of the Gaza Strip, DSPR staff are working with forcibly displaced people to reduce these experiences by providing psychosocial interventions. Additionally, staff members are delivering psychological first-aid training, equipping individuals with essential tools to provide assistance and alleviate panic during emergencies.

Since access to water has been limited, hygiene kits are being distributed to aid cleanliness, curb the spread of communicable diseases, and ensure vital resources reach those in need. Furthermore, cash distributions to households are providing direct financial assistance to individuals deemed most in need.

Fortunately, some are still able to access primary health-care services—including access to

vital medications—through the DSPR-NECC Rafah Clinic. While not nearly sufficient to the need, the clinic helps ensure some health services remain within reach during these challenging times. Individuals who have sought shelter in two churches are also receiving necessary support, such as food and some basic supplies.

### Overwhelming need

While the glimmer of hope provided by DSPR in Gaza is significant, the need for aid remains critical. The ongoing war continues to inflict extensive damage to human life, infrastructure and homes, depriving communities of essentials such as water, medical supplies and food.

Your support has already made so much possible, but the needs grow with each passing day. To learn more or make a donation, visit [WeRespond.ca/crisis-in-Gaza](http://WeRespond.ca/crisis-in-Gaza).



DSPR, an ACT Alliance member, provides psychosocial and play-based support to children displaced by the war in Gaza. PHOTO CREDIT: MAHMOD ELBARAGETHI/DSPR.



Though most of DSPR's clinics have been bombed to the ground, individuals in need of primary health-care services can access support offered by the DSPR-NECC Rafah Clinic. PHOTO CREDIT: MAHMOD ELBARAGETHI/DSPR.

# Challenges Persist in Afghanistan



Guljan lost her husband and 11-year-old son in the earthquake that struck her community in October 2023.

By PWS&D Communications

In the Kushkak village in Afghanistan, 42-year-old Guljan lived a simple life with her husband and their four children, including her daughter-in-law. In recent years, her husband grappled with debilitating leg pain, rendering him unable to work and placing the burden of financial support on Guljan and her sons. Despite facing economic hardships and managing household responsibilities, Guljan displayed unwavering determination to find a way to provide for her family.

On what seemed to be a typical

day in October 2023, Guljan was away from home, seeking medical attention for her six-year-old daughter when she heard news about an earthquake striking her home district. Hurrying back to her village, she encountered a sight of complete devastation. The once familiar landscape was transformed into debris.

Heartbreakingly, the earthquake had claimed the lives of her husband and 11-year-old son, both trapped inside the house during the disaster.

### Post-earthquake challenges

After her husband's passing, Guljan assumed the role of decision-maker for her family, taking on responsibilities that were once his. Now a female-headed household, she encountered significant challenges in obtaining assistance. Observing the disparity in opportunities, she noted that restrictions placed on women exacerbated their difficulties in participating in assessments compared to their male counterparts in the community.

However, after PWS&D's local

partner recognized their needs, Guljan's family received a winterized tent to help them endure the harsh weather conditions. "In a timely intervention, [the partner] came to our aid, providing my family with a new tent, which we promptly set up," she shares.

Still, Guljan has voiced a growing concern about her family's lack of security and privacy under the tents. The communal living arrangement presented obstacles for the women in particular. Carrying out daily washings became a difficult task due to the lack of privacy caused by the cramped conditions of the tents, exposing their activities to onlookers. Likewise, the shared nature of the makeshift bathroom facilities intensified the discomfort.

As winter approached, Guljan's anxiety only increased. The village where they were temporarily settled was in the middle of a treeless desert landscape, prone to fierce, relentless winds. Two intense dust storms after the earthquake reinforced the difficult weather conditions the family faces. Additionally, with a new grandchild on the way,



Guljan and her eldest son stand before the tent provided to them after losing their home.

Guljan is concerned about how the baby, and the rest of the family, will be able to find shelter and food to survive.

### Food security crisis

An estimated 28.3 million Afghans (two-thirds of the population) need humanitarian assistance. The crisis is being driven by three consecutive years of drought-like conditions, crippling economic decline since the Taliban takeover in 2021, and decades of conflict and recurrent natural disasters.

As a result, Afghanistan is among the countries facing the highest levels of food insecurity in the world. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 15.8 million people are projected to be food insecure in 2024.

In June 2023, the Government of Canada passed Bill C-41, which provides exemptions for

humanitarian-focused aid spending in Afghanistan. With matching funds at Canadian Foodgrains Bank, PWS&D implemented a \$1 million food assistance project in Bamiyan province, assisting 4,550 of the most marginalized households. Families received monthly cash assistance over a three-month period, enabling them to buy essential food items to get through the most difficult part of the year.

Your support is vital to ensure that emergency assistance and essential resources reach families like Guljan's after devastating disasters and ongoing food insecurity. PWS&D hopes to expand our response in Afghanistan to alleviate hunger for more families—your prayers and financial gifts will make a real difference to people's lives. Visit [WeRespond.ca/where\\_we\\_work/Afghanistan](http://WeRespond.ca/where_we_work/Afghanistan) to learn more or to donate.

**PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT**

# Pakistan HERD Program Wraps Up

By Emma Clarke,  
PWS&D Communications

“The food aid took away our worry.”

In December 2023, PWS&D wrapped up a two-year project in Pakistan. The program—focused on Humanitarian, Early Recovery and Development (HERD)—was innovative in that it connected responses to urgent short-term humanitarian needs with longer-term sustainable development goals. Supported by the Canadian government, it assisted 3,766 households in the Umerkot District of Sindh province.

Through the HERD program, the same families who accessed six months’ worth of emergency food support also received seeds during the early recovery stage. They were also given instruction in farming practices adapted to climate change, including lessons on choosing drought resilient crops. Additionally, training was provided for women artisans to help them diversify their income

beyond agriculture. This broader income base helps provide sustenance when crops fail due to climate events, such as dramatic floods or extended droughts.

Consider the difference it makes when a family receives monthly food support during the lean season. They are less inclined to sell farming inputs and livestock, a practice which provides for immediate needs but creates disadvantages in the long-term. Similarly, if a family recovering from a disaster does not have to spend everything they earn on food, they can begin to rebuild their home.

The HERD program made a difference for the Mangrio family.

Prior to 2022 floods, Shabana Mangrio had a thriving clothing business, while her husband Saleh ran his own shop, selling snacks and other small provisions. They also farmed their three-acre holding and cared for 15 goats. When the deluge hit, their home was destroyed. Shabana’s work as a tailor suffered



In Pakistan, Saleh Mangrio runs a grocery store, while his wife has her own business as a tailor. PHOTO CREDIT: CWSA/SAHAR ZAFAR

because very few people in her community were able to buy new clothing. Left with few options, the family borrowed money to rebuild their home.

This family was given seeds through the HERD program in the summer of 2022, which Saleh used to sow their plot. With food taken care of by the aid program, Saleh was able to use his earnings from the harvest to repay the loan.

As Saleh recalls, “[The harvest] was not what it should have been, had the rain stopped after irrigating the soil. Nevertheless, the yield was enough for me to sell some for cash and repay my debt. This was possible because of the last two instalments of food

aid.”

Responding in Pakistan is vitally important because the country is ranked as the eighth most climate-affected in the world on the 2021 Global Climate Risk Index. With much of the country reliant on farming for their livelihoods, recurring drought and recent floods have severely challenged families’ abilities to earn an income, not to mention maintain their safety. Sindh region is unfortunately considered to be at a crisis level for food insecurity.

Prior to the project, only a small number of the surveyed participants in Umerkot were considered adequately food secure. By the end of the project, a significant percentage of those

surveyed showed improved food security, according to a measure called the Food Consumption Score.

Asked what he thought was the greatest advantage of participating in the program, Saleh unequivocally said that it had made him debt-free for the first time in many years.

“Normally, when crops fail, even if we recover the cost of the seed, it is a loss because the reduced harvest cannot feed us. Most times we end up selling our livestock only to pay for food items. When I sold my goats late last year, I was not consuming the money but investing it in housing for the family. That was a win for us (thanks to the project).”

PWS&D is now working with Community World Service Asia and the Foodgrains Bank on a three-year follow-up project for communities in Umerkot to help them better adapt to climate change impacts and to sustain the improvement in food security resulting from the HERD project. Households will receive kitchen garden inputs and training on conservation agriculture, livestock management and micro-entrepreneurship. The project will also involve construction of water storage structures to help address water scarcity, which is a common problem in most villages.



The Mangrio family was able to rebuild their home after it was destroyed by the floods in 2022, thanks to food support that met their immediate needs. PHOTO CREDIT: CWSA/SAHAR ZAFAR



**Presbyterian World Service  
& Development**

The development and relief agency of The Presbyterian Church in Canada

**WeRespond.ca**

## INTERNATIONAL

# The Pinuyumayan New Testament and 65th Anniversary of Christian Mission

By the Rev. Dr. Paul McLean,  
International Mission Staff

Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Another new Bible is in the hands of an Indigenous people group in Taiwan. This time it's the Pinuyumayan people, who have their very first New Testament translated into their own mother tongue. We worked together on this NT project for eight years. On Nov. 26, 2023, we gathered to praise God for the fruit of our labours.

The Rev. Haluway Tapang, Chair of our Pinuyumayan Bible Translation Committee, picked me up along with the Rev. Chung Shou-hui, the newly appointed General Secretary of the Bible Society in Taiwan (BST). The sun was shining on a gorgeous 22-degree Sunday morning as we drove 20 minutes from downtown Taitung to the mountain foothills. We arrived at the Bei-nan Visitors Service Centre and drove around to the open field behind. Gradually, members of the six Presbyterian Churches which form the Pinuyumayan Church District (not large enough yet to form a "Presbytery") danced into the circle, then took their seats to prepare to worship God, "Viruwa i itras." I and two other ministers were asked to light an 'Amis bamboo "canon" to start the gathering with a bang!

The worship service was divided into two main parts. First, we praised and thanked God for 65 years of mission history since the Pinuyumayan Church District was formally established. Children

and young people led us in praising "Viruwa i itras" for his loving kindness and faithfulness over the years. We sang traditional Pinuyumayan tunes with gospel lyrics as the youth played traditional bamboo instruments and drums. Parents were moved to get up and dance in a circle to praise God with their bodies. The youth sang some familiar praise and worship songs in Mandarin, which had people raising their hands.

Using the Pinuyumayan translation typed in the bulletin, we professed our faith in unison using the deeply meaningful words of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan's Confession of Faith. (You can find the English translation at [english.pct.org.tw/enWho\\_con](http://english.pct.org.tw/enWho_con). I was at the PCT General Assembly in the 1980s when it was approved.) Scripture was read in Mandarin-Chinese and from a Pinuyumayan draft translation of Joshua 4:1-7.

The sermon was preached by my friend the Rev. Peto, current Chair of the PCT General Assembly's Indigenous Mission Committee. The Rev. Peto is of Sediq-Truku ancestry. He has pastored Snuwil PC in the Sediq-Toda District and happens to be convener of the Sediq-Toda Bible translation team, which I also support. His sermon in Mandarin was translated seamlessly into Pinuyumayan by gifted Elder Pilay, a faithful member of our Bible translation team, who speaks a minority dialect within the Pinuyumayan language family. It was a beautiful

testimony of how Christians from one Indigenous group share in the joy of another group. People were also there from 'Amis, Paiwan and Han ancestry, as well as this Canadian brother in Christ.

The Rev. Peto spoke about the commemorative acts recorded in the Old Testament passage, and the message not to forget God's saving actions in times past and present. Looking at the Pinuyumayan context, we considered what God has been doing in their recent history.

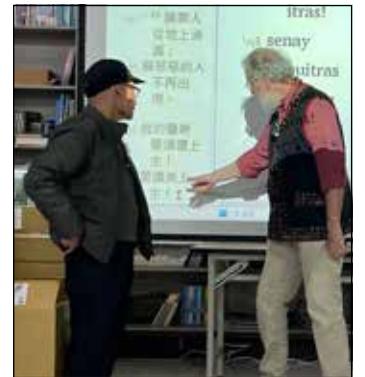
The national government estimates that there are 12,000-15,000 Pinuyumayan people in Taiwan. Among Indigenous peoples, they have one of the lowest percentages of Christians due to early assimilation with nearby Han settlers. There are six PCT churches in the Pinuyumayan Church District. Members on the six church rolls number around 500-600 in total, though only around 100 people attend worship on a Sunday. (There are more Roman Catholic churches, but they face a shortage of priests and active members. A few churches from other denominations are starting to sprout up too. We hope all of them will enjoy the new Bible.)

The first Pinuyumayan person to become a Christian was a man named Dalisen, who came to faith in Jesus in 1928 when he'd heard the gospel in Japanese at a Holiness Church in Taipei. After some seminary training in Japan, he returned to his Pinuyumayan home-

land in Taiwan. There, from 1934 to 1938, he and a Canadian Anglican missionary named Narcissus Peter Yates taught basic evangelism in Japanese, singing Jesus Loves Me and telling children and families Bible stories. (The Rev. Yates, 1862-1938, is buried at the Tamsui Foreign Cemetery near where Dr. George Leslie Mackay and other Canadians are buried.)

After World War II, when the Japanese left Taiwan, revered Taiwanese missionary, the Rev. Loh Sien-chhun, and several China Inland Mission women who had fled from China, shared the gospel and started "family churches" among both 'Amis and Pinuyumayan peoples. In 1958, small churches started taking shape in the Bei-nan or Pinuyumayan villages, near the larger 'Amis speaking region. Hence, 1958 was chosen as one way to date the start of Christian mission through the first established churches.

The Rev. Peto invited us to remember and give thanks for what God has done in previous generations. Give thanks for the first generation of Pinuyumayan families who'd become Christians. Some became the first pastors, elders, deacons, leaders of women's and youth groups, and Sunday school teachers. He emphasized the fact that over the years Pinuyumayan Christians, like other Indigenous Christians in Taiwan, have shared one and the same confession of faith: *<maw i Luzu i Yēsu Kiristo>* "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Philippians 2:11). Remember their



Reviewing Psalm 104:35 with the Rev. Chang. How will we translate "Hallelujah"?

trust in the Lord, their resurrection hope, their joy and their enthusiasm in sharing the gospel—even before they had the Bible in their own mother tongue.

The Rev. Peto also encouraged trusting in the Lord as all Indigenous churches in the PCT face challenges these days, such as the challenge of Taiwanese folk religion as more Han people move into Indigenous areas and set up temples to various gods and goddesses. And social challenges, including issues over traditional Indigenous land rights, and economic concerns in rural or mountain villages. Even the challenge of changing ways we worship God: traditional or modern hymns/songs; scripture on slides or in written Bibles; worship in-person, online or not at all. Each challenge is an opportunity we can face by trusting in God. Six little Pinuyumayan churches can do amazing things in God's hands and, as the Rev. Peto concluded, by obeying Jesus' words in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. Now God has blessed us with the seed of the gospel, the New Testament, all 27 books translated into the Pinuyumayan language for the very first time!

My friend the Rev. Pu'ay Chang A-syin, who recently turned 83, read an account in Pinuyumayan explaining how he and the team translated the New Testament. Later, the Rev. Haluway, Chair of the Bible Translation Committee, added more details. In 1986, the Pinuyumayan Church District gathered leaders from local PCT and Roman Catholic churches, plus village leaders, to try to start translating the NT. Unfortunately, people could not agree on which



Pinuyumayan Bible translators and friends

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of the 6 to 8 village dialects to use. Eventually, PCT leaders chose the dialect understood by most people. A Pinuyumayan Roman Catholic priest (now a retired bishop) translated the four gospels and Acts into his smaller Dz-bun dialect. His actions inspired others to start translating too. From 1989 to 2005, several Presbyterian Pinuyumayan translators and reviewers slowly produced the Gospel of Mark. Two highly respected Presbyterian ministers died of cancer, a great loss to the Pinuyumayan churches and these early efforts at Bible translation. The Rev. Chang felt the loss of his two dear friends very deeply. God inspired him to start translating the entire NT on his own. When he finished, and realized he was not getting any younger, again inspired by the Holy Spirit, he pressed on and prepared a draft translation of the entire OT, too! This is an incredible accomplishment. It became the Rev. Chang's gift to the Pinuyumayan Bible Translation Committee, which was officially formed in 2015. That's when I was assigned by the BST to join the Rev. Chang and the team as their Translation Advisor.

The Rev. Haluwey laughed and cried when she told us how she thought Bible translation would be easy. The three-way covenant (MOU) signed by the Pinuyumayan District Churches, the PCT General Assembly's Mother Language Bible Translation Committee, and the Bible Society in Taiwan said they would take four years in total to translate both the Old and New Testaments! Even with the Rev. Chang's draft translation, it took us eight years (2015–2023) just to translate the NT. We hope to complete Psalms and Proverbs in two years. These books will be useful in worship (responsive psalms) and Christian education. I would note a fourth mission partner that has supported this important work: my own Presbyterian Church in Canada, and the ways it has supported me as the team's Translation Advisor. Thanks also to

the Rev. Daniel Cheng who helped start the NT project and supported it until he retired this past summer.

I can't thank God enough for his faithful servant, the Rev. Chang A-syin. The Holy Spirit inspired him to do a draft translation of the entire Bible, all 66 books, all 1,189 chapters, and around 31,000 verses. He obeyed God's call and followed the guidance of the Holy Spirit. His God-given vision of translating the complete Bible into his people's mother tongue sustained him. During team review sessions, which I attended with him, he was humble, open-hearted and patiently listened to others' suggestions on how to improve the translation, a little here, a little there. He was willing to adjust words and sentences when necessary. But he could also stand his ground and say, "You younger Pinuyumayan speakers need to learn this correct way of saying it."

Ever since 2015, when I and other BST and United Bible Societies (UBS) staff started training the Rev. Chang and the team, he was eager to learn new things that would help him: how to use Bible translation software; how to create wordlists and his own Pinuyumayan spell checker—an immense help in standardizing the spelling of what had been an oral language without anything in writing; how to analyze Biblical terms in eight different semantic domains to check how consistently he and the team translated words for things like animals, plants, rituals, human and supernatural beings, and the many foreign names of people in the Bible.

After Covid hit and I could no longer meet with him or the team in-person in Taiwan, he learned how to have online meetings with me. We would usually Skype three times a week, for two to four hours a session. My wife, Mary Beth, would sometimes say to me, "You kept the Rev. Chang online a long time today," to which I replied, "He got so excited with the checks we were doing,



Some of the translation team the day after we celebrated the publication of the Pinuyumayan New Testament. Back to work on Psalms!

he didn't want to stop!"

In August, I heard the happy news that the New Testament Bibles had arrived in Taiwan, and that the Bible Society had already sent them to the Pinuyumayan churches. But I wondered, weren't we going to have a publication celebration service first? I learned that people were so eager to start reading their new Bibles, they couldn't wait. Plus, the Church District leaders decided they would combine the Bible publication service together with their 65th anniversary of mission service. A good choice.

What happened next in the worship service was even better than I had imagined. All six churches (Puyuma, Likavung, 'Alripay, Liveviek, Pinaseki and Tamalrakaw) took turns reading aloud their two previously assigned passages from the Pinuyumayan New Testament. Twelve passages in total. Each church had practiced reading their passages. What a great way to inspire each church to start using their new Bibles. Children, young people, adults, middle-aged and seniors—all reading the scriptures in their ancestral language. Learning how to read simple words (some people for the first time), hearing familiar sounds, feeling God speak to their hearts.

I found myself praying quietly as they read out loud. May God bless this new Bible and all who read, study and use it. May God use the Pinuyumayan New Testament to help *preserve* their beautiful language. May God help the six churches *promote* literacy for people of all ages in their Pinuyumayan communities, just like we did today at this special worship service. And may God help every Pinuyumayan Christian *proclaim* the gospel of Jesus Christ by simply reading the Bible with a friend who is not yet a Christian.



The Rev. Haluwey Tapang, Chair of the Pinuyumayan Bible Translation Committee.

The New Testament Bible is printed in parallel columns with Pinuyumayan alongside Today's Chinese Version (2019). Below, I reproduce it in rows. I close this blog with two wonderful gospel passages:

John 3:16  
na Viruwa i itras kemazu kana Iraman kana trau i punapunan, arusay za verayanay tu Alrak na misasa, 'aziya matrepu na pakutatena' ziya kantaw na trau, muveliyas kituluz kana munayun na uwavaawan.  
上帝那麼愛世人，甚至賜下他的獨子，要使所有信他的人不致滅亡，反得永恆的生命。

1 John 4:9–10  
9 na Viruwa i itras pazuwa i punapunan kanantu Alrak na misasa, pakalrang ta kantaw kiveray za uwavaawan;  
na Viruwa i itras mimanay kanini

na kudayan pakurena'u kanantu Iramanan kanta.

10 ini mawna Iramanan: amelri ta na Iraman kana Viruwa i itras, maw na Viruwa i itras na Iraman kanta, pazuwa kanantu Alrak muramawan kanta gisē, semavung putrima' kananta pinamelriyan.

9 上帝差他的獨子到世上來，使我們藉著他得到生命；上帝用這方法顯示他愛我們。

10 這就是愛：不是我們愛上帝，而是上帝愛我們，差了他的兒子為我們犧牲，贖了我們的罪。

Thanks to all who pray and support our mission of Bible translation among the Pinuyumayan and other Indigenous people of Taiwan. The team and I press on with our review of the Psalms. To God be the glory!



Likavung Presbyterian Church reading 1 Peter 1:23–25 and Matthew 24:35 in Pinuyumayan.

Read Paul's mission blog, and all blogs of PCC mission staff, at [pccweb.ca/missionblog](http://pccweb.ca/missionblog)

To help support Bible translation, visit [presbyterian.ca/bible-translate-donate](http://presbyterian.ca/bible-translate-donate)

**INTERNATIONAL**

# Serving in Nepal



Lora with staff from the UMN.

*By the Rev. Ian Ross-McDonald, General Secretary, and Lily Ko, International Ministries*

When the Rev. Lora Nafziger, her husband, Mitch Rhodes, and two of their four children left Chicago on January 2, they were beginning a new and exciting ministry in Kathmandu, Nepal. This adventure had begun nine months prior to the trip when the PCC received an invitation from Dhana Lama, Executive Director of the United Mission to Nepal (UMN), asking the PCC to appoint the Rev. Lora Nafziger as Staff Support and Counselling Advisor at UMN Headquarters in Kathmandu for a three-year term.

Since July 2023, Lora and her family had been busily preparing for the years ahead. Two of their sons decided to remain in North America, one at university in British Columbia and the other at high school in Indiana. Meanwhile, Lora, Mitch and their two youngest sons had been packing and participating in medical and psychosocial screening as well as robust orientation to help prepare them for a new context.

Lora grew up outside Stratford, Ont. Educated as a Mennonite

pastor, Lora and her family have been living in Goshen, Indiana, for the last 13 years. During this time, Lora has been working with the Assembly Mennonite Church. Meanwhile, Lora's husband, Mitch, a teacher, is from the United States.

While working with the UMN, Lora will help provide spiritual and emotional support to expatriate UMN staff, their families, as well as key Nepali staff. She will encourage UMN Christian staff in the habits of prayer, Bible study and Christian fellowship, and she will plan retreats. Lora will also serve as a counsellor and visit the sick and their families. In addition, Lora will support expatriates through transition and preparation for return to their home country.

## The United Mission to Nepal (UMN)

UMN serves the poorest in Nepal and seeks to address the root causes of poverty in the country. Established in 1954, UMN is a cooperative effort between the people of Nepal and faith-based organizations from about 20 countries. Multicultural teams of Nepali nationals and expatriate staff work with local partners to provide programs and support that leads to healthy, strong and empowered individuals, families and communities.

The UMN must work closely with the Nepali government, and it must negotiate with the government every few years to determine the kind of work UMN is allowed to do, the areas where it may work, and the way in which



Lora, Mitch and Nepali teachers.

funding can be allocated.

The UMN receives funding from international organizations, churches and individuals from about 20 countries and 16 denominations. In addition to the PCC, the other international partners are: the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, the Church of Scotland, Presbyterian Church World Mission (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Bread for the World (Protestant Development Service, Germany) and the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission.

## A unique partnership: PCC and Mennonite Church USA

The PCC always conducts international work in partnership. Usually, our sole partner in any area is the receiving church/organization that has requested mission personnel and support from the PCC. Occasionally, the PCC has partnered with other denominations to support mission staff. Our most recent similar partnership was with the United Church of Canada from 2017 to 2021, when we worked together to support David McIntosh, who was working with the Korean Christian Church in Japan. In the case of UMN initiatives, the PCC is working with the Mennonite Mission Network of the Mennonite Church USA.

PCC mission staff write blogs to update the church on their work. Visit [pccweb.ca/missionblog](http://pccweb.ca/missionblog) to keep current on what Lora and other mission staff are doing on our behalf with treasured partners.

# Support for the Near East School of Theology



The 2023 NEST Commencement with President Dr. George Sabra at centre. PHOTO CREDIT: NEST

The PCC has a long and important relationship with the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in Beirut, Lebanon. Lebanon faces many challenges and instabilities—politically, financially, economically, socially and in terms of ecumenical and interfaith relations. It's been a difficult and complicated environment for NEST to function in with wars in the region and a devalued currency. When NEST took on a special project to update their library system, the PCC decided to help.

The NEST library is home to roughly 60,000 volumes, 80 periodicals and a unique holding of manuscripts, archives and rare books. Most of the texts are in English, but important works in Arabic, Armenian, Syriac and

other languages line the packed shelves. The subjects of Theology, Church History, Missiology, Philosophy and History comprise the backbone of the NEST library and support its aim to facilitate and nurture the study of the Protestant faith and heritage in the Middle East.

In October, the Rev. Ian Ross-McDonald, General Secretary of the Life and Mission Agency, visited NEST and spoke at Chapel. He met with President Dr. George Sabra to discuss ways to further strengthen the relations between NEST and the PCC. One of the outcomes of those meetings was a commitment by the PCC to provide USD \$8,000 a year for three years from 2023–2025 for the library system.



The NEST library. PHOTO CREDIT: IAN FRASER

## INTERNATIONAL

# Reflecting on “I Love Taiwan” Experience

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has a longstanding relationship with the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan (PCT). Each year, the PCT hosts a dynamic program called “I Love Taiwan,” which attracts youth from all over the world who share in the PCT’s youth and children’s ministry and learn about the unique culture of Taiwan. In 2023, 25 youths from Germany, Hungary, South Korea, Japan, Canada, India, Thailand, and New Zealand participated in the program. The following reflections are from Justin and Neo Wu, sons of the Rev. Paul Wu at St. Giles Presbyterian Church in Ottawa, Ont., who took part in the experience with support from the PCC.

## The Ethics and History of Modern Missionary Work



Justin Wu enjoying a night stroll in Taiwan.

By Justin Wu

While participating in the 2023 “I Love Taiwan” (ILT) program that the PCC is invited to attend by the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, I found myself grappling with the history of Christian mission work. I struggled to reconcile the positive work of current-day Taiwanese missionaries and the harms committed by historical European missions. I concluded that, in Taiwan, today’s missions do not serve the colonialist interests. This is because the goals, methods and attitudes of organizations like ILT are fundamentally different.

In the 1970s, theologians and anti-colonial activists began formulating critical views of Christian missionary work in the European colonial context. Historian Brian Stanley (1990) cites the newspaper of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi: “Missionaries came to Africa with ‘the Bible in one hand and the gun in the other’” (p. 11). Indeed, missionary work is often justifiably associated with European colonialism and imperialism. In an article titled *The History of Christian Missions in Africa*, Norman Etherington (2019) gives an overview of missionaries’ involvement with colonial projects from the 15th century to the 19th century. The dominance of European colonial powers resulted in the partitioning and exploitation of Africa, which still has repercussions today.

In Latin America, the influence of the Catholic Church began with Spanish and Portuguese colonization in the late 15th century. Missionaries accompanied conquistadors, giving religious sanction to the conquest and subjugation of Indigenous populations. Some missionaries opposed the brutality of the conquistadors. For example, Father Antonio Montesinos ardently protested the brutal tactics of the Spanish. Nevertheless, the institutional power of the Catholic Church encouraged the conversion of Indigenous peoples by whatever means necessary, including war (Buckholder, 2014). It is, however, crucial to acknowledge that modern Latin American Christians represent nearly a quarter of the global Christian population. According to *The Oxford Handbook of Latin American Christianity*, “By 2025, Latin America will surpass Europe and the United States to become the global region with the highest number of observant Christians” (Orique et al., 2020, p.1). Despite the history of colonization and the violence associated with it, many modern Latin Americans do not view Christianity negatively. However, they are very different from the Indigenous peoples of South America who were almost completely wiped out following Spanish and Portuguese conquests. Therefore, in Latin America, the consequences of missionary work and the evangelism associated with it are not so straightforward.

In Asia, Christian missions have had a presence ever since the beginning of European commercial activities. Missionaries in Taiwan were only active to a limited extent during Dutch colonial settlement. It was not until the late 19th century that English and Canadian missionaries began to establish a more significant presence (Ion, 1990). The Imperial Chinese administration was openly hostile toward them and, as outcasts, Christians were often violently persecuted. Therefore, after the First Sino-Japanese War “both the English and Canadian missionaries welcomed the Japanese occupation” (Ion, 1990, p. 174). Thomas Barclay believed the Japanese administration would be more beneficial to their goals of proselytism. Thus, many missionaries became supporters of yet another colonial regime. Still, we must acknowledge that missionaries built schools, hospitals and churches in Taiwan. They created communities that served the poor and the outcast. But, this charity depended on whether one embraced Christianity.

Today, the Presbyterian Church is very influential in Taiwan. Their mission work is widely admired and welcomed. “I Love Taiwan” exemplifies this attitude of service. During my time in Taiwan, I never ceased to be amazed by the humble and diligent work the ILT missionaries performed for their respective communities. They contribute positively to Taiwanese society. Still, the potential harms of mission work must not be forgotten and ILT should continue to distance itself from the most negative aspects of this history. As demonstrated by the English and Canadian missionaries in Taiwan, when the priority of mission work is proselytism, it is easy to side with the oppressor. Missionaries saw that the easiest way to convert large populations was to align themselves with colonial powers. This created coercive structures, where the colonized were forced to convert or face poverty and violence. To avoid these historic tendencies, ILT should expand its service to non-Christians. The primary objective of their mission should be to serve communities and individuals without the expectation of conversion. The value of



Justin and Neo Wu, presenting Canadian culture to participants of “I Love Taiwan.”

the Christian religion should not be demonstrated by its political influence and economic power but rather by the selflessness of its followers.

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## Journey of a Lifetime



Neo Wu engaging in conversation with another participant of the “I Love Taiwan” event.

By Neo Wu

Through the ebb and flow of my daily life, bustling crowds and career aspirations, I often forget how precious and beautiful the world really is. I find myself so often entranced by the convenience of technology, which extends to me the ability to view, explore and engage with other worlds. And yet it is this convenience that presents a false understanding and is complicit in my ignorance and presuppositions of the nature of other countries. I thought the world smaller than it really is, cul-

tures simpler and societies less nuanced. It is not often that the bricks of understanding that have been laid since childhood come tumbling down. Flying toward Taipei and witnessing the waves of the Pacific crashing against the green shores of the island foretold a journey of beauty that no camera could capture and no writing could express.

I visited Taiwan last year within the framework of the “I Love Taiwan” mission gathering that the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan invites the PCC to participate in. Even before arriving, I was apprehensive as to the nature of people I would meet. Who were they? Did they think like I did? Did they have the same ideals and morals I had?

I was thousands of miles away from home, with a flawed understanding of Taiwan and an unease toward what was to come. And despite my apprehension and hesitation, I was greeted with love, understanding, respect and mutuality. Throughout my time in Taiwan, I was blessed with new experiences, delicious food, breathtaking views and indelible friendships.

At times, I was confronted with cultural and linguistic barriers, yet the people I met showed me overflowing patience and understanding, the types of which I often find lacking in my home country. Even if we spoke different languages, even if we lived different lives, we understood each other as human beings.

Not often do I find a genuineness in people that incites change and nurtures connection; the people I met through ILT, despite being from different countries each with their own cultures and stories, were able to form connections and community. It is thanks to ILT’s great efforts that such an environment was created, one that cultivated life-changing connections and encouraged engagement with local communities.

I’m at a loss for words to describe the beauty I experienced in Taiwan through the kindness of its people, awe-inspiring natural beauty and rich culture. “I Love Taiwan” gave me the opportunity to experience the journey of a lifetime, and one that I will not soon forget.

**WOMEN**

# WMS Celebrates 110 Years

By Sarah Kim,  
Women's Missionary Society

The Women's Missionary Society (WMS) is celebrating! For over 110 years, the WMS has been involved in mission and has much to rejoice. The WMS gives thanks to God for the timeless purpose "to be involved in local and world mission through prayer, study, service and fellowship." God has been good! And there are many, many reasons to celebrate!

The year 2024 is an important milestone in the history of the WMS. On May 15, 1914, at Knox Presbyterian Church, Toronto, three organizations that had evolved from specific missions united to form the Women's Missionary Society, Western Division, of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It involved women from Quebec to British Columbia. In 2004, "Western Division" was dropped



Women gathering for the mailing of "Tidings," in 1902. PHOTO CREDIT: THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ARCHIVES

from the name.

Much is being organized to make the celebration a time of rejoicing, reflecting and giving thanks. As the theme reflects, this will be a time to "Celebrate God's Goodness," thinking of the theme scripture passage from Philippians

1:6, where it says, "I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."

On May 6 and 7, 2024, the 110th anniversary celebrations will take place at the Queen of

Apostles Renewal Centre in Mississauga, Ont. Then on May 8, the WMS Council will meet, where delegates from across the country will prayerfully brainstorm and envision the way forward.

Some program highlights include:

- Worship with guest preachers: the Rev. Mary Fontaine (Moderator of General Assembly) and the Rev. Dr. Dorcas Gordon (former principal of Knox College)
- A time of looking at the history of the WMS through slide presentations, skits, storytelling and speeches
- Guests from India: Dr. Priya John, Director of the Christian Medical Association of India (CMAI) and Shimy Mathew, Secretary, Nurses League, CMAI.
- Susan Aglukark (Inuit singer)
- Panel on Women and Mis-

sion, facilitated by the Rev. Dr. Dorcas Gordon. Panelists are Cathy Reid (WMS President, Malawi), the Rev. Marion Barclay (AMS Editor, Ghana) and the Rev. Mary Fontaine (Minister of Hummingbird Ministries, B.C.)

- Mission speakers on Ukraine—Elena Risnyk and Thea van Dixhoorn

For more information about this event, contact Sarah Kim, Executive Director of the WMS, at [skim@presbyterian.ca](mailto:skim@presbyterian.ca) or check the WMS website at [wmspcc.ca](http://wmspcc.ca).



## WMS Paris Auxiliary Member Celebrates 100th



By Shirley Miller, President,  
WMS Helen Young Auxiliary

It was party time at Telfer Place Atrium in Paris, Ont., on December 9, as relatives and friends celebrated Joyce Bawcutt's 100th birthday. A band of friends kept the festivities moving by playing many of Joyce's favourite songs. She even sang.

Joyce has been a member of the Women's Missionary Soci-



Joyce Bawcutt at her 100th birthday celebration.

ety (WMS) Helen Young Auxiliary since arriving in Canada from England in 1956. She and her husband, Jack, went into the textile business with Joyce operating The Yarns and Craft store in downtown Paris for many years.

Joyce has been a faithful and valued member of the WMS Auxiliary—having served as treasurer and pianist, and always willing to take part in worship and program studies throughout the years. As a mother of four children, she still found time to serve as an elder, a choir member, a Sunday school teacher and Superintendent, and

she wholeheartedly supported Fidelis Guild, especially at the annual bazaar.

As keeper of the offering for a Wednesday morning Bible Study, Joyce encouraged the women to support the Rev. Margaret Mullen, Winnipeg Inner City Missions and Place of Hope in Winnipeg. Since Joyce was well versed in yarns and knitting, she eagerly produced most of the 100+ Izzy Dolls for a project initiated by New St. Janes Presbyterian Church mission women in London, Ont., for a preschool children's centre in Malawi. Izzy Dolls were sent with a mission team to Nicaragua. Joyce also donated items and helped fill personal care bags sewn by two members for ARISE outreach in Toronto.

At the first Presbyterian Women's Gathering in 2011, Joyce won a prize for the eldest women present! Joyce has been a faithful and enthusiastic supporter of missions locally, nationally and internationally, as she follows Jesus in serving others.



Seated around the table are guests from nearby past WMS groups and church members. Pictured (left to right): Marion Neill, Vivian Young, Kathy Deschene, the Rev. Kuldip Mathew, Carey Jo Johnston, Joan Hilliard, Sharon Chomacki and Mary-Lynn McConnachie.

## An Afternoon of Mission

By Gail Carroll

The St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church Women's Missionary Society (WMS) in Arnprior, Ont., in partnership with Literacy & Evangelism Canada, hosted a mission afternoon to hear from the Rev. Dr. Kuldip Mathew, senior pastor at the Church of Hope in Ferozepur in Punjab, India. The Rev. Kuldip Mathew was visiting the Rev. Carey Jo Johnston,

Managing Director for Literacy & Evangelism Canada.

The Rev. Kuldip Mathew highlighted the Church of Hope's ministry in church planting and visiting slums. They have started 76 churches in village areas. They hold English as a Second Language classes at the church. They operate the School of Hope, which helps educate, feed and clothe 65 children. They organize

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**WOMEN**

# Listowel WMS Going Strong

By Ethel Corry

After recovering from the lack of meetings and activity during Covid, the Britton WMS of Knox Presbyterian Church in Listowel, Ont., has bounced back and is even stronger than before. We have attracted new members and have tried to strengthen our contribution to our church, our community and the world beyond us. We have served many funeral lunches and dinners and from the proceeds from these we have donated almost \$10,000 to the WMS, as well as to many charitable organizations. We have also provided one of the community meals served by our church during the summer.

In a more concrete way, participants knitted 350 dishcloths

that were given to the local Salvation Army to be included in their Christmas hampers. They also knitted “fish and chip” jumpers to provide babies in Africa with protection other than the paper wrapping similar to that used to serve fish and chips.

The whole congregation supported our drive to collect surplus medical equipment and medications, as well as hygiene products. These were sent to the Stratford Medical Depot for distribution to several countries as well as locally. We also collected dozens of pairs of underwear to be distributed by an organization working in South Sudan to improve the safety and self-esteem of young women. All this activity has confirmed our commitment to “doing mission” in the present time.



Back row: Ethel Corry, Marsha Hamilton, Deanne Cressman, Lois Robinson, Shirley Suggitt, Lois Aitchison, Jean Jinkinson, Hannah Thompson. Middle Row: Elaine Scott, Bonna May, Bev Porterfield, Alice Schneider, Christina Nauta. Seated: Robina Alexander, Phyllis Thompson, Lorein VanZant.



“Fish and chip” jumpers, medical supplies and underwear.



Pictured holding dishcloths are (left to right): Ethel Corry, Hannah Thompson, Shirley Suggitt, Christina Nauta, Phyllis Thompson and Elaine Scott.

# Rejoicing in Service

By Caryl Scheel

“Rejoicing in Service” was the theme of the Fall Rally of the Maitland Presbyterial of the Women’s Missionary Society (WMS), hosted by Knox Presbyterian Church, Belmore, on Oct. 25, 2023, at Camp Kintail. Fifteen members were registered and four guests attended to enjoy the day at Camp Kintail.

After registration and a short welcome and coffee break, the

Rev. Theresa MacDonald-Lee of Camp Kintail led a worship service on a quilting theme of “One Stitch at a Time.” Work is worship when done for the Lord. Scripture was read from Romans 12:3–8.

Lorraine Clugston of Wingham presented an Honourary Membership to Marilyn Lapp, also of Wingham, followed by a presentation of letters of thanks from several campers who were able to attend Camp Kintail in the summer of 2023. A total of eight



Lorraine Clugston of Wingham presenting an Honourary Membership to Marilyn Lapp of Wingham at the Maitland Fall Rally.

campers were sponsored by Maitland WMS in 2023.

Camp staff, including Jonathan and Kirsten, reported on a very successful summer at Kintail.

During a break before lunch,

the Rev. Theresa led a discussion among attendees on personal antidotes on their journeys through church life as a child and adult. Lorraine Clugston led us in a hymn singing, accompanied by Judy Watt.

Following a delicious lunch of lasagna and salad, Mary Simmons introduced guest speaker Jean Aitchison of Stratford. Jean was awarded the Order of Canada in 2022. She also received the Stratford Senior Citizen of the Year award and the Sr. Achievement Award. All these honours acknowledge the many, many years Jean has overseen the Stratford Mission Depot, a distribution centre for medical supplies to war-torn and poor countries of the world. These supplies are unused and discarded by hospitals and pharmacies, as well as given by donation. No

money changes hands and they are transported and shipped by service groups and donors of the community. Jean was a nurse for 59 years at Ottawa Civic and Stratford hospitals and has run the Guatemala Warehouse of Hope in Stratford for 28 years. Her message and presentation were very inspiring and enjoyed by all.

Donna Sutton thanked the guest speaker and Mary Simmons said medical supplies will be collected at Synodical next spring for this mission.

An invitation to the Spring Rally and Annual Meeting was extended by Ruth Dorey of Kincardine.

Courtesies by South Kinloss and closing prayer by Merle Underwood of Wingham finished an inspiring and excellent day of “Service.”

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a tailoring class for young women, plus food and medical support for others in the slums. They do all this while sharing about Jesus and praying with those they help. The Rev. Kuldip Mathew also shared about some of the challenges that Christians in his community face. About 15 people from several churches in the Arnprior area gathered to learn about this ministry.



The Rev. Paul Johnston, the Rev. Kuldip Mathew and the Rev. Carey Jo Johnston.



The Rev. Kuldip Mathew from India presenting to the WMS group at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Arnprior, Ont.

# Anti-Racism Covenant Update

By the Life and Mission Agency

The General Assembly resolved in 2022 (A&P 2022, pp. 183-191, 24) that it would seek to become anti-racist. As one step in that journey, it approved a recommendation to create an anti-racist covenant and accompanying strategies for the church.

The church has long held that racism is a sin. The Presbyterian Church in Canada has further affirmed that racism is incompatible with the gospel and operates as a blatant denial of Christian faith (A&P 1972, pp. 269-270, 59). While the church has made statements like this, clearly rejecting racism, a rejection of racism is not the same thing as actively and vigilantly working to oppose and dismantle it. Seeking to become an anti-racist church is just that.

Over the past several decades, since the PCC affirmed that rac-

ism is incompatible with the gospel, there has been a growing realization of how racism operates, how much harm it has done and continues to do, how deep it runs in social structures, institutions and relationships (including in the church) and how dependant on it so much of society's current economic and social structure is.

As the church has started gaining that better understanding of just how powerful this force is that is incompatible with the gospel—and how it has even shaped the church's own witness—the need to begin working more actively to oppose racism has become increasingly clear. The church must do this work to live up to our own understanding of discipleship. How could we *not* oppose something that operates as a blatant denial of Christian faith, but is nevertheless operating in any number of ways, not only in



society but within our own structures?

Becoming an anti-racist church is a process and a journey. Those who have lived experience of being targeted by racism will have more expertise when it comes to trying to understand the best ways to oppose and dismantle racism; so, though this is the work of everyone in the church and we must collectively pull together to do it, the church will need to listen especially to the voices and wisdom of racialized people. This is necessary because it can be very difficult to see all the ways in which racism is baked into our systems for those who are not immediately targeted by it.

Working toward this goal will take time to do it well and to affect real change in the church. One of the first steps that has been undertaken is an audit of the church's practices, policies and lived experience. To conduct this audit, a knowledgeable and experienced firm was contracted at the beginning of November to help the

church take stock of itself from a more objective position than we could possibly do through an internal committee. The firm will not only review the church's polity, policies, correspondence and committee membership but also consult broadly with presbyteries, ministries, committees and other relevant bodies to gather information that will establish a baseline from which the work can better continue.

An Advisory Committee has also been formed to oversee the process of creating that anti-racist covenant and the production of relevant programs and resources to help accomplish this work. The members of the Advisory Committee provide feedback to the Life and Mission Agency Committee and will present updates in reports to the General Assembly, in the newspaper and by way of other accessible and relevant means of communication. The committee has met once in person, in September of 2023, and continues meeting virtually.

The work of anti-racism is transformative work that must reach all areas of our lives and institutions, and it will not be easy. But we will know it by its fruits and that, when done well together, it will demonstrate a greater alignment with Christian faith and Jesus' teachings. We already know the fruits that racism has produced and continues to produce. Privilege and wealth for some, to be sure, but at the cost of broken relationships, lives cut short, traumatized people and communities, inequality and inequity. Its fruits show its sin. These things cannot be part of the witness the church gives.

There will be stops and starts as we discern together, and no doubt missteps too. As *Living Faith* reminds us, the church is in constant need of reform (*Living Faith* 7.1.6). But what better way than to show with our actions the witness of what faithful love—seeking the best for others, which is the mark of a Christian (8.3.2)—looks like?



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# Recognizing John Peter and Tori Smit

*By the Rev. Cherie Inksetter,  
Morningside-High Park Presbyterian  
Church in Toronto, Ont.*

John Peter (JP) and Tori Smit have been active in many levels of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for over 40 years. On their retirement, I'm shining a spotlight on their ministry and giving thanks for their commitment to, and love for, this denomination.

Tori grew up at Hopedale Presbyterian Church in Oakville, Ont., where she began what would be a Christian Education career by teaching Sunday school as a teenager. She was encouraged to go to Ewart College after high school, so she enrolled for one year. But at the end of that year, she said, "It felt right to stay," as she experienced a strong sense of call to Christian education. Later in life, her father said he always thought she would be a minister or teacher, and that she got the best of both.

JP attended St. Columba Presbyterian Church in Belleville, Ont. He was active in PYPS (Presbyterian Young Peoples Society) and Camp Iona, but ministry was not what he had in mind. Instead, his sense of call came from others.

"You're going to be a minister," someone said, and as he participated in worship, others would express the idea that this might be something he would do well at. Following high school, his call from Jesus to "Follow me" and his desire to serve God had him enrolling at the University of Toronto for a bachelor's degree in religious studies.

Tori and JP met at Camp Glen Mhor. Tori was there as a counsellor and JP was at nearby Camp Iona. There was a need for male camp counsellors, so JP was "borrowed"—and that's when they became friends. It turned out that they were both headed for the University of Toronto, and it was there that their relationship grew into their life-long partnership in marriage and ministry.

After completing two years of his bachelor's degree, JP decided to take a year off to discern his call to ministry. That year, the PCC sent him to a three-point charge in Northern Saskatchewan, where his sense of call was nurtured. He stayed there for eight months before he returned to university and completed his final year as an undergraduate. He then obtained a Master of Divinity from Knox

College.

In 1982, Tori graduated from Ewart College and worked with the Women's Missionary Society and the Board of Congregational Life as an Area Educational Consultant until 1984. At the time, the WMS had a policy that every church would have access to a Christian Educator. She helped to produce curriculum and worked with churches in Brampton and Waterloo-Wellington presbyteries before taking a position as the Director of Christian Education at Knox Presbyterian Church in Milton, Ont. It was in 1984 that JP and Tori married.

Following his graduation from Knox, JP was appointed to Chatsworth and Dornoch, where they remained for three years. Tori and JP had the opportunity for team ministry when they were called to Chedoke Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont.

Tori exercised her great gifts for children's ministry and intergenerational ministry by being involved in LOGOS at Chedoke, First, Maitland and at Knox, Guelph. She continued to be involved in LOGOS, as a trainer and also by writing curriculum for the organization. This fed into her firm belief that it is in creating, maintaining and nurturing relationships, intergenerationally, that the church is strengthened.

Their team ministry continued when they went to First Presbyterian Church in Maitland, Florida, before feeling that it was time to come home to Canada after four-and-a-half years.

Both JP and Tori enriched their ministries through continuing education. JP took Interim Ministry training and then went on to achieve his Doctor of Ministry at Columbia Seminary with his thesis: "Understanding Congregational Culture as a Point of Entry and Change." Tori also went to Columbia and received a Doctor of Educational Ministry with her



**Tori and John Peter (JP) Smit.**

dissertation: "Will Our Faith Have Children? Planting a Fruitful and Sustainable Ministry with Children in Congregations with Ten Or Fewer Children." It focused on the importance of intergenerational education and relationships within the church.

Karen DeBoer, the resource developer for Faith Formation Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, shared, "The PCC has benefited from [Tori's] outstanding networking as she connected with people around the globe to learn best practices that could be woven into her work here in Canada. Tori knows faith formation, and her foundational knowledge is evident in all the ways she has supported and equipped ministry leaders in the PCC and beyond."

Both Tori and JP held positions within the Synod of Central, Northern Eastern Ontario and Bermuda: JP as Regional Minister for Congregational Health, and Tori as Regional Minister for Faith Formation. Their participation was invaluable to the synod, but their wisdom and expertise were also shared with ministers and congregations outside their synod. During the Covid years, they supported ministers, Christian education workers and congregations to work in new and important ways, notably online. In particular, Tori developed seasonal Google Classrooms for the wider church to utilize—and her work was used in Canada, the UK, Australia and the US, across a number of denominations. In 2024, Tori will become president of the Association of Partners in Christian Education (APCE), marking 40 years of her involve-

ment with that organization.

This devoted couple has contributed to the wider work of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, with Tori being appointed to work at national office in 2009, and JP offering his expertise in Natural Church Development to congregations across the country. They have shared their gifts as pastors to other pastors. They have both served on national committees: JP served on Assembly Council and with the Ministry and Church Vocations Advisory Committee; Tori served on the Life and Ministry Committee, the Ewart Endowment Committee, as Convener on the Committee to Advise the Moderator, and on the Executive Committee for the Order of Diaconal Ministers. Both were involved in Triennium, a PC(USA) youth event, as well as Canada Youth. And each has served as clerk of the Presbytery of West Toronto.

In their work, they continued to offer their wisdom to the upcoming generations of pastors within the PCC, as JP strove to help graduates find their callings, and Tori took on the role of adjunct professor at Knox College in Human Growth and Faith Development and Christian Education. Tori also taught at Emmanuel College in Toronto and at Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta.

At the end of 2023, the Smits entered their well-deserved retirement, stepping back from all activities and responsibilities, with plans to relax at their new home in Prince Edward County and travel on occasion. They have been a gift to The Presbyterian Church in Canada and we are grateful that they shared their lives and ministry with the church.



**The Rev. Cherie Inksetter with JP and Tori.**

**Learn More about the Nominees for Moderator**  
[presbyterian.ca/nominees-2024](https://presbyterian.ca/nominees-2024)



**HISTORY**

# Canadian Society of Presbyterian History



The Canadian Society of Presbyterian History conference with the Rev. Peter Bush presenting. PHOTO CREDIT: IAN MACCREADY.

*By Dr. Stuart Macdonald, President of the Canadian Society of Presbyterian History*

Have you ever wondered how The Presbyterian Church in Canada created its hymn books?

Have you ever asked yourself, how does what we say in our confessional standards (the Westminster Confession, the Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation, *Living Faith*) affect the de-

terminations the denomination makes?

Have you ever had any other questions about the history of our denomination?

The Canadian Society of Presbyterian History is an independent academic society that gathers yearly to hear papers on various historical topics, including the first two questions above. We also learn about missionaries, the history of Presbyterian Music Camp, and so much more.

While we physically gather in one location, the society has been able to live stream our gatherings over the last years, so that Canadians with an interest in historical subjects from across the country can participate. We also publish a yearly series of papers from our conference.

*We invite people to join the society, as we explore together Presbyterian history. To learn more, visit [csp.h.ca](http://csp.h.ca).*



The **Canadian Society of Presbyterian History (CSPH)** was founded in 1975 during the centennial of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The CSPH is a religion-centred Learned Society, meeting annually on the last Saturday of September. Membership is open to all individuals and institutions who share an interest and fascination in the study of Presbyterian and Reformed history.

Since 1975, 182 scholarly papers have been presented at annual meetings, covering a wide range of research topics. Please visit the “Papers” section of the website to view and download a selection of 18 of these papers, as well as an index of all the papers delivered between 1975 and 2016.

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## REFLECTIONS

# A Legacy of Missions

## Visiting the Kenneth MacKenzie School in Lampang, Thailand

By Dr. Nam Soon Song,  
Professor Emerita, Knox College  
in Toronto, Ont.

*"Hana, dool, hana, dool."*

What an odd experience it was to sit back and listen to the children counting numbers in Korean aloud, "Hana, dool, hana, dool," which translates to "One, two, one, two," at a school in the city of Lampang, Thailand. This was a scene from Taekwondo class.

When I entered the Kenneth MacKenzie School, a mission supported by PC(USA), I was met by many students in their Taekwondo uniforms. This school is served by two Korean missionaries, the Rev. Mooil Oh and Eunsook Jin, both of whom were once my students in Korea. While Jin serves as a Taekwondo teacher, the Rev. Oh teaches Ethics classes. During my visit, I was able to bear witness to their love for their students; it was humbling to see all the efforts they put into embodying the love of Christ to not only their students, but also their fellow teachers.

I also received a warm welcome from the enthusiastic Christian principal, Ongkarm Chomvisarutkul. His vision for Christian education and his passionate commitment to Christ became evident soon after our first meeting, for which I was deeply touched. I gave

thanks to God for the resilience of this Christian school in Lampang, a mission legacy that has survived for over 130 years in a country where Christians make up just a little over 1% of the population. Throughout Thailand in general and in Lampang specifically, Buddhist temples are found on every corner, and even standing as central landmarks in the city.

Situated in a picturesque setting, the school enjoys a beautiful view of Lampang, the capital city of Lampang province in Northern Thailand. The city of Lampang is located within the valley of the Wang River, which runs through the city to demarcate it into two sections: north and south. I was brought to see and cross a bridge that was built in the early days of mission work in the city in order to bring people over from the other side to the church in the north. I was impressed by the impeccable maintenance of the bridge over the years, ensuring a smooth passage for people crossing to the other side of Lampang.

The Kenneth MacKenzie School stands as a testament to Christian education. Located in front of the river in North Lampang, it was established by the mission board of The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America in 1890. The school was named after a

young boy who passed away in his youth. The Oregon church to which Kenneth belonged collected offerings in his memory, which were directed to Thailand to build a memorial in his name. In due course, these offerings found their way to this school, which was officially named in 1910. Presently, the school belongs to the Foundation of the Council of the Churches in Thailand.

Since its establishment, the Kenneth MacKenzie School has flourished, successfully overcoming various challenges. By the year 2009, the school had grown to accommodate approximately 1,000 students. During the Japanese invasion of Thailand in 1942, the school was temporarily closed, as the premises were used by the Japanese military. After the war in 1946, the school reopened its doors. Subsequently, the school acquired government accreditation, encompassing education from kindergarten to high school. This, in turn, initiated a phase of growth and development for the school.

However, the school was severely impacted by the Covid pandemic, closing its doors for two years. In 2022, following the difficult period under Covid, a dedicated principal with a passion for the gospel was appointed to



the school with God's help. The school reopened under his guidance. As a devout Christian, he works to align his vision—and the school's mission—with God's will. He has a clear understanding and background to support the school as a Christian school.

This year, Principal Chomvisarutkul anticipates that the school will accommodate around 500 students from kindergarten to grade 3. The school's gradual expansion plan will extend to include grade 12 students. As a step toward this plan, the school was renamed the Kenneth MacKenzie International Christian School. The school currently has only two English-speaking teachers and they hope to recruit more. In our discussions, the principal emphasized a need for more native English-speaking Christian teachers, as well as his aspirations for the school to exude a Christian spirit.

This visit held deep personal significance, evoking memories of the Christian Mission School in Korea, where I first embraced Christianity and received a calling to become a servant of God. I have witnessed a transformation among many of my former classmates who, formerly non-Christians, embraced Christianity and have since dedicated themselves to serving Christ both locally and abroad. I came to appreciate once more the great contributions of our faithful Presbyterian predecessors all over the world, whose accom-



Kenneth MacKenzie.

plishments are often overlooked or forgotten.

Above all, I was delighted to witness a living legacy of missions by Presbyterian churches worldwide. God continues to bear fruits of missions all over the world, which were carried out long ago through faithful servants. So, I pray to God: "May the gospel spread through the Kenneth MacKenzie International Christian School to the people of Lampang and Thailand. May the students of KMICS be the first to believe, leading their own families to Christ, and later spreading the gospel to others in the city."

In a few cities in Thailand, I was able to visit only legacies of PC(USA). Thus, I began to wonder what Canadian Presbyterian mission legacies are carried out up to today in these countries. Finding Canadian Presbyterian mission legacies forgotten in these areas will be my next journey.



Dr. Nam Soon Song with teachers.



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## REFLECTIONS

# Field Education and Imagination

By the Rev. Richard R. Topping,  
 President and Vice-Chancellor,  
 Professor of Studies in the Reformed  
 Tradition, Vancouver School  
 of Theology

I drove my son to Castlegar, B.C., about 10 years ago, where he had enrolled in a wildlife and fisheries management program. He loves animals. He loves the outdoors. His bent in life was to do this from the time he could move. I'd say it was his calling. On the way to the school, we noticed things like mountains, trees, flowers and wildlife. We observed the world, as far as we could see!

Three years later, I went to pick him up and bring him home. We had to take a truck as he had accumulated all kinds of stuff—snowshoes, skis, a large backpack, heaps of outdoor camping equipment, and books, tons of books, many of them field guides.

The drive home was different than the drive there. It wasn't just the load of stuff we carried in the car. He brought home a load of learning and new practices. The conversation went something like this:

My son: Dad, will you look at that, the angiosperms are blooming.

Me: What?

My son: And did you see that path through the woods undulates love corridors. And did you know that the *pinus ponderosa* has tout needles growing in scopulate fascicles of two to three with flame retardant bark?

I was in awe of his educators. I couldn't even get him to do the dishes; and these strangers, these educators—in the classroom and in the field—altered his world! Coming home, this son of mine had a new take on reality because of his training. They did not just populate his brain with new ideas, they formed him. He saw a different world coming home than he was able to see when he left. They gave him a gift for seeing what he could not see before.

My son lives and acts in the world differently now—he cares. He knows watersheds, he does live releases of sturgeon early in the morning, he rides on a bike to the Fraser just to watch sea lions, he gets up at 5:30 a.m. to go whale watching and, enthusiast that he is, he drags me with him. He tries to get me to see what he sees. His joy pulls other people

into the wake of his love for the delights of the created world; he's even latched on to other people who love what he loves.

We can't eat fish in a restaurant unless he sees the Ocean Wise endorsement on the menu. I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that his imaginative repertoire was enlarged by his education. I think he sees a different world now and seeing that different world means he engages the world in new ways, humane ways, even more loving ways.

His teachers, educators and role models, with whom he is still in touch, initiated him into a whole new world with attendant behaviours, emotions, attitudes and dispositions. They introduced him to new communities and professional organizations where the learning continues. He doesn't just know more—he cares more, he acts differently, he comports himself in the world in news ways with others who do the same. The field education took. And as a theological educator, I'm a little envious of the success!

One of my favourite authors, Northrop Frye, a Canadian literary scholar, gave the Massey Lectures on CBC in 1963. *The Educated Imagination* is now in its 30th printing. In this book, Frye asks a simple question: Why study literature? His answer is rich with possibility. He says that the study of literature, what he calls "man's revelation to man" (1963), is for the sake of enhancing imagination. Literary studies are hard work. They require critical finesse and directed attention, but the goal is to beef-up imagination.

Frye claims that if imagination is stoked (educated) with ideas, pictures of the world, from other times and places, you quickly realize that what's served up by your culture right now is only one way of doing things. There are better worlds than the one around us right now; there are worlds we want to live in. And imagination could lead to action. When you compare what is with what might be, it could make us so restless with the dead-ends and stale leftovers of the present that whole communities could start living toward a better arrangement, a more humane option, a possible world.

"You soon realize that there is a difference between the world you are living in and the one you want



Richard and Karl Topping.

to live in... The world we want to live in (not the world that is) is a vision that is inside our minds, born and fostered by imagination, yet real enough for us to try and make the world we see conform to it" (*Educated Imagination*, p. 4)

Now I wonder if Frye's way of putting it might be jazzed into a theological frame to help us think about theological education and theological field education. We might talk about a vision that is born and fostered by scripture and sacraments and theology and spiritual practices of attention to God's action in the world.

What about a theologically educated imagination? What about theological field education as focused critical attention on "God's revelation to people" in Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit? After all, Frye was a United Church minister, he was always talking about the power of scripture.

Could whole communities dare (by faith) to envision what might be because the Triune God has stoked their imaginations through prophets and poets, scripture and saints, testifying to the Kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven? A theologically educated imagination may envision a reconciled world, fuelled as it is with visions of wild and domestic animals lying down together, with visions of swords beat into plowshares, of a detoxified heaven and earth through the Lamb that was slain.

A people could become so enamoured with these solicitous visions that they grow discontent with what is, and start living toward more humane arrangements, where justice and peace embrace. And they do it not because they have to but because they may and are guided by astute practitioners whose imagina-

tions have been sanctified by the Spirit by means of the gospel.

Subject yourself to theological education, field education, as imaginative transformation and priorities could get reversed, altered, changed. Fund an imagination with the gospel of reconciliation and the next thing you know someone says, "I have a dream..." and moves non-violently toward a more humane arrangement. They just start to believe that history bends toward justice. Talk about grasped by a vision!

One of the disquietudes of students in theological study relates to scripture. The question inevitably comes up about whether revelation is restricted to what is testified to in the Bible. What I try to say is that scripture is testimony, human testimony, to the words and works of God in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ. It provides an imaginative norm so that we can recognize God's MO (*modus operandi*) in the world now. I think that's actually a great way to conceive of the authority of scripture for the church.

Douglas John Hall says: "The question the church (and theological colleges) ought to be asking and seeking to answer in and for a particular time and place (context) is not what should we do, but rather where is God now at work making and keeping life human? The extent to which [we] determine an answer or answers to that question will determine the nature and relevance of our own activity" (Douglas John Hall, *What Christianity Is Not*, p. 122).

In other words, of course God is a live agent in the world just now, and the Bible read as scripture doesn't prohibit but enables the recognition of what God might

be up to in the world today. That work of ministering the gospel in a variety of circumstances requires an immersion in the world of the Bible. Open up scripture, look at it, and then look through it with the help of the saints, and it opens us to where in the world God is active, individual lives and circumstances all around us.

And seeing it, we get invited to go with the grain of the universe. That work, requires humility, spiritual mentors and perhaps, most of all, courage—courage to speak of God. God too often remains the tacit dimension of church life, not brought to speech for fear and serious secular policing.

Theological educators and the clergy live in a time where talk of God is difficult, and God is the main subject of theological study, and so ours is a very odd task. We make sense of our lives and our lives together in multiple idioms, given to us by media and therapeutic culture, and almost none of them include reference to God. Talk about God is often thought of as special pleading or rhetorical excess. Charles Taylor says that talk about God at the university is about as welcome as an atheist in the Bible belt.

And we live in a time of speed; modernity is the process of speeding things up. Just to stay where you are, speed is incumbent upon you—like going up the down escalator, says Harmut Rosa. And discernment of God's work in the world requires us to linger and listen and look for God.

As readers of the Bible, we've been taught suspicious rather than reparative reading and so an educated person is someone hyperarticulate in criticism and often tongue-tied about loves. The barbed wire of suspicion keeps us from contamination by the text—and yet what might this mean for formation in the classroom and in the field? (See Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique*.)

What it means is that theological education in all its dimensions is counter-cultural, prophetic and resistant. It means we need guides who help us attend to God's work in the world—in small, consistent and deliberate ways. It means theological education is in the business of bringing to speech what is there in people's lives, in the church and in the world—the action of the gracious, merciful and reconciling God.

**REFLECTIONS**

Continued from page 36

And this kind of work takes place in encounter, students don't just listen, they watch and imitate and get down moves. Students learn how faith works in the world not just by lecture but from motions, movements and silences. They learn from contexts where talk of God is robust and from ones that seem to police it out. They listen to the dots we connect and the ones we leave to themselves. They learn from what we consider worth praying for, what kind of people we consider worthy of our full attention, from what moves us to compassion. They learn from whether we are willing to wait for a Word from God, or just rush ahead.

Our habits and repetitions lay down imaginative theological and doxological rhythms that can be an invitation to speak of God, to

follow Jesus Christ, to pray for the guidance of the Spirit.

Serene Jones of Union Theological Seminary wrote an essay some years ago on the authority of the Bible. She entitled it "Dreaming Scripture, Imagining Bible." It is a strange essay in the sense that everyone else in the collection wrote in a very didactic and doctrinal tone on the theme of the authority of the Bible. Jones wrote about her sanctification and formation as a Christian leader through time not so much by familiarity with the Bible but by means of familiarity with the world informed by scripture.

"Shaped by the world of churchly, scriptural speech, it is impossible for me to imagine a world without God...and in the ongoing play of my imagination there is also a strong tendency for

me to impose on everything I experience some sort of story about sin and redemption. I cannot look at another person without seeing Jesus loving them...it is impossible for me to frame humanity in any other way than as Jesus-loved.

"I see Jesus looking up at Zacchaeus in the tree or toward the lepers living in caves outside the city walls [and it] moves me toward the edge of what we normally see in search of what we do not... It is an impulse that drove me toward feminism, liberation theology, a deep commitment to radical justice and a suspicion of the exclusions and repressions that religion itself is constantly enacting..." (*Engaging Biblical Authority*, ed. William Brown, p. 79).

We are in this work of educating and forming thoughtful, en-

gaging and generous Christian leaders for the 21st century. I think a central and crucial piece of the work is the sanctification

of imagination by the Holy Spirit so that we imagine the world God imagines in Christ and lean into it. *Veni Spiritus Sanctus.*



# Welcoming

By Ty Ragan, *Centennial Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta.*

Author Thomas Wolfe once said, "You can never go home again." For me, one place has always proven the idiom wrong. Most recently, my son Leland (who experiences life with what he terms "superpowers," and others call disabilities) and I started adventuring in the community by transit and walking.

At the end of this summer, we rolled up to visit Centennial Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., a place where a few years ago Leland had engaged as a greeter (among other things) with our family, and in the summer of 2022, the church responded to our prayer requests, as he had a lengthy hospital stay and we were unsure if he would ever get out.

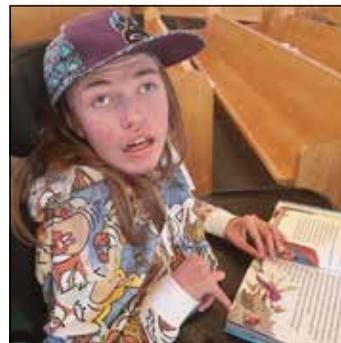
It was like a homecoming! Folks chatted with him, trying to get him to smile, and I saw glimmers of the old son I had known before his long

hospital visit. He was adamant we were to go back the next Sunday, and why would he want that? Was it doctrinal? Nope. Accessibility? The ramps, lift and custom-cut pew at the front that allow for his wheelchair are all wonderful for full engagement with church life, but these only mattered to create an inclusive space. It went beyond that—it was belonging. The community knew they were embracing an unknown journey, but they saw my son, and they loved my son.

The music director ensured decorations and worship aides were set up so Leland could fully see but not feel overwhelmed. Those in the pulpit engaged with his frequent "Hi's" and gentle heckles, knowing that it showed he saw them as his "buddy." Leland had his always rotating yet trusty book he asked folks to read or share with him. He would look out for the other kids in the church because he likes to be a big brother. He could focus, and when Christmas was mentioned, he could get a rousing "Ho



Leland visiting Centennial Presbyterian Church



Ho Ho!" and he felt celebrated and encouraged (where, sadly, other communities asked him to leave).

Leland gave his joy and love, and it was reciprocated.

This is what matters. Churches can come back post-Covid by opening up a sense of home, understanding that *ministry* is an active verb for all in the community.

For a Dad, no matter how long or short this part of the journey with my son is, it is a blessing of thanksgiving in belonging.

"Each person with a disability, no matter how serious, severe, or even profound, contributes something essential to and for the body through the presence and activity of the Spirit; people with disabilities are therefore ministers empowered by the Spirit of God, each in their own specific way, rather than merely recipients of the ministries of non-disabled people" (*The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* by Amos Yong, 2011, p. 95).




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[presbyterian.ca/moderator-easter](http://presbyterian.ca/moderator-easter)

## REFLECTIONS

# Reading the Signs of the Times

By Kenn Stright, Presbyterian representative to CANAAC (the Caribbean and North America Area Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches) and a member of the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee



Matthew 16:2–3: “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning, ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.”

We are rapidly approaching the 20th anniversary of the Accra Confession made by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 2004 and affirmed by the newly formed World Communion of Reformed Churches in 2010. Hands up all who know (or remember) what the Accra Confession is all about?

From coast to coast to coast, that wasn’t a great response!

Let me try another one, this one taking us back to 1997 and a world preparing for the uncertainty of the approaching millennium. In October 1995, the Southern African Alliance of Reformed Churches met in Kitwe, Zambia. They issued the Kitwe Declaration regarding global economic injustice and the careless and selfish destruction of creation. In response, the 23rd General Council (Debrecen, Hungary, 1997) invited member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches to create a covenantal confession to guide the work of WARC and its member churches. The Declaration of Debrecen encapsulated the events and direction of the Council meeting. It was written in a covenantal form and was read in the Square of the Reformers at the final worship. The Declaration was based upon the words of John Calvin, who repeats over and over in *Institutes* these words, “We are not our own.”

It was a powerful statement to take the Reformed tradition into the 21st century. I used the Declaration time and again in my preaching and teaching ministry at that time to help my congregation prepare for the many changes awaiting us in the 21st century.

By 2004, and the 24th General Council of WARC, the world had changed dramatically. Nine Canadian Presbyterians attended the Accra General Council, three

of which were official delegates. We joined our voice with the other member churches and helped create what is now known as the Accra Confession, originally given the title “Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth.” As with the Declaration of Debrecen, this confession was meant to guide the Reformed family through the difficult days ahead. Unfortunately, it appears that few have reflected on the Accra Confession or followed its call to action.

I was invited to lead a Reflection for the Steering Committee of CANAAC not long ago, focussing on the Accra Confession and especially taking a closer look at the statement: “We have heard that creation continues to groan, in bondage, waiting for its liberation (Romans 8.22). We are challenged by the cries of the people who suffer and by the woundedness of creation itself. We see a dramatic convergence between the suffering of the people and the damage done to the rest of creation.”

It will soon be 20 years since the adoption of this confession and, if anything, it is more relevant today than at any other time in our history. “The signs of the times have become more alarming and must be interpreted. The root causes of massive threats to life are above all the product of an unjust economic system defended and protected by political and military might. Economic systems are a matter of life or death.”

We live in a scandalous world that denies God’s call to life for all.

We recognize the enormity and complexity of the situation. We do not seek simple answers. But as a Communion of Reformed Churches, we do seek a theological and religious approach to an answer. That requires a faith commitment! Faith commitment may be expressed in various ways according to regional and theological traditions: as confession, as confessing together, as faith stance, as being faithful to the covenant of God.

In declaring our faith commitment, we are bound to two realities. The first reality is what we believe. The second and maybe even harder reality is in declaring what we reject. Both require a personal commitment from us corporately and individually. Both demand we change our life and lifestyle.

Again, Accra tells us: “We believe that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system...” And no, it doesn’t stop there. Then come those most difficult of words: “We commit ourselves...” The last words of Accra continue that call to commitment: “Now we proclaim with passion that we will commit ourselves, our time and our energy to changing, renewing, and restoring the economy and the earth, choosing life, so that we and our descendants might live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Back in 2019, the Rev. Dr. Rich-

ard Topping, principal of the Vancouver School of Theology, wrote a bulletin reflection that captures the spirit of the Accra Confession:

“We wait for a world on the way. *Living Faith* tells us that Christians are people who hope, not in their own potential, not in progress, but in God whose will for the world will get full traction on earth one day. God has prepared a future and will usher it in, and it will blow our minds. The planet will flourish and life brimming over will come to all. Lions and lambs will lie down together, swords will get hammered into plowshares, and the whole planet will be detoxified. God will do it. Finally, God will triumph over all opposition and everything that disrupts creation. Salvation full on. While we wait for God to act decisively, we pray. We pray the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples: ‘thy kingdom come.’ Prayer is doing something. Prayer is an act of defiance at the way the world is—say ‘thy kingdom come’ and you start holding out for better arrangements in the world than those currently on tap... Prayer for God’s Kingdom is a subversive act, as Karl Barth

said, ‘to clasp one’s hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.’ In a class H. Richard Niebuhr taught on the Lord’s Prayer, he said that praying ‘thy kingdom come’ is like yelling at the bottom of a snow-laden mountain. You’re asking for an avalanche! Hope in the form of prayer for God’s Kingdom is asking for an intrusion into the world that changes everything. Praying Christians participate in the coming of the Kingdom by divine invitation.”

The Accra Confession states that matters of economic and environmental justice are not only social, political and moral issues: they are integral to faith in Jesus Christ and affect the integrity of the church. Maybe it’s not too late to embrace the insights of the Accra Confession as we seek to be a faithful church, Reformed and Reforming, in this 21st century. The signs of the times have become more alarming and must be interpreted.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us interpret not only the signs before us but the appropriate response of faith. Amen.*

Read or download the Accra Confession  
at [wrcr.ch/accra/the-accra-confession](http://wrcr.ch/accra/the-accra-confession)

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- London, Trinity Community** (half-time stated supply minister)
- London, Korean Christian** (part-time children and youth minister)

**REFLECTIONS**

# Presbyterian Minister Helped Create the Game of Basketball

*By John Ashton, self-employed historical author living in Bridgeville, Pictou County, N.S.*

On Aug. 25, 2023, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution proclaiming December 21 as World Basketball Day. Recognizing sport, including sport for persons with disabilities, has an important role to play in the promotion of peace and development, respect for human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, especially given basketball's universal popularity.

World basketball history was made 132 years ago, and a Presbyterian minister from Nova Scotia helped play a role, from the opening tip-off to what has become a sport played around the globe.

The first-ever basketball game was played at the International YMCA Training School at Spring-

field, Mass., on Dec. 21, 1891. A Nova Scotia man, Finley Grant McDonald of Sunny Brae, Pictou County, played in the first basketball game ever recorded.

James Naismith, a 31-year-old Canadian from Almonte, Ont., is credited with inventing the game of basketball when he became a physical education instructor at the YMCA Training School. The school superintendent challenged him to develop indoor activity sports for the winter months, something "that would be interesting, easy to learn, and easy to play inside and by artificial light." Naismith then came up with the idea of a new sport, based on a children's game, Duck on the Rock, where two teams would battle each other by throwing a ball into the opposing team's basket to score points.

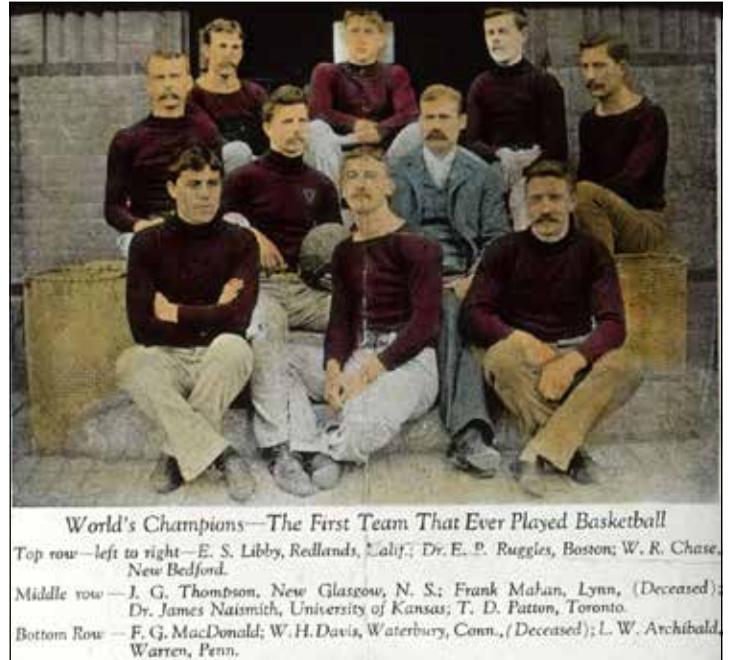
Finley G. McDonald signed up for the secretarial course at the school, which encouraged sport

activity as an academic discipline for all students. During that Fall semester, their class formed a football team and was just finishing up the season when Finley described how the game of basketball evolved: "We were playing football against the other teams from Massachusetts. And we were leaving the field after the last game when coach James Naismith suggested we needed a game to play inside during the winter months. Some of our football players were carrying the goal posts into the gym to store away and someone said, 'Bring them over here and I'll hold them.' Another suggested that we attached a pail to the pole so as to throw the ball into the container (and) at the other end of the gym we hung a hat."

Two teams with nine on each side were chosen and they began throwing the ball around. "It was more like a rugby match with tackles all around, kicking, punching in the clinches. They ended up in a free-for-all in the middle of the gym floor. Before I could pull them apart, one boy was knocked out, several of them had black eyes and another had a dislocated shoulder."

Naismith was then asked what rules were in place for that first game, to which he replied that he: "...didn't have any, and that's where I made my big mistake."

He feared players becoming injured, and drew up the 13 original rules, which described, among other facets, the method of moving the ball and what constituted a foul. A referee was appointed. The game would be divided into



two 15-minute halves with a five-minute resting period in between.

The rules were tacked on a bulletin board and, a short time later, the gym class met and the teams were chosen, with three centres, three forwards, and three guards per side. Two of the centres met at mid-court, Naismith tossed the ball, and the game of basketball was born.

Finley McDonald's biography at the Springfield College Archives states: "...that he was one of the best players as the game became popular at the school. At the first public game played at the Springfield Christian workers gymnasium, between the students and faculty on March 11, 1892, Finley and fellow player Edwin P. Ruggles were the only two students to score in a 5-1 match. More than 200 spectators watched Ruggles and McDonald lead the students to victory over a faculty team led by James Naismith and Amos Alonzo Stagg (American athlete and college coach in multiple sports), who scored the faculty's only point."

After leaving the YMCA Training School, Finley worked at the YMCA in Springhill, N.S., and then moved to the U.S., where he operated a business for several



**Finley G. McDonald.**

years. He later moved to Riverton, Pictou County, N.S., where he was employed with the Town of Stellarton. Finley was also a Presbyterian lay minister and in 1931 became a licensed minister and preached in Pictou County until 1948. During this time, he was Moderator of the Presbyterian Synod in the Maritime Provinces. He died in 1951.

It's interesting to note there were five Canadians who were involved in developing the game of basketball in 1891: Dr. James Naismith from Almonte, Ont.; Finley G. McDonald and John G. Thompson from Pictou County, N.S.; Lyman W. Archibald from Truro, N.S.; and Thomas D. Patton from Danville, Que.



## PULPIT VACANCIES

**Lucknow & South Kinloss**  
(full-time minister)

**Mosa, Burns** (full-time minister)

**Petrolia, St. Andrew's**  
(full-time minister)

**St. Marys, St. Mary's**  
(full-time minister)

**Stoney Creek, Cheyne**  
(full-time senior minister)

**Stratford, Knox**  
(full-time minister)

**Strathroy, St. Andrew's**  
(part-time minister)

**Manitoba & Northwestern Ontario**

**Selkirk, Knox** (full-time minister)

**Alberta & the Northwest**

**Calgary, Grace**  
(full-time lead minister)

**Calgary, St. Andrew's**  
(full-time minister)

**Calgary, St. Giles / New Generations** (full-time minister)

**Presbytery of Calgary-Macleod - General Presbyter** (part-time)

**Red Deer, Knox**  
(half-time minister)

**Sylvan Lake, Memorial**  
(full-time minister)

**British Columbia**

**Surrey, City Centre**  
(full-time minister)

## DEATH NOTICES

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

**Barbara Ann McWilliams**  
Deceased January 17, 2024  
Ancaster, Ont.

**The Rev. Robert Hill**  
Deceased January 4, 2024  
Carleton Place, Ont.

**The Rev. David W. Stewart**  
Deceased January 1, 2024  
Crofton, B.C.

**The Rev. Elizabeth Boyd**  
Deceased December 21, 2023  
Guelph, Ont.

**The Rev. Frederick John Reed**  
Deceased December 4, 2023  
Oshawa, Ont.

**Lachlan Alastair McCallum**  
Deceased November 28, 2023  
Toronto, Ont.

