



Something Interesting Is Happening



Participants at one of the “Culinary Crossroads” dinners.

By the Rev. Susan Brasier,
the Church of St. Andrew
and St. Paul in Montreal, Que.

After decades of research polls confirming what many congregants observe each Sunday—namely, the decline of mainline denominations—something interesting is happening. Although certainly not the only congregation in our denomination experiencing an uptick in membership, the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul (A&P) in Montreal, Que., has grown by almost 100 new members over the past three years—approximately a 20% increase. Initially, this was attributed to the end of the pandemic, which had left people isolated, but the leadership of A&P is now wondering if perhaps something more is at

work behind this good news.

A&P enjoys many blessings: a strong music program, a well-managed endowment and generous volunteers. Yet we also face the same significant challenges that have proved to be the death knell for many large mainline congregations in the same geographical area—being a destination church, limited parking, expensive maintenance and outdated allocation of building space. Nevertheless, other downtown Montreal congregations that remain open have not experienced a similar increase in membership, many reporting an average Sunday attendance of around 25 people in worship.

It may be that no one will ever know exactly what has contributed to A&P’s growth in member-

ship. The leadership suspects it is a combination of factors. The congregation has long demonstrated a strong commitment to hospitality expressed in many ways. Although not a new program, under the leadership of volunteer Don Kelly, the church is open between 15 and 20 hours during the work week for people to visit or pray. Don and his dedicated team of volunteers not only provide tours of the space—highlighting the architectural interest of the building—but also invite everyone to join us on Sunday morning. Sometimes our “Open Church” volunteers find them-

selves engaged in deep theological discussions with visitors.

Additionally, A&P leverages its location between McGill and Concordia Universities by nurturing long-standing connections with the Spiritual Life programs on both campuses. We regularly volunteer with campus projects and are active participants in their interfaith council. This outreach ministry invites students—whether in Montreal for a five-week intensive or a five-year doctoral program—to find a faith home at A&P. These students have many choices of faith communities, and the constant turnover poses challenges, but so far, this outreach to Generation Z has been a key factor in the congregation’s overall health. Coming out of the pandemic, this ministry had only one student; it now has a steady core of around 40 active participants—though never the same 40, as someone is always coming or going.

As the Montreal community has become increasingly multicultural, so too has the congregation of A&P. With so many potentially conflicting cultural values, this could have been a recipe for discord. Instead, about eight times a year, A&P hosts

a community dinner to share food and culture. This program began with the young adults—many of them from around the world—who were homesick and eager to share the customs of their homelands. In the fall of 2022, five Italian students led a group of young adults in making gnocchi. In truth, they may have spent more time watching their *nonnas* make gnocchi than doing it themselves—the church kitchen was soon coated with flour. But amid the chaos, people were cooking, laughing and singing. Conversations in the kitchen that evening flowed in five languages: Italian, French, Cantonese, Portuguese and English. In the end, the food was delicious, the hospitality warm and the cleanup extensive.

The success of that event led to the creation of regular community dinners known as “Culinary Crossroads.” These meals are open to everyone, and many neighbours join us. The range of cuisine reflects the diversity of our congregation and has included Indian, Chinese, Spanish, Nigerian, Lebanese, Louisiana Mardi Gras, Irish and Cuban meals, among

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A meeting of the chess club in full swing in the Session room.



Ordination of new members with the Rev. Glenn Chestnutt.

MESSAGE FROM THE MODERATOR

Offering and Learning from the Church's Apology to Indigenous People

By the Rev. Jeffrey Murray

According to Luke's gospel, when Jesus was on the cross, he said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Following the Resurrection, it was reiterated for the disciples the Messiah's mission: "that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations." As followers of Jesus, we proclaim and are committed to living out Jesus's instruction to repent and forgive one another as God has forgiven us in Christ. It is a simple message easily spoken in worship, but living out this command is a difficult and complex task in a world that has inflicted deep wounds through colonialism, genocide, and many actions that have harmed and hindered life and cultures.

As a preacher of the gospel charged with proclaiming forgiveness, I was profoundly challenged in October when reading

the church's apology to Survivors of residential schools. Some in the room had been students at the Cecilia Jeffrey Residential Schools the PCC operated between 1902 to 1976. The apology names the variety of ways the church's actions harmed Indigenous people, and the lasting impacts on Indigenous lives, identity, culture and traditions.

The space where we gathered, where I read the church's apology for its complicity in colonization and the residential school system, was a room heavy with hurt. Some people in the room were silent, some accepted the apology for themselves, while others expressed anger. To ask for forgiveness was not only unimaginable in that space but would have been irresponsible and self-serving as I represented the institution that had caused harm. Hearing an apology brings up deep wounds for those who have been harmed. Offering an apology calls one to

action, which involves ongoing learning, seeking to understand how complex these matters are. This process leaves the church humbled and hopefully open to listening. In humility, we also seek to act differently: to respect traditional Indigenous spiritual practices that were once suppressed, regarded with suspicion, and even today misunderstood; to continue repudiating doctrines and practices that have done so much harm—like the Doctrine of Discovery—and to work to redress the harms committed.

Though I have read and heard the apology before, it was difficult to offer the apology in the presence of those impacted by residential schools. One feels the heavy burden borne by those on a journey of healing that also recognizes the cycle of harm that was initiated in the schools, which "created an isolated and unsafe environment where violence was condoned and students learned

violence."

The references to violence and harm caused by the church, and taught by our example, name the weight of community repair and healing needed within Indigenous communities. These words also remind the church of how the residential school system made Indigenous people more likely to experience hardship and violence even after leaving the schools. The church needs to listen and learn about the truth of the past and understand its lasting repercussions, and then take informed, humble action to change and walk in a new, good way.

Reading the church's apology challenges my understanding of forgiveness. It has reminded me to be aware of how apologizing or seeking forgiveness can have an ulterior motive, and when it is inappropriate to ask for forgiveness. It also reminded me to recognize the complexities that harm presents us. Also, the experience has highlighted how nuanced the work of apologizing and forgiveness can be, as it gestures toward a call to repair relationships in the ongoing work of reconciliation.

The gospels present Jesus as the victim of religious and state persecution. He was even betrayed, denied and abandoned by his own friends, who were horrified by the events of the cross. Easter morning marks an early part in the journey toward repair. In the resurrection stories of John's gospel, Jesus met with the disciples in the wake of their betrayal, denial, abandonment and harm, and he had breakfast with them before calling them to action. When the church was invited to read our apology to Survivors, hospitality was extended to the three representatives of the church, as we were invited to start our time together over breakfast, even in the wake of harm. We were offered the opportunity to take a step toward repairing a fractured relationship, beginning with, "We are sorry," followed by action.



The Rev. Jeff Murray speaking at the 2025 General Assembly.

The apology itself tries to walk that path culminating with a commitment to action. Along with the 2025 General Assembly, I encourage congregations and all courts, boards of colleges, camps and other ministries, and denominational committees to review the apology and to begin to live out the five commitments that conclude the apology:

- We will continue to listen to and learn from Indigenous people, leaders, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, welcoming and engaging voices from both within and beyond the PCC.
- We will continue the work of reconciliation, responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action and the work of reparation that we have begun.
- We will respect traditional Indigenous spiritual practices.
- We will listen to and tell the truth about the past.
- We will work to support Indigenous-led healing and wellness initiatives and be in solidarity with Indigenous people and communities.

To read the apology, visit presbyterian.ca/apology.

Print copies can be ordered at presbyterian.ca/order.



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Offering a welcoming space

others. Each event brings a bit of chaos and a lot of fellowship. Ultimately, these meals are less about the food on the table and more about helping people find a sense of belonging.

About four years ago, our congregation's leadership decided to shift the focus of mission work from writing checks to supporting community organizations with a more hands-on approach. Gradually, the congregation expanded its existing projects. For example, A&P went from preparing two evening meals a year for the Native Friendship Centre (an Indigenous drop-in centre) to regularly providing part of its monthly dinner. The Mission and Outreach Committee also partnered with an organization called Bread and Beyond to make sandwiches for the homeless and hungry in Montreal. Twice a month, a dedicated group of volunteers gather in the church fellowship hall to produce over 300 sandwiches per session. So far, more than 70 different volunteers have participated. Like Culinary Crossroads, these volunteer opportunities are as much about fellowship and belonging as they are about the meals or sandwiches. In feeding those who are hungry in body, we discovered that we also nourish those hungry in spirit. These are just two examples of the many initiatives through which the congregation has deepened its outreach ministry.

During this time of growth, the congregation has increased



Members of the Young Adults Ministry (YAM) in the church sanctuary.

the number of classes and Bible studies, developed a Green Church ministry, and added new programs as congregational interest has arisen—such as a French Conversation Table, a running group and a chess club—joining long-standing activities like badminton and Scottish country dancing. It hardly seems that these programs alone would explain A&P's growth.

While some of our new members are coming to us from other congregations and denominations, many are completely new to faith. People are looking for something more in their lives, a place not only to belong, but also a place to contribute in a meaningful way to making the world a little gentler and little better.

In the end, perhaps the solution to this mystery lies in A&P's devotion to its music program,



Elder Robert Koffend leading a church tour.

its involvement with the Black Watch Regiment, or simply the fact that in a multicultural city where English is a second language for many newcomers, an

English-speaking church offers a welcoming space. We will probably never know. Nevertheless, for now, we wish to share our joy—and our hope.

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Moderator of the General Assembly:
The Rev. Jeffrey Murray

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CORRECTION NOTICES

In the Winter 2025 edition, under the listing of Pulpit Vacancies on page 40, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Orillia, Ont., was incorrectly listed. The correct listing is St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Orillia.

On page 33, reflections from the "I Love Taiwan" program, Christopher Sankarlal's article incorrectly stated that his orientation began in Taipei. It began in Tamsui, an historic coastal district known for having deep Presbyterian roots.

Our apologies for the errors.



Update from Transcarpathia, Ukraine



By Sandor Zan Fabian,
Bishop of the Transcarpathian
Reformed Church

Ukraine is under siege not only by war, but now also by the cold. Winter has descended mercilessly upon cities and villages, where, due to power outages lasting 15 to 20 hours, lighting and heating often cease for days at a time. Darkness arrives early, enveloping not only the streets but everyday life as well. Families and elderly people live in unheated apartments where the cold is not merely an inconvenience but a real danger.

In Kyiv, nights are torn apart by air raid sirens. The distant rumble or nearby thunder of explosions serve as a reminder that the war

is a constant threat. Metro stations, basements and shelters have become places of refuge, while above ground the city is shrouded in darkness. In Transcarpathia, there are fewer direct strikes, but the consequences are felt here too: power shortages, supply difficulties and uncertainty are part of everyday life.

The most vulnerable are the elderly. Many of them live alone; their children have fled or are serving on the frontlines. For them, a cold home, an extinguished stove, and an empty refrigerator represent both a physical and emotional burden. They cannot always stand in line, they do not always reach aid distribution points, and often they lack the strength to ask for help. Caring for them requires special attention, such as hot meals, medication, firewood and not least, human connection. A bowl of hot soup not only nourishes the body but also gives hope—a sign that they are not alone. Church-run kitchens play a particularly important role, often operating without electricity, with modest means, yet with unwavering perseverance. These kitchens do not ask questions and do not discriminate—they welcome everyone who comes.

Diaconal work becomes truly visible in this darkness. Volunteers, pastors and helpers travel through villages and neighbour-

hoods delivering food packages, visiting the elderly and distributing warm clothing and blankets. They bring not only material aid, but also attention, listening and compassion—human presence that has become one of the greatest shortages of the war.

This winter, people depend on one another. Diaconal service, church assistance and community solidarity represent not only survival, but also the message that even in the darkest times there is care. And, as long as there is someone who cooks for those in need or knocks on the door of an elderly person, the darkness cannot be complete.

There is currently no teaching in schools because there is little heating fuel, school buses are not running and there is no money to pay teachers' salaries.

During the past four years of war, the Transcarpathian Reformed Church has sought to do everything in its power so that those who remained at home might feel and experience every form of care and love. We are grateful for our pastors and their families, for religious educators, for those working in diaconal service, for social workers, teachers, the administrative team, and for all the volunteers who, hearing Christ's call, stepped into service, stayed and faithfully carry out their ministry in the church.

We are not in an easy situation. We are growing tired, weaker and overburdened, because fewer and fewer of us remain. Congregations are shrinking, families are leaving the country, men are hiding from forced conscription, and an enormous number of responsibilities fall on women—often including the daily task of securing basic food. That is why it is very important to us that no one be left alone.

In our church, the year 2026 is the Year of Sowing. The goal of this thematic year is to scatter and pass on the proclamation of the gospel, to deliver it into good soil. Our mission this year is the preaching of the word, evangelization, awakening faith, strengthening weary hands and feet, and comforting embattled people. Throughout the year, we wish to provide encouragement and spiritual nourishment through the organization of various events, meetings, evangelistic weeks, and days of quiet reflection, so that God's word may reach families where God has not been central or where God's promises have faded. If we carry out the task entrusted to us with faithfulness and humility, it will not be in vain, and every small step we take will be for God's glory.

We thank you for your steadfast prayers, and we are grateful that you have stood by us thus far.



The PCC supports various projects of the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia through gifts to Presbyterians Sharing, including the social kitchen of the Reformed Church of Chop preparing hot meals for 50 individuals, four times a week.

165 Years in Elmvale

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

On Sunday, Nov. 2, Elmvale Presbyterian Church in Elmvale, Ont., celebrated 165 years of continuous Christian witness within our community.

Our congregation existed 15 years before The Presbyterian Church of Canada was formed. The congregation's history shows that, from humble beginnings, when these early settlers arrived in the area with only their hope in divine providence and their precious King James Bibles, it was their Presbyterian faith that sustained them.

Through their hard work and

resilience, and with a faithful determination to build lives for their families, a church and a community was built, and the country and our freedoms that we know and love were born.

The congregation gathered to celebrate this legacy and the faithful commitment of those who have gone before, as we continue to honour the traditions of the Presbyterian faith, the centrality of the cross, the guidance of the Bible, and, through an active personal discipleship that reaches out through our actions of love and care, to bring others to know Christ. These are the Presbyterian traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation since 1860.

We were privileged to have the Rev. Dr. John Vissers as our guest preacher for this special worship celebration. John's message from Ephesians was inspiring.

Present in person and through video links were past ministers: the Rev. Paul Sakasov, the Rev. Margerat Robertson, the family of the Rev. Charles Deogratisias, as well as video greetings from the Rev. Sydney MacDonald and the Rev. Dr. Ian Clarke.

Our choir performed a wonderful anthem, and many of the elders and members of the congregation participated with enthusiasm in the service.

We are blessed to have a vibrant and active congregation, where everyone is welcome who



is experiencing growth and a sense of renewal. All glory and honour to our God!

Letters and messages of recognition for Elmvale Presbyterian Church's 165 years of faithful service within the community arrived from: the Rt. Honourable Mark Carney, Prime Minister of Canada; Mary Simon, Governor General of Canada; Doug Shipley, Member of Parliament; Doug

Downey, Member of Provincial Parliament; along with greetings from the mayor and Council of Springwater Township. A letter was also received from the Moderator of our denomination, the Rev. Jeffrey Murray, in recognition of this

milestone anniversary and proclaiming Jeremiah's message to God's people "to give you a future with hope."

Through God's grace, we have indeed been blessed as a congregation. It is with grateful and thankful hearts that we pray for our church and for our denomination's future with hope. May you find the blessings and peace of Jesus Christ.

Wars and Rumours of Wars

The gospel was made for (and in) times like these

By Allyson Carr, Justice Ministries

Someone recently told me that we are living in End Times, and that we had better get ready. I remember thinking, *Are you not ready? What have you been doing all these years?* “Ready” of course means different things to different people.

As a child born during the Cold War, amid near constant reminders that nuclear annihilation was possible at any moment, I internalized early on that I was living in End Times. When I received my first real Bible at nine years old (not the abridged illustrated kids’ one), I started working my way through the Gospels and it wasn’t long before I reached Matthew chapter 24—sometimes known as the “End Times” chapter. When I read it, I remember immediately running in terror to my mother, interrupting whatever she was doing and thrusting the text of Matthew at her, informing her in all seriousness that this was it—we were in the End Times. Hadn’t she noticed?!! Everything Jesus warned of was happening! Shouldn’t we be packing our bags to run to the hills, like he said? I was already doing the math in my head: *How high of a hill does Jesus mean? He said not to get your cloak, but surely he didn’t mean I couldn’t grab our family cat?*

My mother took a deep breath and told me, “Oh Allyson, every generation thinks that it lives in End Times. There are always wars and rumours of wars. We cannot predict when the world will end and we shouldn’t try.



Instead, we need to keep living our lives being good disciples as best as we can.”

It was an important lesson that helped shift my focus away from fear of all I might lose and toward how I should be living and acting instead. We “get ready” every day by living and acting in a way that shows what we love. Over the years, I have tried to take that lesson to heart (though sometimes that is easier said than done). And while every generation who has thought “this is the end!” so far has clearly been wrong, to some extent they’ve all been right too. The societies we live in form the “world” that we inhabit, and those worlds are never stable; they are always ending and changing and beginning again. Sometimes those changes bring greater justice and equity. But sometimes they bring greater harm and suffering.

We are in such a cycle again, where the world, to some extent, really is ending. Again, there are

wars and rumours of wars, not to mention a climate changing faster than anticipated in drastic ways with devastating consequences. Nine-year-olds across the globe would not be wrong, *are not wrong*, to fear that we live in end times—even if they are (likely) wrong that it is the End Times. While endings are (nearly always) beginnings too, we don’t know what will happen. Some of it is likely to be, and already has been, very bad for many people and that is legitimately frightening. It seems clear that human and creational suffering is increasing. What then do we do in (end) times like these?

One very important thing is to remember we are not the first to have gone through this. The Gospels take place in what no doubt many people experienced as “end times.” Their lessons can sound apocalyptic at times because that was in the air. When Jesus calls his disciples to follow him, he issued that call in

a time when there was an incredibly authoritarian world power occupying a significant portion of the world, including what is now called Palestine—and doing largely as it wished. Jesus’ ministry and his call to discipleship takes place in that authoritarian context with its demonstrated tendency to violence.

Often in “end times” (as now) there are focused attempts at power consolidation and a push to normalize “might makes right.” While in the Gospels it was Rome engaged in that behaviour, in the world of today such things look like fascism and authoritarianism, or even Christian nationalism, and they take the shape of atrocities such as genocide (in Palestine as in Sudan and other places); detaining or deporting large swaths of supposedly “undesirable” people; withholding humanitarian aid while people starve; attempts at forced annexation of other nations; and kidnapping dissidents or (apparently

now, as I’m writing at the beginning of January) even kidnapping the leader of another country. And that’s just to name a few. Justifications may be provided but they are farcical, disconnected from any reality besides power and a *who is going to stop us?* mentality. These actions are not legal in any meaningful sense, whatever any government may claim, and they are certainly not moral.

Those who would follow Jesus must not accept these justifications or any normalization of “might makes right.” We must be ready to show what it means to be a disciple in any time, of course, but especially in times where the world is ending. There are many different ways to show that discipleship, to live and act in a way that shows what and who we love, and who we follow. It might be advocacy around peace and justice or climate change; it may be looking out for people targeted by hate or by legislation aimed to curtail their rights or safety; it may be supporting organizations who support vulnerable people; it is certainly rejecting narratives of scarcity that only further isolate each of us—and instead, working to build community, engaging in mutual aid, and showing up with loving care.

Whether times are ending, continuing or beginning again we are called to the same thing: loving service, peacemaking—the real kind, more concerned with justice and equity than with calm and order—and care. These are the marks of a good disciple, if we think about the life of Christ and what he called for.

SPEAKER SERIES:



What We Wish Were There: Biblical Scholarship’s Reliance on Stereotypes of Judaism

Webinar Speaker: Dr. Patricia Ahearne-Kroll • Wednesday, March 25, 2026

3:00 p.m. (Pacific), 5:00 p.m. (Central), 6:00 p.m. (Eastern), 7:00 p.m. (Atlantic)

Register at presbyterian.ca/webinar-stereotypes-judaism

Anti-Jewish sentiment is an ongoing global issue and a force that generations of Christian churches have grappled with. Much to our dismay, the church at times has been complicit in perpetuating this sentiment, with devastating results. In light of the PCC’s commitment to address and dismantle anti-Judaism, we explore one vein of the complicated history of Judaism and Christianity with invited speaker Dr. Patricia Ahearne-Kroll, noted Judaism scholar. Her lecture will expose the role of biblical scholars whose misinformed interpretation of New Testament passages stoked the flames of anti-Judaism.

Dr. Patricia Ahearne-Kroll is a noted scholar on the topics of Jewish narrative literature, gender in Second Temple Judaism, and extra-canonical Jewish writings. She is Associate Professor in the Department of Classical and Near Eastern Religions and Culture at the University of Minnesota.



By Katharine Sisk, Justice Ministries

Artificial Intelligence, or AI, has exploded into society with implications for everything from student learning to medical technology. Most of us have likely used AI in some fashion; even basic internet searches use AI technology. The latest form of generative AI, called LLM or large language models, is what powers AI apps like ChatGPT, Gemini, Microsoft Copilot and many others. Generative AI can produce (either on its own or by utilizing other AI programs) text, images, video, coding, etc. AI is a powerful tool with enormous potential. But it is being developed and deployed in a rapid fashion that challenges our ability to consider future implications of AI and to develop important, meaningful ethical guidelines regarding AI. Even when AI is used in seemingly helpful or

AI and the Common Good?

benign ways, there are ethical dimensions that should not be overlooked.

What are some of the implications?

AI data centres house the infrastructure needed to run, train and analyze the staggering amounts of data needed for AI systems. AI data centres consume vast quantities of power and water. A 2024 report from the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory notes that AI data centres were responsible for 4.4% of all energy use in the United States, and it projects that this number could more than double by 2028 (see doi.org/10.71468/P1WC7Q). The Government of Canada's recent creation of the Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation Cabinet position and its commitment to building AI data centres in Canada seem to indicate plans for heavy investment in AI. This raises questions about how (or whether) these plans align with urgently needed responses to the climate crisis and environmental degradation, given the heavy environmental footprint countries like Canada already have.

As a parent to a grade-schooler, I also have questions about how AI will impact my child's development of critical thinking skills.

What does it mean to research, analyze and develop sound judgement when answers to almost any question can be instantaneously provided? What happens when we stop reading for both pleasure and for knowledge? How will we learn to recognize quality research from faulty responses? What do we stand to lose when we don't learn to think for ourselves?

A follow-up question is whether AI systems and the products they generate are ethical, sound and trustworthy. AI companies face a growing number of legal challenges stemming from copyright infringement, privacy concerns and environmental impact. AI companies also face legal challenges stemming from bias and discrimination and contributing to mental health crises. The human workers who do data labelling or annotation are essential for AI training but can be underpaid or work in unsafe conditions. To develop AI safety protocols, workers can also be exposed to extreme content on a regular basis without adequate training, support or compensation for traumatic work.

Navigating ethical questions

As AI's use becomes more commonplace, how can we navigate these and other difficult ethical

questions? *Living Faith*, a statement of Christian belief and a church subordinate standard reminds us: "We are not owners, but stewards of God's good earth. Concerned with the well-being of all of life we welcome the truths and insights of all human skill and science about the world and the universe" (2.4.1). This welcomes scientific and technological development, but with guardrails that also define stewardship: "Stewardship calls us to explore ways of love and justice in respecting God's creation and in seeking its responsible use for the common good" (2.4.2). These are important things to consider as we examine AI and its uses within the context of the common good.

The Faith and Life Sciences Reference Group of the Canadian Council of Churches has spent time studying and discerning some of the implications of Artificial Intelligence. It supports the Rome Call for AI Ethics as a robust framework for considering the ethical implications of AI and its use. The Rome Call articles were finalized at a conference hosted by the Vatican in 2020 and included participation from faith groups, industry, governments and academic institutions. The Rome Call identifies a need for ethical guidelines affecting edu-

cation, ethics and rights, and has six principles: Transparency (AI systems must be understandable to all); Inclusion (AI systems must not discriminate against anyone because every human being has equal dignity); Accountability (there must always be someone who takes responsibility for what a machine does); Impartiality (AI systems must not follow or create biases); Reliability (AI must be reliable); Security and Privacy (AI systems must be secure and respect the privacy of users).

While it can feel overwhelming to consider the vast implications of AI, our call to good stewardship for the common good reminds us that we have a responsibility to ask difficult questions like, whether (and if so, how) AI can be responsibly used for the good of both humanity and the rest of creation. The values articulated in the Rome Call for AI Ethics are a good starting point to help us consider critical ethical questions like these about AI and its use.

Learn more

The Canadian Council of Churches' Faith and Life Sciences Reference Group's resources are online at councilofchurches.ca/biotechnology. Information about the Rome Call for AI Ethics is online at romecall.org.

24-Hour Warming Centre in Hamilton

Submitted by the Rev. Dr. Mark Lewis, Interim-Moderator, St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont.

St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont., is grateful that, in cooperation with St. Matthew's House and Hamilton Urban Core, it has opened a 24-hour warming and drop-in centre in its facility, which is located in downtown Hamilton. The space opened on Friday, Dec. 19 and provides a safe, warm place for unhoused men to go to after other downtown facilities close at 11:00 p.m. (The YWCA is located directly across from the church and offers spaces for women and gender-diverse people.)

In addition to providing a warm space for overnight guests, the

warming centre will offer on-site health and social services. The centre can also refer people to counselling and medical services provided by Hamilton Urban Core satellite facility, operating in what was formerly the St. Paul's library, nursery and parlour.

There are about 2,000 people experiencing homelessness in the city of Hamilton. Of those, about 300 live outside year-round. Some of those people come from Hamilton, but most come from small towns and cities across southern Ontario.

"We wish that churches across Ontario would open their doors in the winter," said Mark Lewis, interim-moderator for St. Paul's. "It's heartbreaking to know that people will die of cold in Ontario this winter, while massive, warm

churches sit empty and unused. We urge all congregations to reach out to local mission agencies, form partnerships, and open their buildings to people in need. This is a time to respond to the call of Christ to care for the vulnerable people all around us."

We urge all congregations to stop asking how they can get more people and more money and start asking, "What does God want us to do with the resources God has given us? Who needs our help that no one else is helping?"

While St. Paul's is thankful to host the Hamilton Urban Core satellite site and the St. Matthew's Warming Centre, the congregation is also working on developing part of its site for expanded social services and co-operative housing.



St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont.

A Conversation about New Beginnings



The Rev. Sonia Brule is a recent graduate of Knox College. In September 2024, she was inducted into the charge of Knox–St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Dutton, Ont., within the Presbytery of London.



The Rev. Mavis Currie is a recently retired minister who serves as an assessor in the New Beginnings program administered through the Life and Mission Agency. These two ministers meet for coffee a few times a year to share stories, experiences and laughter. They recently sat down at a local coffee shop to talk about the New Beginnings program, offered through the PCC.

enables and supports congregations to live out a new beginning. It is well-suited for congregations that know they need to “do something,” but are not exactly sure what or how.

Sonia: What’s the background of the program?

Mavis: The program was developed and is facilitated by the Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation. It’s a ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It began as a pilot project in the denomination in 2018, and was promoted in the PCC in 2019. But the next year was 2020. During the pandemic, some congregations attempted the New Beginnings program. In hindsight, we realized that this was a difficult undertaking. We are relaunching the program this year and hope to evaluate its success in a few years.

Sonia: How has the New Beginnings program evolved since it started?

Mavis: I think, like the wider church, New Beginnings used those pandemic years for some reflection on the program. We learned that an openness to change is key to a new beginning in a congregation. It’s tempting (and easier!) for congregations to make a few “tweaks,” but those tweaks don’t result in any meaningful change. Even a very small congregation can be transformed by the New Beginnings program, but there needs to be an openness to seriously consider doing a “new thing.” New Beginnings helps congregations move away from asking, “How can we get more people and money?” to “What does God want us to do with the resources we have now, and who needs our help that no one else is helping?”

We also learned that there needs to be at least a few people

in a congregation who are willing to take on the role of leading a conversation and helping the process move forward. New Beginnings provides both an assessor and a guide. For meaningful change, however, there needs to be champions within the congregation itself who are passionate about a fresh start.

We’ve also experimented with what works and doesn’t work as far as materials and activities... So those pandemic years were not completely lost for us.

Sonia: So, can you walk me through what the program looks like?

Mavis: Sure! The program has five phases:

1) Application: Sessions apply using the form on the denomination’s website at presbyterian.ca.

2) Assessment: The process begins with an on-site assessment by a New Beginnings assessor. This includes a building inspection, financial review, a community tour, an examination of the congregation’s history and an “Appreciative Inquiry” session with the congregation. Using data from Statistics Canada and from current research on congregational growth, the assessor compiles a detailed report on the congregation and its community.

3) Pairing with a Guide: Once the assessment is completed, the congregation is paired with a New Beginnings Guide. This person supports the leadership and congregation as they walk through the next steps of the process.

4) Discernment and Planning: The Guide meets with the congregation and walks them through the assessment. Through small group gatherings, the congregation uses the assessment to discern a way forward. At the end of this stage, a plan of action is developed. The Guide has no



Commencement of New Beginnings program with their assessor in January 2020, at Nigerian Presbyterian Church in North York, Ont.

“agenda” for the congregation. The congregation chooses its own path forward.

5) Implementation/Action Phase: The congregation begins to make their ideas a reality by implementing concrete steps toward the future story they have discerned for their church. The Guide will normally meet online six times with an Implementation Team that has been appointed by the Session.

Sonia: So what is the cost for a congregation to take part?

Mavis: Over 90% of the costs of the program are covered by a grant through the Life and Mission Agency. Congregations are asked to pay a fee of \$500. Contact Congregational and Community Ministries at the denominational offices to speak to someone with your questions about the grant and the grant application process.

Sonia: Is New Beginnings something that would work for congregations with a new minister? What about congregations without a minister? Or a small congregation that has stated supply but can’t afford a minister?

Mavis: Yes to all. New Beginnings assessments have been conducted on congregation with fewer than 12 worshippers and more than 200. It is not designed

for congregations that are in the midst of conflict, however. Applications from congregations are reviewed by a team of individuals to ensure the congregation is well-suited for the program.

Sonia: So, if a congregation or a presbytery wanted more information, how do they find that?

Mavis: The PCC website has New Beginnings information on the Congregational and Community page at presbyterian.ca/new-beginnings. The Rev. Dr. Beth McCutcheon is the national staff co-ordinator of the program (bmccutcheon@presbyterian.ca), and she’s always willing to answer questions or to arrange for an assessor or guide to come and share more information about the program with Sessions, congregations or presbyteries.

Sonia: Food for thought. It’s easy to get so busy “being the church” that we forget there are resources to tap into that can help us. It’s a challenging time for lots of congregations. It sounds like this is one way congregations can navigate finding God’s new beginning for them in their community.

Visit presbyterian.ca/new-beginnings to learn more about the program.



Images from the New Beginnings program at St. James Presbyterian Church, North Yarmouth, in the Presbytery of London, Ont.

Change Leadership Team Report

By the Change Leadership Team: Yvonne Bearbull, Colin Conrad, Roberto DeSandoli, Maeva Forde, In Kee Kim, Peter Kinch, Heather Malnick, Debora Rolls, Cindy Stephenson (convener), Richard Topping, Renee Yardley

Reassured by the stories in John 20–21 of Jesus showing up and sending us, and hearing many stories of hope and possibility across The Presbyterian Church in Canada, the General Assembly appointed the Change Leadership Team (Special Commission) in June 2025. The work of the commission is focused on supporting congregations and other ministries in their witness in our changing context. The deliverables are designed to better equip the church that is being sent to bring good news of reconciliation to a broken world.

Deliverables

- A design of multiple models of ministry
- A robust lay leadership program
- A design for regional teams, and the initial implementation of some teams
- The design and implementa-

tion of shared services in four areas (Human Resources, Financial Management, Information Technology and Legal Services)

- A proposal for the revised structure of the church at all levels, to be presented to the 2027 General Assembly

The Terms of Reference for the Change Leadership Team also include revisiting the policy on the allocation of resources from the sale of closed buildings and making recommendations to the 2026 General Assembly. The Terms of Reference emphasize collaboration and consultation in all this work.

These deliverables are not ends in themselves, but strategic building blocks that position our denomination for a more hopeful future.

Work to date

Through the fall of 2025, the team's time has been spent on gathering information about existing and visioned models of ministries, training for laity and clergy, and on how regional staff teams might support these ministries. In parallel, opportunities



to reduce the burden on congregations and presbyteries associated with legal, HR, finance and IT needs are being examined. Research into the characteristics of thriving congregations is being combined with best practices into an assessment tool for congregations and presbyteries to discern the vitality of their ministries.

The commission has also developed a detailed project plan (with over 150 individual steps) to achieve the deliverables in a timely manner, as directed by the General Assembly. These steps include holding conversations with many people across the church. A survey is collecting further input from presbyteries and congregations. The team appreciates the input of those who have already generously shared their time and perspectives.

Observations

We continue to hear wonderful stories of inspiration and faithfulness. There are presbyteries, congregations, colleges, clergy,

lay leaders and staff who are already supporting new models of ministry, humbly utilizing the charisms (gifts) God has provided. We have much to learn from these examples.

We also hear stories from those who are tired, resigned or fearful. It is our prayer that our work, guided by the Spirit, will bring hope and confidence in Jesus' promise of peace and presence.

No two situations are identical. Flexibility and discernment will be key to selecting the "right" models for each local context.

There are a variety of training resources already available. More can be done to improve awareness and utilization of these webinars, courses and programs.

The work ahead

In the coming months, the Change Leadership Team will be seeking further input on draft proposals on the specifics of how the deliverables might be achieved. Several pilots are planned to "test drive" the preliminary recommendations. A report will be prepared

for the next General Assembly.

Please continue to refer to the updates provided on the website at presbyterian.ca/gao/change-leadership-team. And please continue to pray for the church and the work of the Change Leadership Team as, collectively, we respond to Christ's questions of hope and possibility for The Presbyterian Church in Canada: "Do you love me?" "Do you love me more than all this?" "Feed my sheep."

The Lord continues his ministry in and through the church. All Christians are called to participate in the ministry of Christ. As his body on earth we all have gifts to use in the church and the world.

—*Living Faith 7.2.1*

Safe Church Policy

By the Life and Mission Agency

The Presbyterian Church in Canada aspires to be and is committed to fostering a safe church environment, free from harm and harassment. Creating a safe church involves preventing and responding to harm through policies, training, police record checks, transparency, clear reporting and investigating procedures for misconduct, as well as providing pathways to justice, redress and healing when harm occurs.

"Safe Church" is the name of a new section on the PCC's website. Clicking on "Safe Church" along the top of each PCC web page

will lead to information about the church's safety policies. There is also a place where frequently asked questions are answered related to how the church aspires to be a safe place and what to do when we fall short of our commitments. Also, there is information on how to raise concerns about bullying and harassment based on race, national or ethnic origin, skin colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, ancestry, disability, etc.

It is the policy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada that all persons, and in particular all children, youth and vulnerable adults,

who participate in the denomination's programs, ministries and/or use the denomination's facilities, will be cared for with Christian compassion and will be safe. The steps on how to foster a safe place among people and in places where the church gathers are found in the Leading with Care policy. Most bodies in the church must review this policy at least annually.

It is also the policy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada that sexual abuse, sexual harassment and harassment of any kind by church leaders, staff or volunteers will not be tolerated. All complaints will be taken seriously and handled in accordance with the

denomination's policy. The best practice is for Sessions, presbyteries, denominational committees and the boards of ministries, camps, and colleges to review the harassment policies annually. Notably, the *Policy and Procedures for Addressing Harassment in the Church* must be reviewed by all denominational courts, boards and committees annually.

Staff of the denomination's offices routinely and eagerly offer guidance on the implementation and interpretation of policies and provide training and webinars.

The information that is available through the Safe Church section on the PCC website will expand

over the next few months to assist people in learning about the church's policies and how to raise concerns. Refer to the web page for contact information to raise a question, request information and suggest features that would enhance this new service.

Visit presbyterian.ca/safe-church to find the Safe Church information.



The Light Shines Brightest in Darkness

By Karina Shuen, Oakridge
 Christian Ministry of the
 Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian
 Church in Vancouver, B.C.

During the hectic weeks leading up to Christmas, we take time to slow down and open our hearts to celebrate Advent. This is a season of preparation for God's promise to send light into the world through our Saviour and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Week by week, candles are lit, signifying themes of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love, leading up to Christ's candle being lit on Christmas Day. The lighting of each candle over time teaches us patience and trust, serving as a visual reminder of God's work in our lives, often unfolding slowly but surely through perseverance and faith.

In honour of this illuminating

season, the Oakridge Christian Ministry community held an Advent beeswax candle-making workshop. Guided by Jeanette L., a local beekeeper and member of our congregation, she shared her knowledge of bees and the process of creating beeswax. We learned about the natural processes bees endure to produce enough honey to create the sheets of beeswax we used. Even before beeswax is harvested from the honeycomb, collecting enough honey takes a considerable amount of time. Bees must consume approximately five pounds of honey to create one pound of beeswax, but even this can take thousands of bees and flower visits to produce.

Through cleaning, filtering and pouring the wax into sheets, the formation of beeswax candles is

not a quick process. This experience reminds us of how natural creations persevere through demanding work before transforming into their final form.

Similar to the Advent season, God's plan for us does not always come with haste but through patience and preparation to strengthen our faith. The pace of Advent is like this gradual journey, where God's promises are not often fulfilled instantly, but through faithful waiting. Scripture reminds us of this: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined" (Isaiah 9:2).

Just as bees work patiently within the hive, God was quietly at work in the world, preparing for the birth of Jesus, the Light of the World. When we light an Advent candle, we acknowledge that light still enters darkness, even through unexpected ways.

Using beeswax candles also reminds us of the goodness of God's creation. Beeswax is a natural, renewable material that burns longer and cleaner than many other types of wax. Its warm honey scent is known for improving indoor air quality by releasing negative ions that can



The finished beeswax candles ready to be lit.

help reduce stress and create a calm atmosphere. In this way, beeswax candles tend to both body and spirit, just as God cares for us and our growth.

Even small details such as the dyes used to colour the beeswax come from God's natural creation. Advent candles are traditionally purple, a colour associated with royalty and repentance, and interestingly, purple is also a favourite colour of bees. To achieve these hues, natural dyes such as blackberries and cochineal are used.

The handmade candles each participant took home provided a reminder that light takes time to prepare and that Advent calls us to trust God's timing. We also thank Aaron L. for providing us



Jeanette teaching about the creation of beeswax.

with an amazing resource by Evangeline K. from Prairie Presbyterian Church, which inspired this project. When we light our beeswax candles this season, may we remember the work of nature's creation behind them, and the greater story of Christ's light entering the world.



Making the candles.

The Importance of Youth Ministry

By Tristan Gerrie, Morningside-
 High Park Presbyterian
 Church in Toronto, Ont.

Many folks ask why I continue to be involved in Canada Youth (now Collective). The reasons are too numerous to list, but if I had to try, I would say that I believe in the importance of youth ministry in the PCC. Youth ministry in the PCC has changed my life—it helped me to forge new relationships, grow as a person, and deepen my faith and connection to the church.

I first attended Canada Youth in 2009 and found it to be a foundational experience for my faith. Growing up, I, like many others, attended a Presbyterian church where I was the only young person. Though I had connections and relationships through the Presbyterian Young People's So-



Tristan Gerrie and Connor Watson at CY2009.

ciety (PYPS) in my region, these events happened a few times per year. I found myself feeling lost—most of my peers were not Christian, and I was left to grapple with

questions of faith on my own.

In attending Canada Youth, I found a group of peers. Though the event was just one week long, I made friends who I continued

to keep in touch with virtually. I was shown that the Presbyterian church does have other young people, which helped me to feel less alone. Attending church as a teen, especially a church without a youth group, can feel isolating and like you are an outsider—not the same as your peers, but also not the same as those in your church. The power of representation, of seeing others who are in a similar situation, is powerful. CY took this one step further—not only were we represented, but we were welcomed, celebrated and made to feel a part of something bigger.

After attending CY, I stayed involved as leadership—first as a member of the planning team, then involved in conference administration. This is where I felt my faith truly blossom. Having an opportunity to provide positive faith-formation experiences

to others, to offer back what was given to me when I was a participant, was so meaningful. Youth conferences are built to offer opportunities for peer-to-peer ministry and leadership development for young people. I will be eternally grateful that the CY team saw something in me and invested in my leadership and development, and I know that my continued work and involvement in the church is built on the shoulders of this invitation to participate.

Collective is more than an opportunity to get together, worship and play games (though this is also important!). It is a chance to understand that we are part of a larger Christian family, to forge new relationships and ask questions, and to reinvigorate your passion. This is why I continue to support Collective 20+ years later!

Celebrating 140 Years of Christian Witness

By Karen L.S. Robbins and Shona Potts, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Lethbridge, Alta.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Lethbridge, Alta., celebrated its 140th anniversary on Saturday, Oct. 25 and Sunday, Oct. 26, 2025. On Saturday evening, 95 people enjoyed fellowship over a catered dinner with guest speaker Assistant Professor Sidney Shapiro from the University of Lethbridge. The topic was Artificial Intelligence and how it is shaping the way we serve our community.

At our Anniversary Sunday service the next day, City of Lethbridge Mayor, Blaine Hyggen, brought greetings from the city to mark St. Andrew's historic milestone.



The anniversary service. Karen Robbins was the evening's MC. PHOTO CREDIT: GORD MCKAY

Our anniversary theme throughout the weekend was *Celebrating the Past, Recognizing the Present and Embracing the Future*. The congregation viewed exhibits, curated by Karen Robbins, that depicted these three messages while also recognizing the 150th anniversary of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Members of the congregation loaned items relating to the exhibits to complement the photographs and documents retrieved from St. Andrew's archives.

In November 1885, the first communion service was led by the Rev. Dr. James Robertson, Superintendent of Home Missions for The Presbyterian Church in Canada. This is considered to be the establishment of the first



St. Andrew's 1885 – 2025. Pictured (left to right) are Mayor Blaine Hyggen, Karen Robbins and the Rev. Daniel Surya.

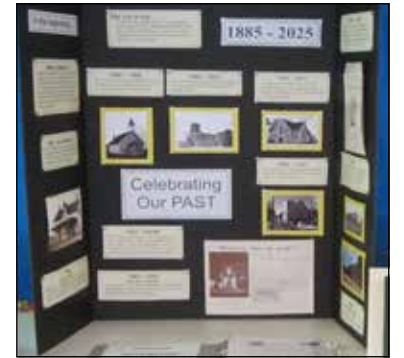
Presbyterian church in what is now Southwest Alberta, 10 years after the formation of the PCC. This occurred long before the incorporation of Town of Lethbridge (1890), Alberta becoming a province (1905) and Lethbridge gaining city status (1906). St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church (formerly known as Knox) is the oldest constituted congregation in Lethbridge, and the only congregation of The Presbyterian Church in Canada located in the city. Over the course of 140 years, the congregation has worshipped in a number of buildings, some of which were rented, and others they built.

For our music exhibit, mannequins on loan from the Galt Museum were used to display choir gowns from past years. The "choir" was gathered around the piano on the stage in the gym with Lavinia Kell Parker, choir director, playing music prior to the celebratory dinner. The Galt Archives also loaned us an exhibit called *Inn Purple*, which was displayed on the walls around the gym. *Inn Purple* was a coffee house operated by youth of St. Andrew's in down-

town Lethbridge in 1967–1968.

Through a series of photographs of congregational activities entitled *Rejoicing in Our Fellowship*, the exhibit included a section on our church family, many individuals from Hope Christian Reformed Church (Lethbridge), St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church (Fort Macleod), Knox Presbyterian Church (Jumbo Valley) and the Bethlen Hungarian Presbyterian Church (Lethbridge). Individuals from these congregations joined St. Andrew's when their churches closed between 1971 and 2007.

An exhibit for the 150th anniversary of The Presbyterian Church in Canada consisted of



Photos from the past. PHOTO CREDIT: KAREN ROBBINS

information about church union in 1925, the approval of the ordination of women to both the ministry of Word and Sacraments and ruling eldership (1966), and the PCC's apology to Indigenous people for its complicity in colonization and the residential school system (2024). A number of historic and current publications from the library of Karen Robbins were integrated into the display.

It is with God's grace that St. Andrew's, Lethbridge, continues to carry forward its Christian witnessing in southern Alberta through worship, nurture and outreach.



Photos from present day—rejoicing in fellowship and recognizing the congregation's Scottish connection. PHOTO CREDIT: KAREN ROBBINS

Knox College Celebrates Thrive Campaign



Martha MacEachern, Bruce Wilson and the Rev. Dr. John Viissers at the Thrive Service of Thanksgiving.

By Sach Prashad, Knox College in Toronto, Ont.

On December 2, the Knox College community gathered for a Service of Thanksgiving to celebrate the successful completion of the Thrive Campaign, marking a milestone in the college's history. The campaign concluded with remarkable success, raising \$9.6 million—more than triple its original \$3.1 million goal.

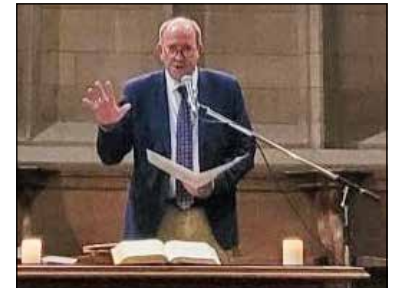
Launched in 2022, the Thrive Campaign set out to strengthen



Knox students Joseph, Kimmy and Mia.

congregational vitality and expand spiritual and mental health care across Canada. Its impact is already being felt across Knox College and beyond, supporting students and faculty while advancing new initiatives designed to equip the church for a changing world.

"The Thrive Campaign has never been about dollars. It has been about disciples," said Principal Ernest van Eck. "It has always been about preparing the church for its calling in this new



Principal Ernest van Eck delivering the message.

world—forming leaders who will touch lives, heal hearts, proclaim the gospel and build communities that radiate the love of Christ."

Knox College extends its sincere gratitude to its donors, whose generosity and shared vision have made a lasting impact—supporting students and faculty and enabling the launch of the Centre for Lifelong Learning and the Knox Counselling Centre.

Disability Wisdom Series

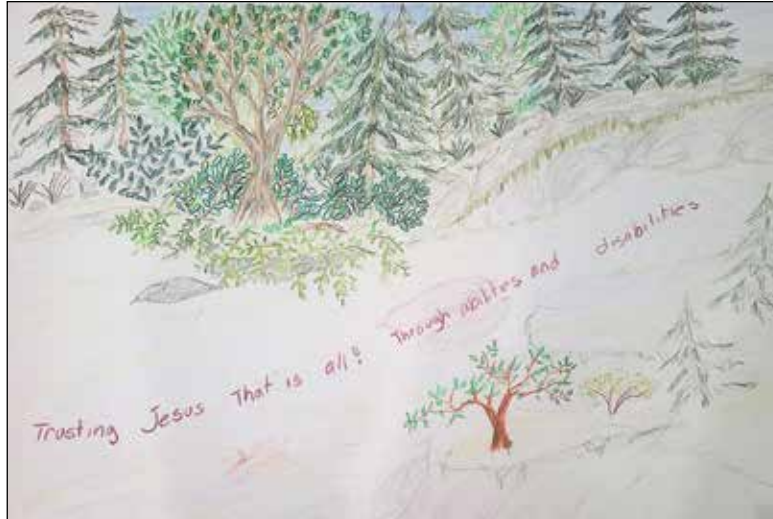
By the Rev. Jacqueline Cleland, Knox Presbyterian Church in Sooke, B.C.

In the autumn, from September through Advent, the congregation at Knox Presbyterian Church in Sooke, B.C., embarked on a profound journey through scripture, theology and contemporary experience to wrestle with our ableism (social bias against people with disabilities, viewing them as inherently inferior) in biblical interpretation. Our series, focusing on Disability Wisdom and Justice, challenged us to look beyond conventional understandings of ability and embrace the fullness of God's diverse creation.

This deep dive into inclusive theology was inspired by the core conviction of The Presbyterian Church in Canada: "When your congregation offers hospitality to people with disabilities, it is actually offering God's welcome" (*Our Doors Are Open: Welcoming People with Disabilities*, 2008, p. 3).

Not only were we inspired by others, such as Julia Watts Belser, who shares spiritual practices of self-acceptance and subverting expectations of wholeness, we also reflected on *Soft Words for Hard Days: Enfleshed Disability Wisdom*. This collection from *enfleshed*, is an anthology of poetry, rituals and essays centred on living with disability and chronic illness. *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary* offers a deep, exegetical look at how scripture addresses and portrays disability throughout the Testaments. The series was guided by a rich selection of books and anthologies that redefined our understanding of disability not as a deficit, but as a source of wisdom and spiritual insight.

Our theological exploration moved chronologically through the Bible, confronting passages that have traditionally been used to exclude or pathologize disability, and rediscovering them as texts of liberation and affirmation. In September, we laid the ground-



Powerful original artwork by Christene Emery depicting God's presence in all forms of ability and disability.

work in the Torah (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy), analyzing creation, covenant and the laws of purity and sacrifice through an inclusive lens. From October onward, we moved into the historical narratives (Joshua – 2 Kings, Chronicles – Esther), wisdom literature (Song of Songs, Psalms, Lamentations), and explored disability within community and worship. We rounded off November by shifting focus to the prophetic tradition and the Gospel of John, examining calls for justice and encountering Jesus' ministry, which fundamentally re-frames the relationship between the body, healing and faith.

One topic discussed was the

narrative of Moses and the common assumption that his stammer improved over time, a misconception often fuelled by the fact that there are fewer subsequent comments on his stutter. Yet, the twist we looked at was the idea that Moses' lips are uncircumcised, hence the difficulty of speech. An interesting idea of something that was fixable by circumcision is a possible choice. Especially as God chooses to believe Moses is the best choice and equips him with accessibility aids such as a mouthpiece in Aaron.

Not only were we privileged enough to learn from many resources, we were blessed to host

a variety of guest voices, who brought diverse perspectives and real-world experience to the pulpit. We were blessed to have elder Deborah F. (Oct. 19) share her reflections, the seminary student Joe R. (Nov. 16), and the retired pastor Ray S. (Nov. 23) to offer different perspectives from different life experiences.

Their voices emphasized that God is present in all bodies, and all roles. Throughout our series, we held on to the powerful conviction that God is not just present despite disability, but within it. We were honoured to reflect on the art of Christene E., which beautifully illustrates the profound theological truth that God is fully present in all forms of ability and disability.

We believe this series has been a stepping stone to a deeper understanding of the blessings God has placed on this earth. It is a beautiful and complex leaning with no simple answers. We invite you to jump into this journey with us of looking at the Bible with less of an ableist lens to shifting our focus from simple inclusion (inviting people in) to genuine justice (ensuring full and equitable participation). We pray that the wisdom gained continues to shape our welcome and our shared life together in the body of Christ.

Knitting Community Together in Sooke

By the Rev. Jacqueline Cleland, Knox Presbyterian Church in Sooke, B.C.

Knox Presbyterian Church in Sooke, B.C., is delighted by its Advent adventure. Up until the very eve of Christmas this year, it felt like we were developing new and deeper community connections. It genuinely felt like we were living into the call of 1 Peter 4:10: "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of



you has received."

As we journeyed through Advent, we looked at the topics of "Hope's New Wardrobe," "The Root of Peace," "Singing Joy into the World" and "Love in Family Lines," and we ended on "Prophecy for a Silent Night." It was a welcome season of worship where, by request, we added additional hymns to sing during our Christmas Eve service.

Yet the community was not only active in worship. We were so blessed to be able to contribute to our tradition of local and global support through several initiatives. The idea that everyone should feel the love of Christ as a gift at Christmas is a fundamental tenet of the church. To that end, we hosted packing parties. Members gathered to pack gift boxes for international distribution with Samaritan's Purse; additionally,

gift boxes were made for local children with the help of the Casa Family Resource Centre. And gift boxes were made for women in South Island communities to support transition housing.

Knox is blessed with people skilled in knitting, crocheting and quilting, so handmade support was abundant. Transition House received donations of handmade blankets, slippers and hats. Knowing the difficulty of keeping warm, the Sooke Food Bank received a donation of handmade toques, mittens and scarves. To support those in the hospital and families in difficult times, handmade baby blankets, sweaters, slippers, mittens, hats and toys were gifted as well.

Knox Presbyterian Church was proud to host the 10th anniversary of the Winter Solstice Music Tour on December 10, featuring



an ensemble led by artistic director Cari Burdett. This community event combines musical performance with seasonal ceremony and reflection, with a portion of the proceeds supporting youth in crisis through Mischa Lelum.

Not only did we reach out to the community, but we invited them for engagement in the church as well. We hosted our annual Treasure Sale, where items people might treasure are brought to the church, along with a craft sale. The proceeds went to support Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D). We had our first cookie exchange, where the minister received extra treats and can say they were all delicious! We also hosted a Christmas Pot-



luck Lunch, which was a great time of fun fellowship.

We believe all these gifts of time, talents and treasure are a beautiful reminder of Christ's love that can feel more tangible in December. Thank you to everyone who made this possible, even in our sibling churches. We pray that these initiatives helped others feel the hope, peace, love and joy of Christ this season and beyond.

Better Equipped to Serve the Community in Uxbridge



Enjoying the new elevator.

By Barb Summers and Jen Astop, Life and Mission Agency

A major renovation project at St. Andrew's—Chalmers Presbyterian Church in Uxbridge, Ont., is supporting the congregation as well as the wider community.

The congregation raised over \$100,000, and the community raised an additional \$100,000 to renovate a new commercial kitchen in the church, which is

currently being used for a weekly community soup lunch meal program, with all proceeds from the meal going to support the Loaves & Fishes Food Bank (which also operates out of the church), an accessible washroom, and an accessibility lift.

The kitchen upgrades were necessary to expand the congregation's efforts to provide hot, nutritious food to residents who face food insecurity and social isolation, at a time when the need has increased. The Wednesday soup lunch has up to 80 people in attendance each week, and the local Loaves & Fishes Food Bank says usage of their services has more than tripled in recent years.

The fundraising team, led by Barbara Purdy and Andrew Munro, developed a three-part fundraising strategy focused on the congregation, the community and grants/endowments.

Community-focused fundraising encompassed door-to-door outreach to local businesses, support from local government (including a township donation), contacting local foundations and reaching out to the broader community. Ads were placed in local

papers and on social media inviting community members to support a project designed to serve the community as a whole.

The community responded enthusiastically and generously—and donations continue to roll in.

Community members and local businesses contributed not only immediate financial donations but also gave gifts of stock to support the long-term mission of the congregation. A local electrician donated his time, and a construction company donated tile and other materials for the kitchen. It was humbling and encouraging to realize how much the community cared about the project.

"The response of our church and wider community to the challenge of retrofitting this older building so that it is more welcoming, functional and accessible has been nothing short of remarkable," said the Rev. Sean Astop. "What began as a hope, or maybe even a holy nudge, more than two years ago, took shape through prayer, conversation and careful planning. Day after day, the work progressed with skill and care as walls were moved, an elevator rose, a kitchen was re-



Prepared to welcome guests to the Wednesday soup lunch: the project's building team of Barry Crane, David Phillips and John Gould.

newed, and spaces became more open and accessible. At the same time, another kind of building was happening, which was just as important... Regular updates, encouragement and engagement with the wider community helped knit us together around a shared purpose."

The project, which is now complete and open to all to use, was connected to the church's mission of hospitality, accessibility and community.

"Hospitality, accessibility and welcome are not just architectural features. They are signs that God is forming us into a people who open doors rather than close them, and who make room rather than keep others out, and who see every person as part of the story God is telling."

Special thanks go to John Gould and the Building Team; Barb Purdy, Andrew Munro and the finance team; and everyone in the congregation and community who generously supported this project.



Barb Purdy and Andrew Munro in the new kitchen.



The ribbon cutting ceremony for the new lift.

Remembering Joy Randall in Cobourg

By Nancy Williams,
 Pastoral Care Committee,
 St. Andrew's Presbyterian
 Church in Cobourg, Ont.

On June 5, the congregation at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Cobourg, Ont., was pleased to welcome the Rev. Tsung-Jen Wang and the Rev. Ching-Fa (Avai) Chen from Taiwan. After attending General Assembly in Hamilton, our guests had time to view the newly dedicated room to honour the late Joy Randall, a long-standing member of the congregation and head of many committees, who also worked as a missionary in Taiwan for over 30 years. The Rev. Chen worked with Joy at the Changhua Christian Hospital, where Joy was

Director of Nursing.

The Taiwanese from Changhua Christian Hospital gave a generous donation in Joy's memory, which enabled us to renovate and dedicate a room in our church to honour Joy's many gifts and her dedication to St. Andrew's and Taiwan. The Rev. Wang and the Rev. Chen were met by members of our pastoral care team, who took them on a tour of the church where Joy had grown up in and which she dedicated many hours to, following her retirement from missionary work in Taiwan. After a tour of Cobourg, a luncheon was held with the Taiwanese delegation.

The actual dedication of Joy's Room took place on Sunday, April 27 with family, former ministers

and colleagues in attendance and was followed by a congregational luncheon and celebration honouring Joy's work in the church and Taiwan.

The church bulletin included a "Legacy of Joy Randall: June 10, 1943 – July 10, 2020":

Born with an innate compassion and a calling to heal, Joy pursued a career in nursing early in life, with fervent dedication. She worked as a registered nurse at the Cobourg Hospital, continued her education in midwifery and then followed her missionary calling to Taiwan, a land rich in culture and heritage. There she found her purpose, not only in tending to physical ailments but also in uplifting spirits and bridging divides.



The Rev. Tsung-Jen Wang, Marlene Randall (sister-in-law to Joy Randall), John Randall (Joy's brother) and the Rev. Ching-Fa (Avai) Chen are in the room that was dedicated in Joy Randall's honour, named "Joy's Room," and a picture of Joy is in the background.

Presbyterians Sharing



One Mission Many People

The Presbyterian Church in Canada brings together people from across Canada to live out God's mission in the world by sharing their gifts in mission and ministry.

- 61,160** professing members
- 34,855** adherents
- 11,124** children and youth
- 5,228** elders
- 1,214** ministers
- 725** congregations
- 43** presbyteries
- 8** synods
- 1** General Assembly



Edmonton Urban Native Ministry in Alberta is one of the ministries that form the National Indigenous Ministries Council. The council brings together ministries living out the reconciliatory action of Jesus in word and deed as they work to restore relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.



"Messy Church has helped three congregations in Saskatchewan draw young families and enthusiastic attendees. Messy Church, in two of the congregations, now has more attendees than the traditional Sunday morning worship. It has given them a new outlook on ministry and how it's OK to change things up and not do things the way they've always been done. It has given them renewed hope that they can still do meaningful (even if messy) ministry."

– The Rev. Devon Pattemore, Regional Staff, Saskatchewan

"As worshipping communities joyfully celebrating the sacraments, we are supported, strengthened and equipped to share the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ. In all times and seasons, we give glory to the God of all creation, to Jesus Christ, the Son, and to the Holy Spirit by whose presence all are blessed."

– Mission statement of Synod of Central, Northeastern Ontario and Bermuda. Regional grants support the salary of the Rev. Jonathan Tait, the synod's minister for congregational health.



Presbyterians Sharing *funds the mission and ministry of* The Presbyterian Church in Canada



Together we

Accompany presbyteries as they **launch new and renew established** faith communities

Equip congregational leaders in evangelism, stewardship, outreach, renewal, and theological reflection, so they can better serve the church in Canada and around the world

Provide spaces and fund projects for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to **work together on truth, reconciliation, healing and reparation**

Support ministries with Indigenous people, **meeting the physical and spiritual needs** of generations harmed by the residential school system

Mentor and coach congregations **discovering new strategic directions and exploring how to re-develop buildings** to better serve mission and ministry

Accompany international partners through grants and mission staff as they share the good news of Christ

Address causes and consequences of poverty, racism, oppression, conflict and violence

Implement practices and advocate governments and communities **to protect and restore God's creation** amid the current climate crisis

Share experiences through the *Presbyterian Connection* newspaper, the presbyterian.ca website, social media and e-newsletters

Host and support websites for 309 congregations, camps, presbyteries and other ministries



"I have seen God do some amazing things throughout the year in our ministry to young people."

– Sunjay Henry, Ministry Animator for the Ottawa and Seaway-Glengarry Presbyteries, supported by regional grants

Offer long-term investment opportunities for congregations and ministries

Bring people together to **prayerfully seek God's direction** through General Assembly and its committees and working groups

Provide educational pathways to ordained ministry for presbytery-certified ministry candidates

Fund regional staff, camps and equipping events

Support the faith journey of young people through national conferences, learning opportunities and international experiences

Develop resources to **help all levels of the church to foster safe, welcoming and inclusive faith** communities

Create and update policies and guidelines for the church and provide ongoing assistance in their application and use



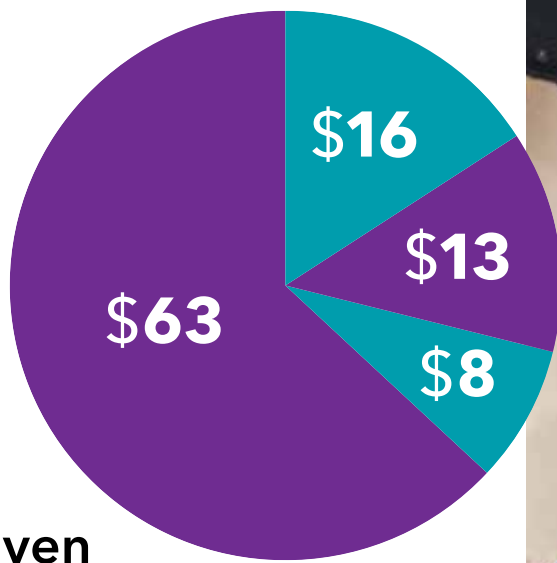
"We launched an online course in February 2026 designed to build intercultural awareness and equip participants with tools to deepen understanding and transform engagement across cultures."

– Pablo Kim, PCC Intercultural Liaison



The Clerk's Consultation shares experiences and best practices between presbyteries and synods.

Your gifts make a difference



Out of \$100 given to Presbyterians Sharing

\$63 equips **ministries in Canada** by providing grants for congregations, camps, theological colleges and other ministries; producing educational resources; hosting webinars and events; stewarding congregational investments; and supporting governance and justice work

\$16 accompanies **mission partners** in Canada and across the globe

\$13 supports ministries with **Indigenous people**

\$8 ensures good stewardship of the gifts with strong **financial and administrative support**

Legacy and designated funds, distributed by staff funded by Presbyterians Sharing, facilitate even more ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.



Experiences like "I Love Taiwan" allow young people to develop leadership skills and live out their faith.



"We are very grateful for your funding of the Electronics/Computer Program for Palestinian Refugees for several years. This vocational training initiative teaches skills in electronics and computer maintenance and repair to refugees, helping them gain employment and improve their livelihoods within the camp communities."

– Sylvia Haddad, Director, Joint Christian Committee for Social Service in Lebanon (JCC)

"The mission trip to Nepal allowed us to meet people whose lives are touched by Presbyterians Sharing – a reminder that faith and generosity can truly change lives. Every contribution helps teach, empower and spread knowledge, ensuring that hope continues to grow in communities across Nepal and beyond."

– Linda Murray, Elmvale Presbyterian Church, Elmvale, Ont.



"Thank you for your support of the Roy Street project seeking to redevelop the property at St. Andrew's Kitchener. I believe things are moving in a highly positive direction for their vision to support adults with disabilities."

– The Rev. Jeff Crawford, Waterloo-Wellington Presbytery

Share your gifts through Presbyterians Sharing

PRAY & WORSHIP

- pray for PCC ministries
- attend General Assembly worship in person or online
- use the worship resources from presbyterian.ca/worship

LEARN

- attend events, webinars, book studies and theological courses
- read the *Presbyterian Connection* newspaper, PCConnect monthly e-newsletter and mission blogs
- discover what it means to become a welcoming, inter-cultural community
- explore what it means to transform your ministry and redevelop your building to better serve it

ACT

- share your experiences at an event or in the newspaper
- volunteer to serve on a committee or working group or at an event
- write to community leaders and governments on social issues (see templates at presbyterian.ca/social-action)
- give to **Presbyterians Sharing** through your congregation, online, by mailing a cheque or by making a planned gift



"Sharing the gospel message of the good news of Jesus Christ is a matter of life and death in the community of the Cree Nations of Mistawasis, Saskatchewan. We need the support of Presbyterians Sharing more than ever."

– The Rev. Stewart and Terry Folster,
Mistawasis Memorial Presbyterian Church, Mistawasis First Nation, Sask.



"We are so grateful to God, to the entire Presbyterian Church in Canada for your support of the prison ministry. It is successful because of your financial support, prayers and commitment. Despite challenges, the ministry

has brought total transformation to hopeless inmates."

– The Rev. Hastings Phale, Country Director,
Malawi Friends of Prisons

"These annual retreats have really helped us think differently about missiology and missional work while also developing deep connections with colleagues and friends within the presbytery. Thank you for helping fund this time together."

– The Rev. Jennifer Geddes, Presbytery of Vancouver Island



BALLOT FOR MODERATOR

Nominees for Moderator of the 2026 General Assembly



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 June 7–11, 2026, at York University in Toronto, Ont. For a name to appear on the Ballot for Moderator, each candidate must be nominated by a minimum of two presbyteries.

This year, three names will appear on the ballot to elect the Moderator of the 2026 General Assembly. On Wednesday, April 1, 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 151st General Assembly.

Candidates for Moderator of the General Assembly are asked to submit their biography, along with answers to a series of questions, to help the church come to know the candidates better. Below are lightly edited versions of each candidate's biography. Answers to questions they addressed can be found online.

Learn more about the nominees at presbyterian.ca/nominees-2026.



The Rev. Marianne Emig Carr

The Rev. Marianne Emig Carr entered ordained ministry following a 20-year career in corporate law, serving as counsel with General Motors Acceptance Corporation (GMAC), GMAC Australia, and General Motors of Canada Limited. She holds a BA in Political Science from Creighton University, a Juris Doctor from the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, and a Master of Divinity from Knox College. Marianne was ordained on Oct. 20, 2013, and inducted at First Presbyterian Church in Brockville, Ont., on Nov. 24. In September 2023, she was inducted as minister at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Caintown, when the Brockville–Caintown pastoral charge was created.

During her ministry in Brockville and Caintown, Marianne has been active in the Brockville and Area Ministerial Association, organizing ecumenical Good Friday worship services and leading worship in long-term care and seniors' residences. She is a founding member of Refugees for Brockville, formed in 2016 in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, and continues to participate in community groups that support refugee sponsorship through both the Private Sponsorship and Blended Visa Office Referral programs.

Within the PCC, Marianne has served as moderator of the Presbytery of Seaway–Glengarry and as interim-moderator for congregations in the Presbyteries of Seaway–Glengarry and Kingston. She currently is convener of the Presbytery Mission Committee and the Refugee Sponsorship Subcommittee, is a member of the Standing Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, represents the PCC on the KAIROS Canada Steering Committee, and has been a commissioner to three prior General Assemblies.

The Rev. Cherie Inksetter

The Rev. Cherie Inksetter has served the church faithfully for 40 years and says that, God willing, she will serve for 40 more.

Cherie joyfully began her ministry as a Sunday school teacher, then Sunday School Superintendent in a small rural church, St. Paul's Presbyterian Church Carluke in Ancaster, Ont. She was then ordained to serve as a ruling elder and went on to serve as a representative elder to presbytery. Over the years, she has served on many presbytery committees and has been convener of many.

Cherie organized presbytery-wide worship services, training courses, retreats and workshops across three presbyteries and served as clerk of presbytery. She believes deeply that the strength of our denomination lies in our elders, who are gifted in so many ways.

Cherie felt called to ministry and attended Knox College, graduating with her M.Div. in 2012. She was called to St. Giles Presbyterian Church in St. Catharines, Ont., and currently serves at Morningside–High Park Presbyterian Church in Toronto.

Cherie has served two synods on a variety of committees, working groups and task forces, and was moderator of the Synod of South-Western Ontario.

For the past six years, Cherie has been deeply involved at the national level with the Assembly Council, serving as convener for the last three.

Currently, Cherie serves on the Knox Board of Governors and is convener of its Inclusion and Diversity Committee.

She is mom to three adult children and grandma to three adorable grandchildren. She believes that our denomination stands poised on the edge of something wonderful and life-giving and looks forward to God's leading.

The Rev. Lara Scholey

The Rev. Lara Scholey grew up in Brampton, Ont., and attended St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. She received a BSc (Psychology) from Queen's University (1994) and an M. Div. from Knox College (1997). She was ordained by the Presbytery of Brampton in 1997.

Lara began her ministry at Rockwood/Eden Mills Presbyterian Churches in Ontario, then served as a parish associate in Purcellville, VA (PC-USA), and later was called to Bethel/Burns Memorial/Knox, a rural charge in the Presbytery of Pictou, N.S. (2001–2017). She currently serves St. Columba-by-the-Lake Presbyterian Church in Pointe-Claire, Que., (a suburb of Montreal), since 2017.

In the wider denomination, Lara has served as moderator of the Presbytery of Pictou, and moderator of the Atlantic Synod. She was a member, then convener, of the Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D) Committee (2009–2016), which included monitoring trips to Malawi, India, Afghanistan and Haiti. She served on the Life and Mission Agency Committee (2014–2016) and is currently on the Grants Committee of Congregational and Community Ministries. Lara has been the PCC representative on the Interfaith Committee on Canadian Military Chaplaincy since 2021. She serves as convener of the Mission Committee in the Presbytery of Montreal, since 2018.

Lara enjoys attending an ecumenical, lectionary Bible Study, and served on the board of Dix Mille Villages in Pointe-Claire, a fair trade store begun by churches.

Lara is passionate about creative worship, community building, intergenerational mentoring and social justice. She is married to Dr. Carl Adams. They have triplet, young adult children, Matthew, Isaac and Charlotte.



The Rev. Marianne Emig Carr



The Rev. Cherie Inksetter



The Rev. Lara Scholey





In 2025, the congregation at St. Timothy's Presbyterian Church in Ajax, Ont., was blessed to be able to make generous donations to many worthwhile charitable organizations. Pictured here (top row, left to right) is the Rev. Barbara Duguid presenting a cheque to Charles H. Best Diabetes Centre; the Rev. Duncan Jeffrey, minister at St. Timothy's, presenting a cheque to Crieff Hills Retreat Centre; Frank Robinson presenting a cheque to Grandview Kids, (second row) the Alzheimer's Society, and to the Salvation Army; and Susan Raeburn-Gibson presenting a cheque to Canadian Foodgrains Bank.



Braving a cold and wintry Remembrance Day, and wearing their patriotic colours, the choir and chorus from St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Caintown, Ont., led the music and singing at the Mallorytown Legion's Remembrance Day Service on November 11. The choir and chorus have been regular participants in the Remembrance Day service for several years.



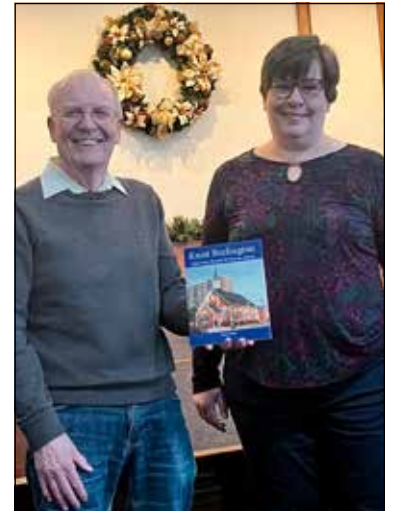
St. David's Presbyterian Church in Toney River, Pictou County, N.S., wished to add a little extra spark to the season. A Nativity Photo Booth was constructed by several energetic members of the congregation, and families and/or individuals were invited downstairs after the service to have their photos taken, complete with costumes and props. Each photo was developed and given as a keepsake. It was a unique time of fellowship for everyone, young and old! Pictured here are Kaleb, Duncan, Crystal and Blakeleigh Henderson; and in the second photo, Hannah, Scott, Tina and Clayton Sutherland.



On Sunday, Nov. 30, the congregations of First Presbyterian Church North Pelham and Rockway Presbyterian Church in Fenwick, Ont., welcomed 11 new members through baptism and profession of faith. It was truly a day to celebrate!



The congregation at Central Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, B.C., held a Hallows-Eve Party, where many participants came in costume to enjoy the games, treats and photo-taking in front of the photo backdrop.



St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont., celebrated its 192nd anniversary. Pictured here (left to right) are the Rev. Dr. J. Mark Lewis (interim-moderator 2020–present), the Rev. Dr. James R. Dickey (minister 1997–2009), the Rev. Willard K. Pottinger (minister 1986–1995), the Rev. John Borthwick (guest preacher, Centre for Lifelong Learning, Knox College). The second photo shows the Rev. Dr. Mark Lewis with the Rev. John Borthwick.

As part of the celebrations for the 180th anniversary of Knox Presbyterian Church in Burlington, Ont., church historian Gary Evans delved into the archives to produce an interesting look at some of the congregation's stories, including the donation of stained-glass windows and how the church was lost during the church union vote until a second vote restored it as Presbyterian. Gary is shown here with the Rev. Emma Duncan, church minister until Dec. 31 when she left to take on the new position of general presbyter for the Presbytery of Brampton.



The congregation at Central Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, B.C., held a "Kid's Club," which was a week-long club for kids that included games, Bible lessons, snacks and music. Also pictured are photos from a community dinner called Open Hearts, Open Table.



The Chancel Choir for Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont., along with the Rev. Robert Hayashi and Music Director Imre Olah, led a Christmas carol service at Mackenzie Health Hospital on Tuesday, Dec. 9. The event was well-attended and enjoyed by all.

In November, the Christian Education Committee for Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont., hosted their yearly Jay Cook Memorial pancake fundraiser in support of the Salvation Army's Christmas Toy Drive. Peggy and Peter Cook (Jay's parents) came from out of town to help serve at the breakfast and are pictured with Mary Hebert of the Salvation Army.



Children and youth participated in the Christmas story pageant at First Presbyterian Church (FPC) in Winnipeg, Man., on December 21, with the help of a few adults.



The congregation at First Presbyterian Church in North Pelham, Ont., celebrated their 197th anniversary on Sunday, Oct. 19. Pictured here is First's minister the Rev. Jacob Lee (left) with guest minister for the service, the Rev. Mark Lewis.



The folk band at North Bramalea Presbyterian Church in Brampton, Ont., "Spirit River," provided a pre-Advent Friday Night series all through November. They also hosted "Spirit River Christmas" the afternoon of Saturday, Dec. 13. All events were well attended, with audience participation. Participants read gospel passages, sang along with the band, and shared in faith and fellowship. There was even a special visit from "Elvis"!

December 14 was a chilly day at Erindale Presbyterian Church in Mississauga, Ont., as the furnace in the sanctuary gave up the ghost two days before. However, with God's help (and five space heaters turned on at 6:30 a.m.), the service took place in a balmy 12 degrees temperature. With lots of emails advising folks on what to expect, a solid group of stoic Presbyterians came to hear the word of the Lord on this day of joy. Coats, shawls and blankets (handed out at the door to those who needed them) adorned all. While the adults were chilling in the sanctuary, the kids were snugly warm making gingerbread houses in the hall. Even the AV Team bundled up to ensure live streaming for those who couldn't make it! Erindale is a long-time supporter of the Coldest Night of the Year fundraiser, and this seemed a brief but fitting reminder of what it's like to have to live in the cold. God works in mysterious ways to continually remind us of how fortunate we are and how always to remember others in need. The new furnace was installed the following day—amen and hallelujah!



Erindale Presbyterian Church in Mississauga, Ont., annually hosts a gingerbread house-making event. Kids of all ages participate (and their parents), fitting the pieces together properly, making the houses stand up, decorating them nicely, and of course not eating all the decorations before they're done! Packaged kits make it easy, and the kids look forward to it every year—they do it during the service as their church school activity. A definite activity to do for congregations looking for something simple and effective for the younger ones at Christmas.



St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Coldwater, Ont., shared the joy of Advent by wearing their favourite Christmas sweaters.



On Sunday, Nov. 30, Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont., celebrated the "Hope" of the first Sunday of Advent by having the Rev. Joy Abdul-Mohan, visitor from Trinidad, along with the Christian Education Committee, lead in an intergenerational, intercultural worship service. Pictured are the Rev. Abdul-Mohan and the Rev. Robert Hayashi with the Christian Education Committee.



The congregation at St. Timothy's Presbyterian Church in Ajax, Ont., sat down to a Christmas lunch to celebrate the season and enjoy fellowship.



Knox Presbyterian Church in Vernon, B.C., offered a community Christmas Carol Sing-Along with a twist this past season. Residents from local retirement homes were contacted to take part in a mid-week service (that included transportation and supervision) to enjoy caroling, conversation and cider. Volunteers from Knox were available to move walkers and wheelchairs, as well as provide quiet companionship in the pew for those who felt anxious or a little confused. Over 50 guests were entertained with music, readings and of course, Silent Night by candlelight, before a time of refreshments and fellowship. The event was a highlight of Christmas activities at Knox!



For the past several years at Christmas, the congregation at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in North River Bridge on Cape Breton Island, N.S., has collected non-perishable items for the local food bank. The MacLeod AMS Auxiliary proposed the idea to Session to collect socks, mittens and gloves, hats, and scarves instead. St. Andrew's is a very small, congregation but this is what was delivered to the South of Smokey Food Bank after Christmas: 204 pairs of socks, 90 scarves, 23 caps, 26 pairs of mittens or gloves and 4 small blankets. As well, a cheque was provided for \$500.



In October, the congregation at Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., marked Halloween with a baking event on Saturday, Oct. 25, and a Blue Jays Watch Party on Oct. 31.



On January 11, the congregation at North Bramalea Presbyterian Church in Brampton, Ont., was pleased to welcome 18 new members—one by adult baptism, 13 through profession of faith, and four by transfer.



First Presbyterian Church in Brockville, Ont., held its second PA Day Camp of the school year on November 29 and welcomed 19 campers and student helpers to a day of fun, games and crafts. The congregation's mission project was in support of the Brockville and Area Food Bank, and Amanda Petch, food bank operations manager, spoke to campers about their work supporting the vulnerable in the community. Campers brought more than 70 pounds of non-perishable food and personal care items for the food bank's clients. Many thanks to Christian Education Coordinator Denise Kent, the volunteers, and the people of First Presbyterian Church for making the PA Day Camp such a success!



On Sunday, Oct. 19, members from Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., participated in a community walk to raise funds for Evangel Hall Mission.



The congregations of the Lancaster & Martintown Pastoral Charge (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Lancaster, Ont., and St. Andrew's Martintown) have been preparing "Blessings Bags" to support "The Hands & Feet of Jesus Ministry" that Rev. Ian MacMillan (retired minister of the pastoral charge) began in 2024 to help unhoused people in the area. A request went out in early December for socks, hats, gloves, personal care items and high protein snacks to fill the bags. Also included was a message of hope, a New Testament Bible, and a sheet of information advising people of support services available in the area. Members of the congregations gathered in early January and filled 50 waterproof blessing bags. While the Rev. Ian MacMillan is out and about, he looks for people in need with whom he can chat and offer a bag. He also provides them with a Tim Horton's gift card for a hot drink and a meal. This is a small way the pastoral charge can be the "hands and feet of Jesus," reaching out to assist vulnerable people. PHOTO CREDITS: CINDY ROWE



A service of covenanting took place on October 5 at Iona Presbyterian Church in Dartmouth, N.S. The Rev. Dr. Andrew Richardson of the United Church of Canada's Office of Vocation, and minister for the Bermuda-Nova Scotia region, celebrated Holy Communion and led in a service recognizing the leadership of the UCC student minister Tamsin Moynihan Robson. This arrangement is the first of its kind in the Atlantic provinces and one of several circumstances in Canada where a portion of the journey to ordination by a United Church candidate is taking place in a Presbyterian congregation. Tamsin has been providing pulpit supply at Iona for almost two years and will continue until July 2026.



On Thursday, Oct. 30, the York Regional Police Interfaith Council's Leadership Sub-Committee met at Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont. In attendance was Superintendent Ahmad Salhia, who oversees the Executive Services Branch, which includes community services and his team. He's pictured third from the left in the front row. Also part of his team was Capt. Greg Bailey, lead chaplain, standing beside choir member Bonnie Walsh. The RHPC Chancel Choir sang some hymns in honour of their visit.



St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Caintown, Ont., held its annual Country Christmas Concert on November 22, in the St. Paul's sanctuary. Over 100 people enjoyed an evening of music performed by the Caintown Choir and Chorus, the First Presbyterian Church Handbell Choir, soloists and the Athens District High School Band. Refreshments followed the concert. A free-will offering taken at the concert raised over \$1,100 for the Brockville and Athens Food Banks. A wonderful way to start the Christmas season!



On Saturday, Nov. 1, members of the congregation, along with the Cemetery Board for Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont., in preparation for the November 11 Remembrance Day services, participated in the No Stone Left Alone program by laying poppies and flags on the graves of veterans in the Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church Historic Cemetery.



For the first time, First Presbyterian Church hosted the Brockville Community Christmas Day Dinner in 2025. The Christmas Day dinner is an annual tradition in Brockville, Ont., and welcomes people from the community for a free turkey dinner with all the trimmings, festive music and fellowship. The dinner had previously been organized by a local Catholic church, which decided to step back in early November after many years. First Presbyterian Church, together with five other churches, stepped in on short notice to organize the dinner, including: creating social media flyers; contacting local news media for publicity; securing donations of food and decorations; and, of course, recruiting lots of volunteers! A local musician provided festive music for the guests to enjoy as well. The dinner was a great success, with 110 people in attendance to enjoy the delicious meal and the warm community welcome. What a wonderful way to share God's love with neighbours. First Presbyterian will again host the dinner as an ecumenical effort for Christmas 2026.



Central Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont., supports local needs through donations on White Gift Sunday each year. This year, the church gave to "Hearts for Hamilton," providing for those in the city who are unhoused. As well, this Advent season brought Central's Mission Committee and youth group together to raise funds from members of Central and its surrounding community for PWS&D's Gaza Response through the PCC's "Giving Tree Ornaments" initiative. Pictured here are Ramona Starkey from the youth group and the Rev. Hannah Lovaglio. The congregation prays for a world where such giving trees are no longer needed, and adequate housing is available for all.



On December 14, members of the Sunday school at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Bramalea, Ont., hosted a fundraising coffee and fellowship time, raising over \$600 for goats in Malawi.



On Sunday, Dec. 7, the congregation at Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., welcomed and gave a donation to Aniska Ali, a representative from the 519 Community Centre, who shared a presentation on LGBTQI+ refugee and newcomer support provided at the 519.



On October 10, folks from Riverdale and Westview Presbyterian Churches in Toronto, Ont., joined with members of local United, Anglican and Mennonite churches for the first annual square dance fundraiser for the Danforth Grow Hope project, in support of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Over \$1,600 was raised to help sponsor the equivalent of almost three acres. Churches are working together to help end hunger in the world! Visit foodgrainsbank.ca/grow-hope.



In December, the choir of the Believers Revival Tamil congregation, which worships in the sanctuary of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Bramalea, Ont., blessed the congregation by opening the worship service with a Christmas selection in Tamil.



On Thursday, Dec. 4, members of Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., prepared and served a turkey dinner for the Evangel Hall Mission residents' Christmas party, which included food, singing, dancing and lots of fun.



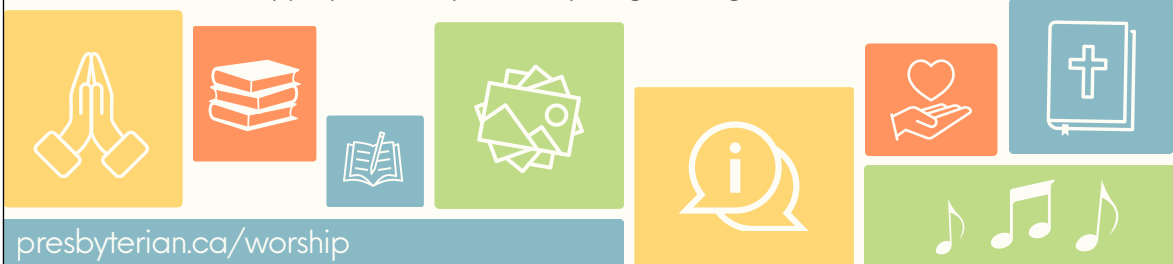
On October 19, the congregation at North Bramalea Presbyterian Church in Brampton, Ont., celebrated its 42nd anniversary with a special service that provided an opportunity for a photo of the congregation... And of course there was cake! Pictured is the full congregation as well as a photo with Session and the Rev. Noel Ramsey.



"Be Strong in the Lord" was the theme of the Fall Rally of the Maitland Presbyterian of the Women's Missionary Society (WMS), hosted by St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Wingham, Ont. Fourteen members and two guests attended on a sunny day. Worship service was led by Joanne Lennips on the topic Lavish Giving, based on scripture Mark 14: 1-9. Lorraine Clugston of Wingham led an informative analysis of the Apostles Creed. The afternoon session began with a sing-along led by Wingham Goforth. Jenn Crits of Kitchener had an inspirational message about her cancer journey as well as crisis-intervention situations in her teaching career. Honorary Membership was presented to Judy Watt (left) of Kincardine, pictured here with Caryl Scheel.

RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP

Daily prayers, weekly lectionary, liturgies, images, and so much more!



presbyterian.ca/worship

INTERNATIONAL

Our Journey to Nepal

By Linda Murray,
 Elmvale Presbyterian
 Church in Elmvale, Ont.

In November, the PCC led a group to visit mission partners in Nepal. Seven people from across Canada, ranging in age from 20 to 80, travelled to visit PCC mission staff the Rev. Lora Nafziger and Mitch Rhodes, and witnessed the work they are doing with United Mission to Nepal (UMN). Participants also visited the United Mission Hospital Tansen, witnessed the life-changing work at New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Centre, toured cultural sites, and visited International Nepal Fellowship Green Pastures Hospital in Pokhara where PWS&D is supporting the medical needs of impoverished patients. The trip was an opportunity to see first-hand how partners supported by Presbyterians Sharing and PWS&D are sharing the good news of the gospel in word and action.

Our journey in Nepal began not with project reports or statistics, but with stories of faith. In Kathmandu, the bustling streets are intermixed with quiet temples. Here, we encountered the living traditions of Hinduism and

Buddhism—the two dominant religions that shape much of Nepal's cultural identity. Alongside them, we discovered the growing presence of Christianity, a faith practiced by a small but vibrant community. Learning about these traditions was more than an introduction—it was a reminder that PCC's work here unfolds within a rich tapestry of belief, resilience and hope.

During our visit, we met with leaders of United Mission to Nepal (UMN), an organization supported by Presbyterians Sharing. UMN's work is rooted in compassion and justice, to reach the poorest of the poor. We visited the United Mission to Nepal Lum-bini cluster projects that are in Nawalparasi and Kapilvastu. Their programs span education, health care, sustainable livelihoods and disaster resilience, always prioritizing communities with the greatest need. What struck us most was their commitment to empowerment: rather than offering short-term aid, UMN partners work with local people to build skills, strengthen resilience and create lasting change.

Our first stop was in the Lum-bini area. Revered as the birthplace of the Buddha, it is a sym-



The group at the United Mission to Nepal office: Monica Scott, Maeng Hong, Sarah Simpson, Lily Ko, Bibhu Singh, Lora Nafziger, Linda Murray, Jan Siemens and Grace McCreary.

bol of Nepal's spiritual heritage. Amid this backdrop, we met with a small but determined mental health support group. Nine members gathered with two dedicated staff coordinators, sharing stories of resilience and struggle. The group provides a safe space for individuals facing challenges that are often hidden or stigmatized in society. What struck us most was the courage of the participants—their willingness to speak openly, to support one another and to embrace hope for healing. The coordinators emphasized that UMN's partnership helps to sustain these efforts, ensuring that even those on the margins receive care and dignity.

At our second stop we met Annisika, a young girl whose life has been transformed through medical support funded by UMN, with donations from partners including the PCC. Born with a club foot, she received treatment that not only corrected her condition but gave her the chance to walk and play like other children. What makes this program remarkable is its commitment to long-term care: follow-up continues until the age of 21, ensuring that children like Annisika receive complete treatment and ongoing support. Her story is a powerful example of how Presbyterians Sharing's partnership with United Mission to Nepal extends



Speech and movement therapy class for young children at Green Pastures Hospital.

dignity and opportunity to people living with disabilities.

Another inspiring part of our visit was meeting with youth clubs supported by United Mission to Nepal. These groups bring together young people aged 18 to 24, giving them a space to meet once a month and learn practical skills in governance, leadership and goal setting. What begins as training in how to run a club soon expands into real community impact. The youth group organizes homework clubs for children, create opportunities for games and recreation, and engages directly with local government on pressing issues. They are learning to advocate against domestic abuse and child marriage, while also promoting sanitation and environmental awareness. Equipped with these tools, the young leaders return to their villages and put their learning into practice, making life a little bit better for everyone

around them.

We next visited a farming area, where we learned how innovation and tradition are being woven together to improve livelihoods. Farmers are reducing pesticide use, adopting better irrigation techniques and building water supplies to sustain their fields. The project supports 32 groups, reaching about 45 farmers—most of them women—who are leading the way in sustainable agriculture. Beyond crops, they are experimenting with composting and biogas technology. Already, 14 households have installed biogas systems, saving approximately 7,000 Nepali rupees (approximately \$70 CAD) each year, which is essential in a country where the minimum wage is 108 rupees an hour (approximately \$1 CAD). This also reduces reliance on firewood, which can be a safety issue in small rural homes. What impressed us most was the



Tansen Mission Hospital staff.

ripple effect: these farmers are not keeping their knowledge to themselves. They are travelling to other communities, sharing what they've learned, and expanding the reach of sustainable farming practices across the region.

One of the most eye-opening parts of our journey was in Tansen, where we toured the United Mission Hospital. Guided by Marianne, who came from Switzerland many years ago and founded the Nursing School within the hospital compound, we discovered a facility that is remarkably self-sufficient. From ICU to paediatrics, surgery and laboratory services, the hospital produces much of what it needs—filling its own oxygen tanks and even making its own beds, chairs and equipment. The Nursing School, once a pioneering effort, continues to thrive. Today, the school trains students from Grades 10 to 12, equipping them with medical knowledge and practical skills, such as taking blood, reading slides under microscopes and performing simple procedures. These young people return to their villages ready to assist with basic health care, while also studying math, chemistry, biology, zoology and anatomy. Each student also spends a week in pastoral care training, blending medical service with compassion.

Our visit continued at the New Life Psychiatric Rehabilitation Centre, a farm-style complex

founded by a local pastor to support people living with mental illness, many of whom were homeless. Here, patients are reminded that they are not alone and are encouraged to help themselves and each other. Socialization is a key part of recovery, and the farm provides a therapeutic environment where clients raise chickens, water buffalo, pigs and crops. The produce not only sustains the centre but is sold to make the program financially viable. In a beautiful act of generosity, the farm also provides food for a local orphanage. This self-sufficient model demonstrates how dignity, community and sustainability can come together to transform lives.

After staying in Tansen, we headed to Pokhara to visit International Nepal Fellowship (INF), which is supported by PWS&D. INF has community development projects and a business arm, which helps fund its ongoing work. Green Pastures Hospital in Pokhara started as a rehab and leprosy-focused hospital, but over the years has grown into a full-service hospital. We attended a speech therapy class for children with disabilities and learned some Nepali children's songs.

This mission trip was made possible through the assistance of staff at national office and Lora Nafziger, PCC's mission staff working with UMN in Nepal. Their guidance allowed us to witness firsthand the impact of Presbyte-



A woman (right) who is a beneficiary of land, seeds and agricultural training from UMN community initiatives beside a member of the UMN staff.

rians Sharing on an international scale. Meeting the people whose lives are touched by these programs was one of the greatest gifts we received—a reminder that faith and generosity can truly change lives. We encourage continued support for Presbyterians Sharing. Every contribution goes toward teaching, empowering and spreading knowledge, which ensures that hope continues to grow in communities across Nepal and beyond.



Tansen Mission Hospital nursing students.

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PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

For the Neighbours We Do Not See



In Yemen, PWS&D is providing food assistance in response to one of the world's most severe and complex humanitarian crises. PHOTO: ITDC.

By Guy Smagghe, PWS&D Director

Jesus was known as a teacher. When people were confused and didn't know which part of the Bible to prioritize, he did not hesitate to straighten things out. He taught that the greatest commandment was to love God fully and to love your neighbour as yourself. Very clear. "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40).

Presbyterians respond through Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D) to love their neighbours, those who are affected by large natural disasters and conflict—like Gaza, Ukraine, Haiti and Afghanistan—in situations that are often featured in the media and that are therefore more visible. PWS&D also responds in many places that don't receive much media coverage but where

needs may be even greater—think of Yemen, South Sudan, Nepal or Sindh province in Pakistan.

It is easier to care for a neighbour in need when they live next door than when they are in the depths of crises halfway around the world. In the days when Jesus taught, means of communication and transportation were very basic. It was nearly impossible for people to reach out to those in need in places that they couldn't see. Likely, they would never hear about them, and if they did, there was little they could do about those situations.

Nowadays we can find out about what is going on in most places almost instantly. Thanks to the internet and modern mass media, we learn very quickly about crises, except for a few places where access to media is severely restricted, where the

government fully controls information or where basic infrastructures, like electricity and internet, are seriously missing.

That is why we are usually much better informed about a massacre that occurs in Europe, Australia or North America than we are when a massacre happens in Sudan, North Korea, the Democratic Republic of Congo or Yemen. Communications infrastructures are not equally developed or free around the world, which makes it easier to cover the needs in some places than others.

PWS&D endeavours to respond where the needs are the greatest, whether or not those places make the news. Our partners and the ecumenical networks we are part of, like the ACT Alliance, are rooted in communities who inform PWS&D about their needs.

Bangladesh

To give an example, PWS&D is responding in Bangladesh to assist Rohingya refugees (now called Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals), in one of the most protracted and severely underfunded humanitarian crises in the world. The ACT Alliance is looking to raise and program \$2.8 million to improve food and nutrition security; expand safe livelihood and skills opportunities; provide shelter, water, sanitation and hygiene; and contribute protection for vulnerable households in camps and host communities.

Yemen

Another example would be in Yemen, which continues to face one of the world's most severe and complex humanitarian crises. By mid-2025, nearly half of the population (over 17.1 million people) were experiencing acute food insecurity, with this number projected to rise to 18.1 million by early 2026, including 41,000 people expected to face catastrophic famine-like conditions.

PWS&D is responding with Canadian Foodgrains Bank to provide wheat flour, canned beans, vegetable oil, sugar and salt to 6,340 people. For each one of these people, the assistance provided will be a lifeline through a challenging period. You can read more about this project in the following pages.

Malawi

A third example would be Malawi. Due to unreliable rains, an assessment revealed that 22% of the national population would not be able to meet their annual food requirements during the lean period (October 2025 to March 2026). Mulanje is one of the most affected areas and has reached crisis levels of food insecurity. It is estimated that over 30% of households will have depleted their own food stocks three months earlier than normal, indicating a serious food gap in the district and requiring humanitarian assistance to meet their food needs.

PWS&D will respond with its partner to reach approximately 1,000 households through direct cash transfers, enabling people to purchase what they need through the three most difficult months. The cash is equivalent to a food basket that could include 50 kg corn, 10 kg of beans and 2 litres of cooking oil. The cash gives them the flexibility to further diversify their basket to suit their needs.

Most readers will not have been aware of these critical situations where PWS&D is responding in the world. Undesignated donations to PWS&D help us meet the needs of many of the neighbours that we do not see or hear about, in Bangladesh, Yemen, Malawi and many other countries, but who are just as deserving of assistance as those who make the news.



PWS&D partners provide humanitarian assistance in response to crises that make the news and those that don't. In Afghanistan, families receive cash vouchers to buy necessary food during harsh winter months.

Responding In Community

By Emma Goldstein,
PWS&D Communications

One of the most powerful aspects of responding through PWS&D is that we respond together. As we share resources and advocate for our neighbours near and far, as we read about their lives or meet with them to hear their stories, we embrace the call Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 1:10: "Be united in the same mind and the same purpose."

This is something that the Rev.

Marianne Emig Carr, minister at First Presbyterian Church in Brockville, Ont., has seen in action in her local congregation. Marianne reflected that the more we help those in need, "the more we see how much we have in common. Not the things that divide us—the things that join us together."

As we respond, we come together from generation to generation. In November 2025, for example, the children at First Presbyterian Church invited their

community to purchase small Christmas gifts they had crafted. Together, they raised funds to purchase a Gift of Change that would make a difference for kids in a different country who are facing difficult circumstances.

We come together, from faith to faith. Marianne said about Brockville Together, a multi-faith refugee sponsorship group: "The cool thing about this particular group is it's a bunch of people, not just those from our congregation.

Continued on page 29



In September, Roushin and her family arrived in Ottawa, and were welcomed by members of the multi-faith sponsorship group, Brockville Together.

PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

The Sound of Hope

By Emma Goldstein,
PWS&D Communications

What does hope sound like?

For Ishrat, a teenager in India, hope sounds like the voice of her teacher, providing instruction in the schoolroom where she has a place to belong. It sounds like the thrumming of the tires on a bike that she is no longer too weak to ride.

And for Laxmi, a 31-year-old Nepalese woman, the sounds of hope include the bleating of goats and the clucking of chickens, in her home farm that she started after participating in a PWS&D program in her community. Hope also rings out when she uses her own voice to lead a group of women, gathered to invest in brighter futures.

For Ishrat and Laxmi, and many other women like them, hope sounds like no longer being silent due to discrimination.

In both Nepal and India, deep-rooted cultural norms hinder girls' participation in many things that we may take for granted, such as attending school. This discrimination leads to low literacy rates for both girls and women and limits the opportunities they will have to earn an income when they grow up.

Even if they have achieved an education, social stigmas and difficulty accessing credit may further limit the chances women have to make an independent livelihood.

This was true for Laxmi, who once lived a quiet life. Her daily routine revolved around household chores. She rarely attended community events or interacted with other women in the village, which made her feel isolated.

Speaking in front of others was also a challenge for Laxmi. Even at home with her two kids, when she had ideas, she wouldn't often share them.

One day, she heard of something beginning in her community: an initiative of Women for Peace and Democracy called the POWER project. The project, which PWS&D has been supporting since February 2025, invites women and those from other excluded groups to come together and access opportunities for socially just, financially viable and environmentally sustainable livelihoods.

Laxmi joined a village women's group through the program. She was surprised when those around her recognized her leadership capabilities and selected her as the group's chair. Each month, she now confidently uses her voice to facilitate meetings.

After learning about poultry farming, goat raising and organic vegetable farming through the group, Laxmi had the confidence to pursue a livelihood in animal husbandry. Beginning with one goat, she soon expanded her small farm by adding two additional goats, six chickens and a buffalo. She is now creating a

more sustainable income for her family.

Laxmi reflected on the difference that being involved in the program made in her life: "I am working towards becoming independent by initiating my own small business."

In neighbouring India, Ishrat is a 17-year-old girl who lost her father to cancer, after which her two brothers moved away to earn an income. Despite their efforts, her family often struggled to afford proper food and other essentials, and she was forced to quit school. She felt little hope that she'd be able to continue her education, because her family could not afford it.

Ishrat received help from the PWS&D-supported Karuna Project at Duncan Hospital, a holistic program that supports marginalized girls' nutritional and other needs. This project provides financial assistance to help girls have unhindered access to education, while program staff also work to raise awareness of the value of equal opportunities for girls, and advocate for them to remain in school. Vocational training courses equip girls with practical skills, thereby boosting their employability and empowering them to make meaningful contributions to their communities.

When the project team first met Ishrat, she was visibly undernourished and weak—and as a result, withdrawn. Understanding her fragile health and difficult cir-



After learning animal husbandry and leadership skills through a PWS&D-supported program in her community, Laxmi now rears goats, chickens and a buffalo to provide for her family, and leads others in her village women's group.

cumstances, the team extended help through its nutritional support program. Regular nutritional supplements, follow-up visits and dietary guidance helped Ishrat gradually regain her health. Over the following months, Ishrat's weight improved, her energy levels increased and she began to look and feel stronger.

Encouraged by her progress, the Karuna team also motivated Ishrat to return to school. Ishrat enrolled in grade 10, equipped with the school supplies provided by the project. Once malnourished and withdrawn, she is now an energetic student.

With restored health and growing confidence, Ishrat began participating in school activities. Her resilience showed when she competed in, and won, her district's 10-kilometre bicycle race.

Reflecting on her journey, Ishrat said, "Karuna gave me strength and a new identity."

Investing in the lives of women



Ishrat, who was previously malnourished, was proud to compete in and win her school district's bicycle race after regaining her health.

and girls in countries where they are marginalized goes beyond access to food or better educational and economic opportunities: it results in regained hope, ringing out loud and clear.

Continued from page 28

We're working with people in the Muslim community in Brockville. We're working with people just in the community. We're working with people from other churches. It's a composite group that have come together to provide support [for refugees]."

We come together, strengthened by God. "We look in the world and see all the things we see with our eyes of flesh. But we don't always see all the things that God is doing in the world. The small things, the big things," re-

flected Marianne. "God is always working ahead of us. We're just called to be the people that God calls us to be: to be faithful and do what we can to support."

Jesus demonstrated ministry—in community, to the marginalized. Yet he did this in a particular way: as he engaged others in mission, he made disciples, who in turn made further disciples. In Brockville, one of the people who has been the most supportive of a newly settled family is a young man who had previously been sponsored

by the community. "He has been like an uncle figure to the kids, popping over regularly to share a meal and supporting them with language and communication," noted Marianne. "I think he enjoys it as much as they do."

When we work together, all are impacted. "I can't tell you all the times I've been blessed as I've stayed connected with [those we have sponsored]," shared Marianne. "We are helping them, but they're helping us too. It's not a one-way street: our lives are also changed."



The children from First Presbyterian Church in Brockville, Ont., rallied their congregation to raise funds for PWS&D through their handmade Christmas craft sale.



PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

How Food and Water Save Lives in Yemen



Water filters distributed through the project provided families with access to clean water. PHOTO CREDIT: ITDC.

By Stephanie Chunoo,
PWS&D Communications

When Hamdan received a food basket, it meant more than just immediate relief—it was a lifeline. In Yemen, Hamdan became disabled after an accident, leaving him unable to walk and work, or support his family.

“Days passed heavily as I

watched my children with the eyes of a helpless person. I relied on remittances from my brother, who works abroad, but the amount was small and insufficient for our basic needs,” said Hamdan. “I borrowed money from my neighbours, and every day I would say, ‘Tomorrow will be better...’ but that tomorrow never seems to come. The situation worsened when my daughter fell ill and needed surgery, which forced me to borrow more money from other people to perform four surgeries for her and buy medication. I saw her in pain, and my heart broke a thousand times a day.”

Unable to work, coupled with Yemen’s food insecurity exacerbated by conflict, floods and economic issues, along with his daughter’s medical needs, Hamdan found himself in an almost impossible situation.

After over a decade of civil war, the humanitarian crisis in Yemen is one of the world’s most severe. In 2025, over 17 million people were suffering from acute food insecurity. That number is projected to grow by at least one million by

early 2026. To address rising food insecurity, PWS&D supported a food assistance project to provide food baskets and water filters, as well as cooking equipment. Hamdan and his family were selected to join the program.

“That basket was not just assistance for my children and me; it was a lifeline. Thanks to it, I was able to save some money that I had been spending on basic food needs and used it for my daughter’s treatment. I saw her improve before my eyes, returning to laughter and play little by little... I swear, there is no joy in the world that equals a moment like this. In my heart, there is hope, and on my face, a smile I hadn’t known for a long time. Thank you to every person who contributed to it,” he shared with gratitude.

Manar* is a mother of four who faced her own struggles. Her husband suffers from a mental health condition, which leaves her as the sole provider for her family. She lives with her parents and works tirelessly collecting firewood from the mountainside to make charcoal to sell and support her children.



To address worsening food security in Yemen, PWS&D has provided food baskets to families to help meet immediate food needs. PHOTO CREDIT: ITDC.

“My family’s suffering was great, as my children always suffered from illnesses and diarrhea due to contaminated and unclean water, like many other children in our village. This caused me constant worry, as I would see my children in pain and could not do much to help them,” she explained.

Manar and her family were also among those who participated in the project.

“I felt indescribable joy because my children and I are getting good food and clean water. I never thought that the water filter could change our lives in this way. It saved us money and protected my children from diseases and diarrhea. Their health improved noticeably, and they could go to school happily,” Manar reflected on the program’s impact. The food basket that the family also

received allowed Manar to redirect her limited income toward long-term stability.

“With the food support, I was also able to save money to buy two goats, which will help us further improve our situation. I am so grateful to you; your intervention has had a significant impact on improving our lives, and I hope you continue to assist people in circumstances like ours.”

Hamdan and Manar’s stories reflect the reality of thousands in Yemen. With your continued support, we can reach more families. Visit [WeRespond.ca/donate](https://www.werespond.ca/donate) to do so. This project is implemented in partnership with Canadian Foodgrains Bank and ERDO (Emergency Relief & Development Overseas), the humanitarian agency of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

*Names have been changed.

Unceasing Prayer

Prayers for a More Sustainable,
Compassionate and Just World



Unceasing Prayer

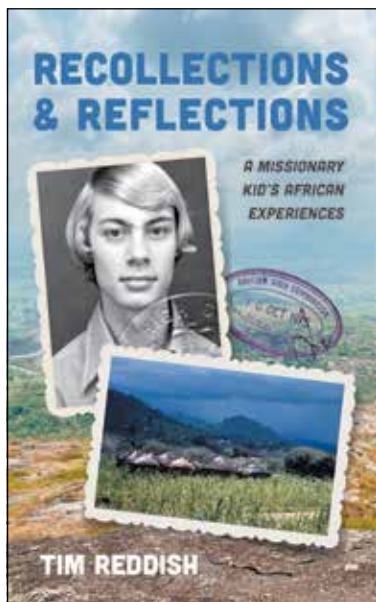
Unceasing Prayer features prayers for specific PWS&D programs and emergency responses, prayers from PWS&D’s global partners and ecumenical coalitions, and prayers written by PWS&D supporters from across Canada. Use the guide for times of worship with your congregation or at home.

[WeRespond.ca/UnceasingPrayer](https://www.werespond.ca/UnceasingPrayer)


 Presbyterian
 World Service
 & Development

BOOK REVIEWS

Recollections & Reflections



By the Rev. Dr. Richard Fee,
former mission staff to Nigeria
and General Secretary of the
Life and Mission Agency

Recollections & Reflections
A Missionary Kid's African
Experiences
Written by Tim Reddish
Resource Publications, 2025

There is a trove of rich Christian mission history to be found in the annals and memoirs of Christian missionary schools, written by former staff and students of these residential/boarding schools. Two such schools are Rift Valley

Academy in Kenya, Kijabe, Kenya, and Hillcrest School in Jos, Nigeria. The Rev. Dr. Tim Reddish has contributed to this trove in the writing of *Recollections & Reflections: A Missionary Kid's African Experiences*. He was a student in the 1970s at Hillcrest, and one of its boarding residences, Rock Haven, while his parents were British missionaries of the Sudan United Mission.

Rift Valley Academy is a Christian boarding school in central Kenya with 100-plus years of history. They serve 500 students representing 30 nationalities, drawn from several churches and organizations. Their website states they “also accommodate a small number of Kenyan national students and expatriate students.” The school declares that it is “supporting current mission work while investing in the next generation of leaders and gospel-bearers.” The school is a branch of Africa Inland Mission, existing to see Christ-centred churches established and thriving among all of Africa’s peoples. In 1909, American President Theodore Roosevelt laid the cornerstone of the main building to Rift Valley Academy in Kiambogo, Kenya.

Founded in 1942 upon the



Kabwir Bible School and SUM mission station in the dry season (c. 1974).

motto, “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psalm 127:1a KJV), Hillcrest School in Nigeria was founded to provide a Christian education for missionary children by the Church of the Brethren Mission.

Other missions developed an interest in Hillcrest for the children of their mission staff. In 1955, the Sudan United Mission, Assemblies of God Mission and the United Missionary Society joined; in 1963, the Missouri Synod Lutheran Mission joined; the American Lutheran Mission, the Nigerian Baptist Mission, Mambilla Baptist Mission, Sudan Interior Mission, and the Great Commission Movement followed from 1964 until 1982. Later, both the United Methodist Church of Nigeria and the Wycliffe Bible Translators became contributors.

While being built upon an American model, it is interesting to note that from the beginning, Hillcrest accepted pupils without regard to race or colour. On March 29, 1947, *The Nigerian Daily Times* in

Lagos carried an article “No Color Bar in Brethren Mission School.”

For various reasons, The Presbyterian Church in Canada did not actively participate in the establishment or support of such large mission institutions. The children of their missionaries either attended “international” (expatriate) schools or small local schools set up at various times and staffed by other missionaries assigned to them. One such school was in Umuahia, Nigeria, in the 1960s. It was established for Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian mission personnel.

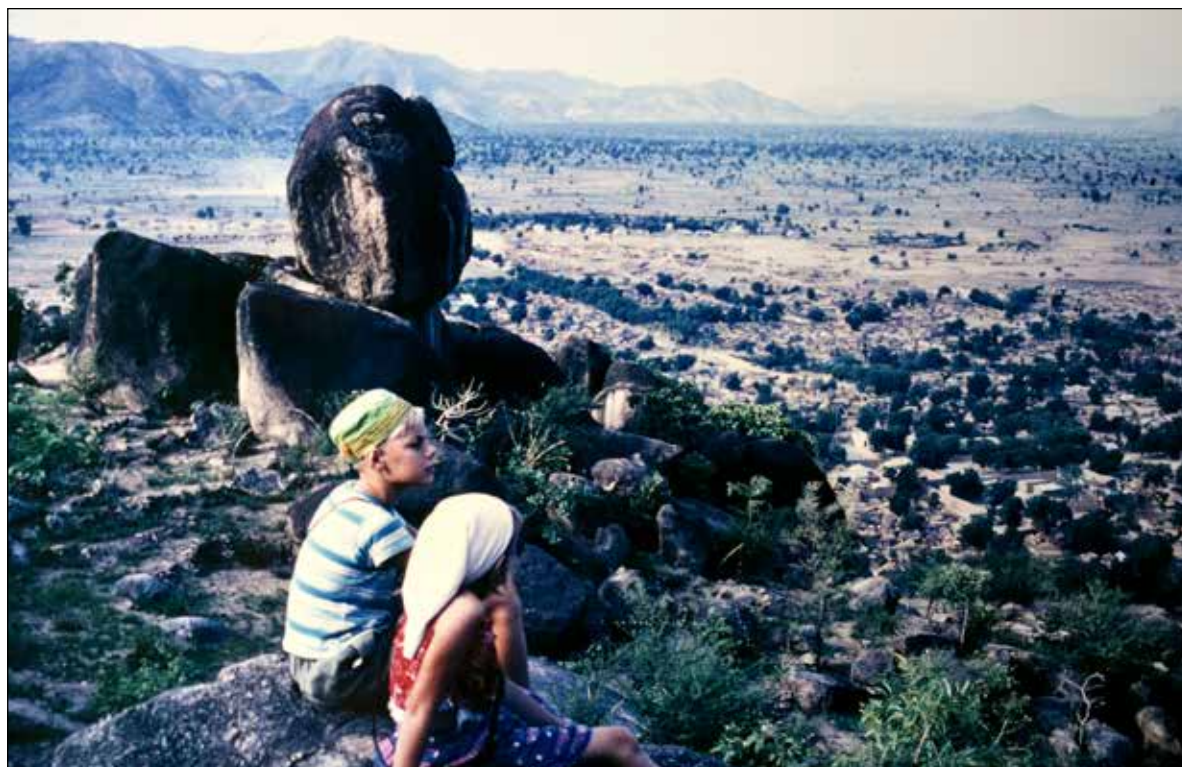
Tim Reddish’s memoir, *Recollections & Reflections*, is a valuable contribution to the trove of Christian literature that examines the missionary enterprise, not from the safe distance of academia, but from within the intimate space of memory. Reddish unabashedly states he was a “missionary kid,” and he wrote this memoir as such. Reddish brings to life the daily realities of mission work in Nigeria in the late 1960s into the 1970s with vivid narrative, photographs and carefully paced reflection. The book exemplifies what post-Christendom Christians most need: testimony that is honest enough to confess complexity, yet still animated by faith.

From a progressive Christian standpoint, there is much to commend. Reddish avoids both hagiography and cynicism—the two poles that often dominate contemporary discussion about missions. The reader is encouraged to comprehend the sacrificial courage that animated his parents’ generation, while allowing for the challenging acknowledgment of the cultural blind spots that inevitably shaped Christian mission personnel. Especially striking is his willingness to raise hard questions about legacy, divine calling, power and the mean-

ing of “success” in Christian work when geopolitical violence (such as the rise of Boko Haram) seems to erase earlier investments of love and labour. In his reflections, Reddish offers a chastened eschatological hope—one that trusts the work of God without demanding outcomes on the missionary’s terms.

From a progressive theological perspective, several tensions remain unexplored. The narrative occasionally defaults to the implicit frame that mission work is inherently justified by scripture, rather than subject to moral discernment in light of colonial histories and inter-religious dynamics. Readers of this book who have been formed by liberationist, post-colonial or interfaith sensibilities may wish there was a deeper engagement with African Christian critiques of missionary paternalism, or with the theological implications of Indigenous agency and resistance. Likewise, though Reddish gestures toward alternative missional models (e.g., Donovan, Newbiggin), the reflections stop short of articulating what a post-imperial, de-centred missiology might be required of Western churches.

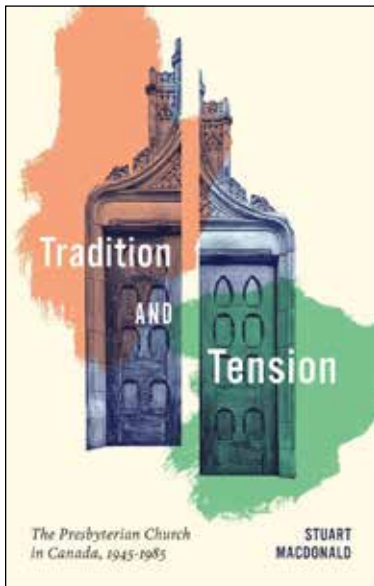
Nevertheless, *Recollections & Reflections* succeeds on its own stated terms: it contributes a human document to the church—a textured interior view of Christian mission, written not to settle the debate but to offer a complexity that is honest and faithful. It is this kind of confessional candour, emerging from lived experience rather than theoretical postures, that can aid the church’s ongoing work of repentance, reform and re-imagining. Reddish’s memoir will serve pastors, theologians, former missionaries and “third-culture” Christians as a catalyst for more responsible and Spirit-led conversations about mission after Christendom.



In the Gwoza hills: Tim and his sister Ruth overlooking Gwoza township in northeastern Nigeria (c. 1970).

BOOK REVIEWS

Tradition and Tension



By Phyllis D. Airhart, Professor Emerita of the History of Christianity, Emmanuel College, Toronto School of Theology

Tradition and Tension: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1945–1985
 Written by Stuart Macdonald
 McGill-Queen's University Press, 2025

“Things worked. Until they no longer did.” Those sentences from the final paragraph of *Tradition and Tension* frame Stuart Macdonald's fine study of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in the four decades after the second world war. The book's title captures the dilemma faced by church leaders: how to deal with friction between the familiar beliefs and practices of the past and a context changing with astonishing speed.

It would be easy to assume that those tensions stemmed from the

numerical decline of the 1960s that followed the advances of the postwar period. Macdonald's point is more subtle: growth brings its own challenges. Successful organizations sometimes find it difficult to come to terms with new realities—*because* of past successes. The PCC went from celebrating its remarkable progress after 1945 to forming committees to analyze what had gone wrong once membership peaked in the mid-1960s. Ironically, some initiatives intended to meet that moment contributed to the dynamic that Macdonald names in his title: tension within the tradition itself. Presbyterians changed from being proud of their denomination to questioning “all that they were and all that they had done.”

Macdonald explores four themes in making his case: church extension; denominational identity (especially as it pertained to mission); the place of women; and theology and worship. He sets the stage by highlighting church development in areas where new housing was concentrated and communities were growing. The preference by the 1960s was for smaller congregations serving those neighbourhoods rather larger areas, transforming the PCC from a denomination of large downtown churches in major cities to one that was stronger in the suburbs.

While he sees extension strategies as “largely successful,” he faults denominational leaders for failing to spot the decline of religiosity in Canada. Awaiting them at the end of a period of expansion was a financial crisis that coincided with slumping membership numbers. His detailed attention to the national church's structural and financial problems suggests that proposals for restructuring may have made things worse by creating a confusing mix of boards and committees to deal with them.

One of the unintended consequences of rapid growth was its impact on denominational identity. Planning was centralized, resulting in what he sees as “a clear break” with how decisions about where to expand had been made in the past. It also set church governance at odds with the traditional “hierarchy of church courts” designed to deal with discipline—not, Macdonald pointedly notes, a system devised to raise money—rather than growth and mission. To meet new objectives, a different administrative structure was needed, with full-time staff rather than volunteers to run it. He provides an extended consideration of the tension-producing outcome and gives readers a glimpse into the complications of what he describes as the courts of the church in tension with

“a national office that had been duct-taped on to the General Assembly.”

Ponder for a moment all the new committees that moving to that new model entailed. Its implementation required what Macdonald describes as “a massive level of participation” that assumed there were enough people in congregations to serve on the new committees that came with reorganization. He points out that eight people serving on four committees involved gathering 32 members, with not enough consideration given to the time involved in meetings and related tasks. It crossed my mind to wonder whether the need for more elders to serve on Session was a tacit motive for ordaining women as elders, which he adroitly explores as his third theme: a reconsideration of their place in the church. The decision to ordain women as both elders and ministers was made in 1966, although those opposed to the latter simply acted for a time as if nothing had changed.

Macdonald explores the fourth theme by detailing attempts to update confessional statements and the Book of Common Order. His meticulous attention to the procedural aspects of producing *Declaration of Faith Concerning Church and Nation* (1954) defies brief summation but underscores how seriously such matters were

taken. In so doing, he demonstrates how the development of “subordinate standards” allowed the PCC to move beyond the constraints of the Westminster Confession as a statement of faith and toward adopting Living Faith. He raises a provocative question: Why was there more acceptance of such changes, including use of the lectionary and observing the church year, towards the end of the period he considers? Perhaps, he suggests, a neo-orthodox consensus had formed over the previous three decades. He also notes that many were looking outside the denomination for resources, to ecumenical partners such as the World Council of Churches or, in the case of evangelical Presbyterians, to the neo-evangelical movement. But, he wonders, might it have been a consequence of growing indifference?

Rather than blaming either too much or too little change for the PCC's failure to flourish after the revival of the 1950s, Macdonald describes a church adopting a “model that worked effectively in one era, then attempting to adjust that model when it no longer worked.” His final sentence hints that the Presbyterian tradition can expect more tension in the years ahead: “Adapting to a different Canada, one that is post-Christian and post-Christendom, remains a challenge.”

Encampment

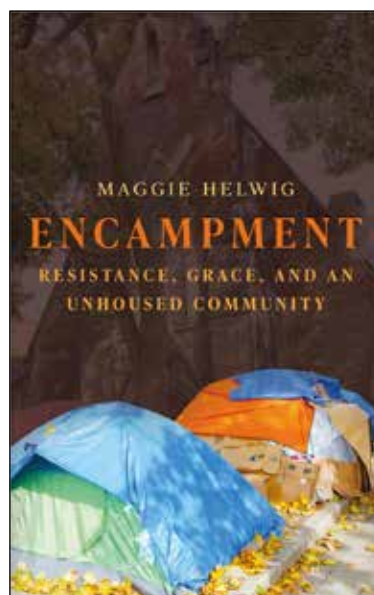
By Ainsley Chapman, Executive Director of Evangel Hall Mission

Encampment: Resistance, Grace, and an Unhoused Community
 Written by Maggie Helwig
 Coach House Books, 2025

Encampment: Resistance, Grace, and an Unhoused Community is a heartfelt reflection on the Rev. Maggie Helwig's time as an Anglican minister at the epicentre of one of Toronto's most visible encampments. Among the goals

of this book is to give voice to the experience of the people who live in encampments and highlight how our failing system has created an impossible situation. Maggie shares some of her sermons and weaves in spiritual reflections about the experience of being a caregiver, minister and community leader, navigating ethics, bureaucracy and power.

This makes a fantastic book club read and provides a good insight into parts of the homelessness crisis that doesn't make it into the news. The following are



some questions that will ensure there is no shortage of reflection

and discussion:

- What did this book highlight that is not being represented in the media? What was new for you?
- How does the book portray the relationship between the housed world and the unhoused world?
- How does the book portray the impact of encampments on people's sense of identity, dignity, or humanity?
- What does the account suggest encampments take away from people—and what, if anything, do they give in return?
- What does the book say about the concept of “Moral Injury”? How are people put in a

position where they are forced to act in a way that is contrary to their value system?

- Did the book change the way you think about encampments, homelessness, poverty, or social responsibility? If so, how?
- What does the book have to say about grief, loss and hope? Why might this be important when we think about encampments?

I read this book as part of the Housing Book Club hosted by the Canadian Housing Renewal Association. While I read the paper copy, others said that the audio book was wonderful, as Maggie herself narrates and sings the hymns.

BOOK REVIEWS

Optic Heart

*By the Rev. Dr. Victor A. Shepherd,
Glenbrook Presbyterian Church
in Mississauga, Ont., and
professor at Tyndale University*

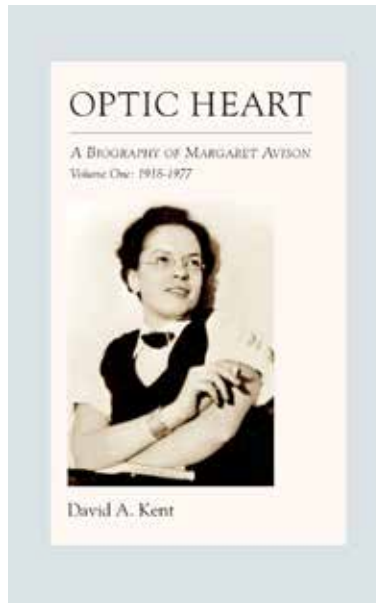
*Optic Heart: A Biography of
Margaret Avison: Volume One:
1918–1977*
Written by David Kent
The St. Thomas Poetry Series,
2025

I met Margaret Avison in November 1999, when I began a six-month assignment as pulpit supply at Knox Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont. She never missed morning worship there, sitting in the last few rows of the sanctuary and leaving quietly during the last hymn lest University of Toronto students or admirers engage her, adulate her or otherwise fail to recognize the simplicity and self-effacing humility that she deemed to befit someone who wanted only to exalt her Lord. I understood her in this regard, for I had long since read her poem, *Don't Touch The Glory*, in which her exposition relentlessly detailed the logic of John the Baptist's declaration, "He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Appreciating my preaching, Margaret invited me to her residence. Naively thinking myself to possess a modicum of poetic gift, I sent along in advance a poem I had written. When we were settled in her apartment she smiled graciously and informed me unhesitatingly, "Victor, I am 71 years

old, I have lupus, I am blind in one eye and have only 15 percent vision in the other. And I shall play hockey in the NHL before you become a poet." I was not offended, for her undeniable warmth eliminated any imagined slight, even as her honesty spared me the naive lack of self-perception.

Having read her work for years, together with several critical discussions of it, I was privileged to be allowed to see David Kent's forthcoming exposition, *Optic Heart: A Biography of Margaret Avison: Volume One: 1918–1977*. (*Optic Heart*—the expression is found in one of Avison's poems—reminds the reader that our profoundest apprehension of human anguish, complexity and hope occurs not as the eye observes but as the heart penetrates.) On account of Kent's scholarly appreciation of Avison's poetic genius, and no less on account of his empathic appreciation of humankind's conundrums, contradictions and grace-wrought triumphs that we can never anticipate but which the victory of Jesus Christ guarantees, Avison's biographer has discerned in her a poet whose genius shines through the ambiguities that haunted her throughout her life. For instance, she was born into a Methodist manse, yet found little in her father's demeanour or conviction to move her to faith; she spent years in "Toronto the good" with its Victorian respectability, yet immersed herself in a lifestyle



she subsequently declined to discuss; she had been exposed to church and gospel since infancy yet came to startling, all-determining faith only when she was in her mid-forties; she had enjoyed the social advantages of a middle-class home yet spent decades working among the least, the lonely, the last and the lost. (Every Sunday evening found her at Evangel Hall on Queen St. West in Toronto, where services were held and provision was made for women who were challenged on several fronts.) While her intellectual gifts could have garnered her highly profitable employment, she preferred kingdom-work that benefited underprivileged strugglers

even as she treasured reserves of psychic energy for her after-hours poeticising when she was overtaken by the poetic "afflatus" (as she called it) and penned fathomless lines until evening's end found her "too tired not to eat."

David Kent's biography traces the unfolding of Avison's life from infancy to middle-age. (A second volume will discuss the years 1978 to 2007.) Everywhere it probes both her poetic formation and her spiritual development. It highlights the recognition she gained as a major Canadian poet and her insistence that she wanted to be seen not as a "religious" poet; essential to her witness, rather, was that she be seen as an accomplished poet, so very accomplished, in fact, that non-believers would read her poetry for its literary worth and therein find themselves confronted by a gospel that had sneaked up on them through the mind and heart of a believer they would otherwise never have bothered with.

At the same time Kent's biography does more than chronicle: it empathically investigates the imagery, cadence, rhythm of Avison's work. Anyone with poetic sensibilities is aware that poetry is read as much by the ear as by the eye. In this regard, Kent acquaints readers with Avison's idiosyncrat-

ic fusion of sound, sense, significance. Throughout his biography he familiarizes readers with this fusion in such poems as *Scarface*, where Avison states, in the first line, "Scarred—beyond what plastic surgery could do," then in the middle of the poem reflects on what a hideously disfigured face means for someone maimed, only to conclude overwhelmingly, "His face is a good face, looking-out-from." Or consider her pondering the carrion that a raven brought Israel's greatest prophet in the desert: "Elijah swallowed what the bird of doom there dangled down" only to conclude with the eschaton's triumphant reversal: "It consecrates a time...towards the bread and drink of Him whose is the final kingdom."

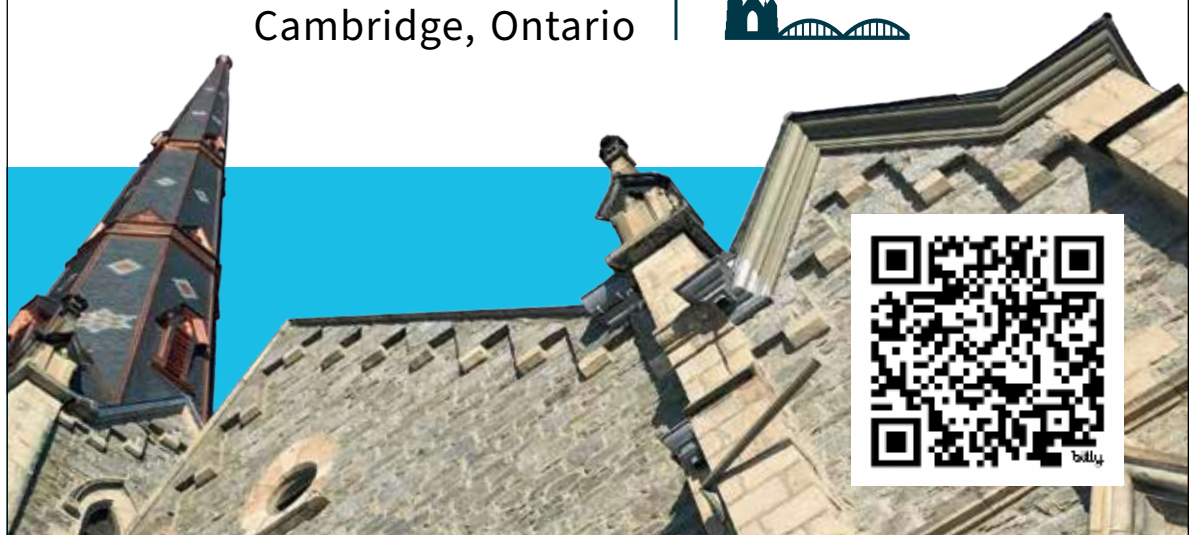
Avison was twice accorded Canada's Governor General's Award, as well as the Griffin Poetry Prize. David Kent's biography will leave readers knowing why. Not least, it will acquaint readers with the One whom Avison wanted only to extol through the rarest gifts entrusted to her.

The book launch for Optic Heart will take place Saturday, April 25, at 2:30 p.m., at St. Thomas's Anglican Church, 383 Huron Street, Toronto, Ont. For information about ordering a copy, visit stthomaspoetryseries.com.

CALLED TO LEAD WITH HEART AND VISION?

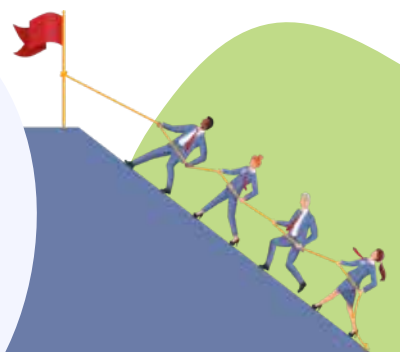
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REFLECTIONS

What a Mandarin Greeting Can Teach Us About Creation and Grace

By the Rev. Eugênio Anunciação,
Independent Presbyterian
Church of Brazil

I have always enjoyed studying languages. In addition to Portuguese, I study English, Spanish, Italian and French. More recently, I began learning Mandarin—a language that is not only spoken but contemplated. Unlike alphabet-based languages, Mandarin is expressed through characters: visual signs rich in history, culture and worldview, called Hanzi (汉字).

In a context such as Canada's, shaped by the meeting of peoples, language and traditions, even simple words can carry deep meaning. It was along this path that I became fascinated with one of the most common Mandarin greetings: 你好 (nǐ hǎo), usually translated as "hello" or "how are you?"

The beauty of this expression lies in the character 好 (hǎo), which means "good." It is composed of two other characters: woman/mother (女) and child (子). Visually, what is "good" emerges from the relationship between mother and child. This linguistic observation opens space for a deeper reflection on life, care and faith.

In the Reformed Christian tra-



dition, "good" is not defined by usefulness, efficiency or productivity, but by creation as God intends it. In Genesis, God looks upon life and declares it good. The Chinese Reformed theologian Stephen Tong insists that this goodness is grounded in the order of creation and covenant, not in passing cultural conventions. Motherhood, in this sense, is not merely a social construct, but a vocation that, within the Christian faith, participates in the goodness of God's creation.

Yet Reformed theology never speaks of creation without taking

the fall seriously. Pastor and theologian Wang Yi, writing from within a context of religious persecution, reminds us that every Christian vocation—including motherhood—is lived under the cross. It is not idealized or romanticized, but marked by daily faithfulness, quiet suffering and eschatological hope. Still, it remains good, because it is sustained by God's grace rather than by visible success.

The Holy Spirit and the birth of God's children

This horizon deepens when we recall that, in Reformed Protes-

tant theology, it is the Holy Spirit who gives birth to God's children. Jesus tells Nicodemus, "What is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). John Calvin describes the Spirit as the one who accomplishes our regeneration, bringing us to new birth into a life we do not generate ourselves.

In this way, the language of filiation—so clearly present in the character 好 (hǎo)—finds a profound echo in Christian faith. Human motherhood points analogically to a greater reality: God begets children not by the flesh, but by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit

acts as the one who conceives new life, forms Christ within us, and welcomes us into the family of God.

This connection illuminates the linguistic symbol without turning it into a forced allegory. What faith recognizes is that the goodness of life, expressed in the mother-child relationship, finds its fullness in the work of the Spirit, who creates, sustains and leads children toward maturity in Christ.

Contemporary Reformed women theologians help preserve this necessary balance. Kathleen B. Nielson reminds us that motherhood does not define a woman's ultimate identity, which is rooted in Christ. Jen Wilkin warns against the idolatry of motherhood, insisting that theology must precede experience. Nancy Guthrie, writing from the place of personal loss, testifies that even when motherhood is marked by suffering, the Spirit sustains hope and keeps the promise of redemption alive.

So, when we say 你好, we may be doing more than offering a polite greeting. We may be confessing—perhaps intuitively—that life is good, that care is good, and that filiation, both human and spiritual, remains a gift.

As we confess this goodness, we participate in the Reformed hope that God, in Christ, has not abandoned creation and continues to reconcile all things, while the Spirit goes on giving birth to children for the glory of God.

Theologians referenced in this article

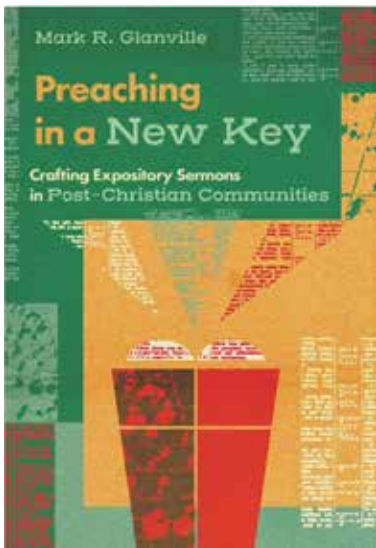
Wang Yi (王怡) — Reformed pastor and theologian (wangyilibrary.org/en)
 Stephen Tong (唐崇榮 / Stephen Tong) — Reformed theologian and evangelist (stephentong.org)
 Kathleen B. Nielson — Reformed Bible Educator (kathleennielson.com)
 Jen Wilkin — Bible teacher and author (jenwilkin.net)
 Nancy Guthrie — Reformed author and lecturer (nancyguthrie.com)

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A Preacher's Holistic Health



This is an adapted excerpt from Preaching in a New Key: Crafting Expository Sermons in Post-Christian Communities by the Rev. Dr. Mark R. Glanville, director of the Centre for Missional Leadership, St. Andrew's Hall in Vancouver, B.C.

While I have long recognized the significance of a pastor's inner life, I hadn't pondered the relationship between our inner life and the act of preaching until recently. Our whole life—our emotional, physical, spiritual, social, sexual, vocational, storied life—shapes our preaching and its outcome. Sometimes more than the content. It is commonplace, and important, to speak about a preacher's prayer life. But that's where the conversation usually stops. And yet spiritual and emotional health are inseparable. The vitality of a homily, the capacity of a sermon to revitalize, is impacted by the interior condition of the preacher.

I missed the importance of attending to our inner life for *preaching* until recently. I had a lightbulb moment when I was teaching preaching to graduate students. A student, Samantha, was preaching on Ruth, chapter 2. Sam's sermon was a high-quality narrative retelling of Ruth. It was gripping. Sam had worked with street-adjacent people in

Sydney, Australia. She began her sermon by telling us how she had been sitting with a friend who was experiencing a drug overdose. Her friend's heart stopped beating for a time, and she came close to death. As Sam told her important story in the sermon's introduction, she had an edge in her voice, even a hint of anger. She ended the introduction by stating that we need to see the humanity in this woman. I noticed in myself that while I strongly shared Sam's convictions, I wasn't drawn into Sam's experience.

Next, Sam dropped into the body of her sermon, a masterful retelling of the story of Ruth: an entrepreneurial outsider who becomes enfolded under Yahweh's wings. Sam's retelling was full of imagination and fascinating historical background. She made me feel like I was standing in the barley fields of ancient Bethlehem. I noticed that as Sam dropped into this narrative, her voice calmed, her face relaxed and even smiled, her eyes sparkled with excitement.

When Sam finished, we discussed her sermon as a class. All agreed that the sermon was quite wonderful. Yet, I was curious about the difference between Sam's introduction, which left me disengaged, and her narrative, which captivated me. I had a hunch that whatever had happened in the introduction often happened in my own preaching, so I wanted to understand it.

As the whole class continued to converse, I saw a connection I hadn't noticed before. I offered to Sam that her introduction sounded as if it were delivered from her "defended self." I was emotional as I spoke, for it was dawning on me that I preach, time and time again, from my defended self.

Betty Pries, an author and conflict consultant, uses the term "defended self" to describe "the self we develop to hide our vul-

nerability" (*The Space Between Us: Conversations About Transforming Conflict*, p. 83). Pries writes that our defended self is that part of us that emerges when our selfhood is threatened (pp. 83–89). Our defended self lies behind our negative self-talk: "Now I've proved that I am a poor leader." And it is the source of self-congratulatory assumptions, like: "I'm the only one holding this place together." We often preach from our defended self when we have unresolved anger at the congregation. In difficult pastoral circumstances, a cycle of conflict and preaching from our defended self can continue for years and years. My defended self shows up, to a greater or lesser degree, in every sermon I preach. Often, I'm not even aware of it.

But Sam didn't stay in her defended self. As she dropped into the narrative of Ruth 2 as a skillful storyteller, her face relaxed. Sam put the beauty of this story on full display as she ingeniously interwove narrative movement with historical details of daily life. I could feel that she loved this story, and she loved us. Now Sam was at her best. Buoyed by the beauty of the story and the joy of using her aesthetic gifts, she had shifted from her defended self into her "deeper self."

Pries describes our deeper self as, "the most intimate layer of our selfhood ... sometimes simply known as the place of one's heart" (p. 89). Our deeper self is anchored in God and in who God has created us to be. And our deeper self is integrated, in heart, mind, body and community. We know when we are living out of our deeper self (rather than our defended self) when our face is relaxed, we are open to connection to others and to God, and we are feeling flexible and creative.

As Sam retold the narrative of Ruth 2, her face relaxed. And as Sam's face relaxed, our faces as



listeners relaxed. When we are preaching, it is not always the emotion that we consciously project that the congregation takes on; it may be an unexamined emotion. Sam's emotional journey in her sermon was probably unintentional. The pathway to preaching from our deeper self as often as possible is our holistic health.

A call for preachers to pursue holistic health is not a call to adopt a psychological model but a call to faithfulness, a call to Jesus. After all, we desire to hear God's address in scripture, do we not? And yet, if we don't do this inner work, our unrecognized wounds may not only influence how we preach, but even how we read scripture. If our goal is to read scripture clearly, to respect others, to nurture healthy churches and to demonstrate humble honesty about what we bring to the preaching task, we need to do this inner work.

How can we preach from a place of health, from our deeper self? One strategy is to learn to recognize the signs of health and illness in our preaching. Learning to recognize these signs is a life-long journey of growing in self-knowledge. If you want to gauge the health of your preaching, at a basic level, ask yourself: "Am I preaching out of frustration

with my congregation, today?" A contemplative pastor may be frustrated by a lack of prayer. A tired pastor may be frustrated at lack of engagement. Whatever it is that frustrates you will inevitably leak into your preaching—you are only human. So, be alert to when you are preaching out of frustration.

Another sign: Do you love your people as you stand and preach to them? This, too, gauges your inner condition. A subtle lens, one requiring discernment, is recognizing the shape of your desire for your congregation to be transformed. Can we offer an invitation genuinely and humbly, trusting in God's timing for our community?

A foundation for healthy and effective preaching is our health in every domain of our lives, including the spiritual, physical, emotional, sexual, social and vocational. None of these domains can be ignored, for they are all intertwined and interdependent. For example, regular physical activity can improve mental wellness, as well as creating opportunities for social connection, fostering a sense of gratitude to God.

Having read this short reflection, you might consider pausing to journal, taking stock of your life in the various domains of your life.

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The Hub contains information and resources on living out God's call to do justice. It is an online collection of justice-related educational, liturgical and advocacy resources.

Visit presbyterian.ca/social-action



Reflections on 140 Years of Grace



The Rev. Daniel Surya (centre) with Karen Robbins, clerk of Session, and Mayor Blaine Hyggen, whose presence at the 140th anniversary service reminded us that faith and community flourish together.

By the Rev. Daniel A. Surya,
 St. Andrew's Presbyterian
 Church in Lethbridge, Alta.

My church, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Lethbridge, Alta., recently turned 140 years old.

One hundred and forty years. When I say that number out loud, it still amazes me. That's generations of prayers, laughter, baptisms, weddings, funerals, potlucks and countless cups of coffee shared in the name of Christ.

As I stood at the pulpit that morning, I looked out at familiar faces—some who have been here for decades, others newer to our church family—and I thought to myself, this is what grace-in-the-flesh looks like when it lingers.

In my sermon, I began with Psalm 126: "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream."

There's something about anniversaries that feels like that psalm—standing in a field of

memory, watching the sunlight of God's faithfulness stretch out across the years. I told the congregation, "It's not the kind of dream you wake up from; it's the kind you wake up into."

That line has stayed with me. Because anniversaries aren't just about nostalgia, they're about realizing that we are living in someone else's dream. The dream of those who built, prayed and hoped before us. And, in turn, we are becoming the dreamers for those who will come after.

For the anniversary we chose the theme, "From Generation to Generation: Celebrating the Past, Recognizing the Present, Embracing the Future." It felt fitting. We celebrated the past with gratitude, recognized the beauty of what God is doing among us now, and embraced the future—trusting that the same God who carried us here is not done yet.

One of the things that made the day even more special was the presence of Mayor Blaine Hyggen, who came to bring greetings on behalf of the City of Lethbridge. His words were full of kindness and community spirit—a reminder that the church doesn't stand apart from its city, but lives in relationship with it. I was deeply grateful for his presence, and for the friendship and goodwill shared between our church and our community.

There's a verse in Isaiah that I shared: "See, I am doing a new

thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland" (Isaiah 43:19).

That's the heart of our story—of every faithful community, really. God is still doing new things among old bricks and familiar pews. God still brings new life out of dry ground, hope out of despair, and beauty out of brokenness.

For me, this anniversary wasn't just a church milestone, it was a reminder of God's unbroken thread of faithfulness. From the first prayer spoken here in 1885 to the songs we sang last Sunday, grace has never stopped moving.

I left the service with a quiet conviction: the future of the church is not about trying to recreate the past, it's about perceiving the new thing God is already doing. There is always hope and possibility!

And maybe that's true for more

than just churches. Maybe that's true for all of us: in our lives, our families, our hopes. God is still writing, still creating, still faithful.

One hundred and forty years... and still dreaming.

A prayer of gratitude

Faithful God,
 thank you for the gift of memory,
 for the saints who dreamed before us,
 for the friends who walk beside us,
 for our community and its leaders,
 and for the future you are still unfolding.
 Teach us to celebrate the past without getting stuck there,
 to recognize the beauty of the present,
 and to embrace the new things you are doing in our midst.
 Amen.



Greeting friends during the 140th anniversary dinner.

Living Faithfully in the New Year

By the Rev. Laurie McKay, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., as featured in the church newsletter *ConneXions*

One of my favourite authors and podcast hosts is Kate Bowler (katebowler.com). She is a Canadian, now residing in the United States, and a professor at Duke University. Bowler helps clarify our limits in changing the state of the world, while directing us to maintain an essential orientation toward loving and acting for good—in small ways, and in an imperfect world.

With the new year, some people make resolutions that may not be sustainable. Those who succeed often focus on micro-changes that are realistic and easier to maintain over the long term. We may encounter setbacks, but step by step we make progress. In much the same way, we orient ourselves in the world in a particular direction and take small, consistent steps toward a vision of a kinder, gentler world—one that smells like redemption. In the face of a world that causes us civic dread, we are invited to be citizens who show up in small and steady, sometimes

imperfect or partial ways, refusing the lie that if you can't do everything, you can do nothing.

Bowler speaks about what she calls "secondary suffering"—the suffering we impose on ourselves. As she writes: "Secondary suffering is the pain we add through judgement, resistance and self-blame. Secondary suffering doesn't ask, 'What happened to you?' It asks, 'Why haven't you fixed this yet?' Secondary suffering thrives when we mistake responsibility for omnipotence, when we confuse moral concern with total control, when we turn le-



The Rev. Laurie McKay.

gitimate fear into a referendum on our worth."

This sounds like sin to me. Sin is telling God to move aside. In contrast, Jesus joins us in suffer-

ing and loves our humanity from within a human body. Forgiveness is the voice of God, who alone has the final word on our worth. We are beloved. We are called. We are sent. God calls us to be faithful, not omnipotent or perfect. In this spirit, Bowler encourages us to orient our lives toward what is possible within our human limits, asking, "How do I live now without becoming cruel, numb or self-righteous?"

Being kind. Standing up for the vulnerable. Holding leaders accountable. Engaging in small acts of change—these take courage and faith. Together, we reflect the resurrected Christ to a broken and hurting world. We cannot do this alone. And so, I am thankful that as a community that is God-touched, we seek to live faithfully as a beloved church.

Rural Ministry: A Light for One Another



Ruth and Lucy and the congregation of Sand Hill gifted the Rev. Julielee Stitt with a beautiful stole that Ruth quilted!

By the Rev. Julielee Stitt, Sand Hill and St. John's Presbyterian Churches, Kingston Presbytery, Ont.

It was an overcast November night, but the living room of the church manse on Middle Road smelled like a tropical paradise. The smell didn't come from me... or the brown-eyed dog who lay curled next to me. The power had gone out, and a few small candles provided light and lovely aromas.

The old limestone house, where I will celebrate my second Christmas, retained heat remarkably well.

As I sat and emailed a small group to let them know our first Advent Book study would be postponed due to the power outage, I was met by a flurry of texts and calls: "Do you have power?" one asked. "Do you need anything?" chimed another.

A few minutes later my phone buzzed again telling me the power would be out until the morning. "You're welcome to join us down at the house. It's not much, but we have a fire going."

Later that night, I was offered a warm meal, and book study participants emailed, hoping electricity would soon be restored. When the lights finally came back and all my gadgets buzzed back to life, I thought about the ways God works in and through us to be a light for one another. One of the places I have experienced this light is in God's sanctuary with God's people.

While my history with the church reaches back to childhood, my time in ministry is much briefer. I moved to the east end of Kingston, Ont., just over a year ago while completing my

studies at The Presbyterian College in Montreal. Since August 2024, I have served the two-point charge of Sand Hill and St. John's Presbyterian Churches—small rural congregations that stand as testimonies to God's faithfulness.

The people here have embraced me from day one. They filled the manse with furniture, invited me to their farms, tables, concerts, fundraisers and into their lives. I was curious about them, their lives and traditions.

I feel that I am exactly where I am meant to be, and I thank God every day for this work and these people. Yet, my road here wasn't obvious. Prior to feeling called to ministry, I worked as a reporter, instructor, riding assistant to a Member of Parliament and communications specialist. When I told friends I was going into the ministry they said, "Which one?" thinking I was making a lateral shift from municipal to provincial or federal government.

When I told my family I would be leaving my position as a Communications Officer with the City of Kingston to pursue full-time theological studies, they were understandably concerned for my future. Sure, I wasn't giving up my 9-to-5 job to try to become a rock



On the first Friday in November, it's all hands on deck for the turkey dinner at St. John's. Lots of love and time goes into this annual event.

star, but it felt just as uncertain to them. In time, they accepted and embraced the change. The pieces fell into place.

If you feel called to ministry or find yourself at a decision point in your discipleship, and wonder how life might change or what you might sacrifice, I encourage you to ask different questions: What might I gain? What new joys, experiences and opportunities are there to draw closer to God and God's people?

Living a life in ministry is not sacrificial—it is creative, ever-changing, exciting, generative,

and above all—good. Very good.

My story of a few hours of darkness filled with light brought by my neighbours and fellow worshippers is not to persuade anyone to stop what they are doing and enter a theological college. (But if you choose to, awesome!) Rather, if this article accomplishes anything, I hope it would be this: the heart of Christ and his message still burn within the church. It can happen in a space where there are a few or many. You can feel ministered to by the words of a pastor or a call from a neighbour.



Sand Hill Presbyterian Church received a \$5,000 grant from the City of Kingston to host a free community concert series to showcase local talent and the rural landscape. Many people came to discover this beautiful country church!



It was a wet cold day when people from the church donned their gear to participate in the clean-up of Middle Road. The event was part of the national initiative, Pitch-In Canada.



An End of the School Year Celebration was held at the manse. All who gathered celebrated with a BBQ and blessing. At St. John's and Sand Hill, youth are actively involved in the service by reading scripture and the call to worship, participating in music and taking up the offering.

Not Done Yet: Ministry in Remote Communities



Chetwynd Shared Ministry in Chetwynd, B.C.

The Rev. Dr. George S. Malcolm, Interim-Moderator, Presbytery of the Northwest

This is about the work of the four congregations that I am the interim-moderator for in the Peace Country of Alberta and British Columbia in the Presbytery of the Northwest:

Strang Presbyterian Church, Dixonville, Alta., population 96;

St. James Presbyterian Church, Dawson Creek, B.C., population 12,980;

Fort St. John Presbyterian Church, Fort St. John, B.C., population 22,280;

Chetwynd Shared Ministry, Chetwynd B.C., population 2,300.

I have been interim-moderator for a number of years, even before I retired almost four years ago as the minister of Forbes Presbyterian Church in Grande Prairie, Alta. The story is not about me though, but rather about these four congregations who have decided that, as small as they may be and unable to consider calling a part-time or full-time clergy or lay person, have decided they are “not done yet.”

Each in their own way, these four small congregations continue to do ministry within their own communities and in the larger world around them. Let me share with you something about each of the congregations.

I begin with Strang Church, Dixonville. It is located in a small hamlet. Their building is a log church built in 1932 and maintained beautifully. The number of people at worship range from one to maybe 10. The numbers, though, are not increasing but decreasing and they have had to consider their future. That has not stopped them from doing ministry

in the community and area. They have garage sales and other special events, like spaghetti dinners, to which the community is invited. As well, they have concerts and invite all to come. It may not add numbers to the congregation, but it is expressing their love for Jesus Christ to the wider community. For example, in anticipation of Father’s Day, they had a pie sale and they donated the proceeds of \$475 to two local food banks. To quote the clerk of Session: “We do struggle with diminished numbers of congregants, but we adapt, thank God for a safe place to worship, and praise God’s name always.”

The next is St. James in Dawson Creek. They are a bit larger of a group, and they too feel ministry should carry on. In 2024, they made the decision to sell their church property, as it was getting too much to maintain. In selling the property, they in essence gifted the building (receiving some money) to a young, vibrant Filipino congregation, which has been a blessing to St. James as they see a young and vibrant congregation grow into the building and minister to the community as well. St. James now rents a hall each Sunday for worship at one of the local seniors’ housing areas. With money received from the property, they support local groups, such as Search and Rescue. The clerk of Session said: “Mostly, we have happily adjusted to our new description as ‘house church’ and I consider that for the time being we are stable under the guidance of God and the leadership of our interim-moderator.”

Then there is Fort St. John Church, which still has its own building but is an older congregation trying to figure out their fu-

ture as well. Presently, they rent their space (at a nominal fee) to a United Church of Canada congregation and a young, just-getting-started Filipino congregation. This brings great joy to the people of the Presbyterian church as they can see that they are helping with ministry in the community through the use of their building. As well, they continue to strongly support PWS&D, as they have for many years. What their future is no one knows but they feel that God still has a plan for them. As the clerk of Session stated: “We are a small but faithful group with usually seven or eight people attending. We are blessed with an excellent pianist who can assist where needed. We all enjoy listening to the Rev. George Malcolm’s sermon and words of wisdom. We have a weekly Bible study on Tuesday afternoon.”

The last congregation is Chetwynd Shared Ministry. This is a shared ministry congregation with people from the Anglican Church of Canada, the United Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church as well as people from other denominations. It is a small but active group who are led in worship by a member of the congregation on a regular basis with others filling in if they are absent. This person feels called to do this and ably leads worship. Their average attendance is eight to 10 people. They also share the service online as they have parish-

ioners in other communities who still want to be involved. They are active in the community with various things that they can help out with. I provide them with weekly worship services and a video of the sermon. They can choose to use the video or read the sermon as they wish.

As the interim-moderator, it has been my privilege and delight to work with these four congregations as they reach out to bring God’s word to their respective communities, despite not having big numbers of members. They are faithful and they are devoted to serving God in whatever way God chooses to use them.

It should be noted that several of the congregations have an elder who has taken the course through St. Andrew’s Hall to lead communion in the absence of, and with permission from, the interim-moderator. I set up a schedule to lead worship services, usually with the celebration of Holy Communion throughout the year, as well as having Session meetings or congregational meetings, or whatever they need. There are always ongoing discussions as to their future and how they can continue to service faithfully. As well, a couple of times a year the leadership of the four congregations get together, usually online, to keep their contact strong with the others.

To put things in perspective, one needs to know that these are not communities 20 or 30km



Fort St. John Presbyterian Church in Fort St. John, B.C.



Strang Presbyterian Church in Dixonville, Alta.

apart but a minimum of 85km and up. So, it would not be easy for them to worship together. For me to travel to Strang Church is a round trip of 430km, to St. James it is 260km, to Fort St. John it is 420km and to Chetwynd 500km. Am I complaining? No. I have received so much more from these congregations than I could ever give to them. Although I am retired, it was laid on my heart by God that there is still work to be done, and in order for these congregations to continue someone has to do it, and God’s voice said, “George, it’s you.” So, I do this with thanksgiving to God for this experience and with gratefulness to the congregations for their wanting to continue to be used by God in whatever way required. If you are ever in the Peace Country in northwestern Alberta, drop in to join them for worship—they would love to see you.



The congregation at St. James Presbyterian Church in Dawson Creek, B.C.

Where Are All the People with Leprosy?

By the Rev. Kenn Stright

A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus was indignant. He reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cleansed. Jesus sent him away at once with a strong warning: "See that you don't tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly but stayed outside in lonely places. Yet the people still came to him from everywhere (Mark 1:40–45).

Outcast, diseased, despised, rejected... Where have all the people with leprosy gone? Most people believe leprosy to be an ancient disease that disappeared, even though millions around the world are still afflicted.

Leprosy was as much a social stigma as it ever was a disease—fear was the constant companion of both the afflicted and those near them. The afflicted person was usually cast out of society and strict rules were enforced to keep them at a distance. Old Testament scholar Sister Dianne Bergant wrote that such suffering exacts because it "can sap our energy, jeopardize everything we have achieved, and leave us unproductive and feeling worthless." As it isolates us from our community, it also affects our inner well-being, reminding us of our "vulnerability and our desperate need of each other and God" (*Preaching the New Lectionary, Year B*).

The real challenge of this text comes from biblical scholar Gerald Caron who notes how we objectify people, classifying them by such things as illness, referring to them as "the sick, the lepers, the poor, the downtrodden."

Jesus met people on the level of their need, regardless of who they were or what they had done. He met everyone as human beings, never as stereotypes. Stereotypes were as powerful then as they are now. Once a label is placed on a person, the human being vanishes. Many labels were given to people in the New Testament—such as tax collector, Samaritan, Roman soldier, prostitute, rich young man, Pharisee, sinner or publican. They all appear in the gospel narrative, and every time Jesus completely ignores the label and deals with the person.

David H.C. Read pointed out that, "Jesus knew the ugly side of society—the brutality of the occupation, the corruption of the tax system, the racial prejudices, the economic injustice, the religious hypocrisy, and the sexual degradation. But never once did these factors blind him to the reality of the human being, the unique son or daughter of God he saw before him."

A friend of mine refuses to be objectified, labelled or isolated. She demands to be seen for who she really is—one of God's blessed. She has spent her whole life seeking to integrate her Cerebral Palsy and her experience of a loving God.

Her attitude to life and living dramatically changed when someone once asked her, "What can you do for your world, with your handicap, that you couldn't do without it?"

My friend created a theology of ability—an expression of God's love and will and purpose, in and through handicap or disability—and she explores the Bible in ways that most of us ignore. She sees God's gracious invitation to all, but offered in a unique way to anyone who society often ignored or rejected in Jesus' day. Maybe the truth is that we still ignore and reject those who are "differently abled."

My friend wrote a paper in school about attitudes in society and in the church, and I was one

of her respondents. To her piercing questions, I had but feeble answers about how the giftedness of those considered disabled were cultivated and used in the church. Jesus implied in his teaching that the truly blind, the truly disabled, those "crippled" in their attitude toward life were those who had eyes to see and saw nothing, who were unable to overcome stereotypes and clichés or prejudices, those who dragged themselves through life with the baggage of prejudice and fear and even exploitation.

Based on Christ's teaching, my friend suggests we need to be careful about using the word "wholeness," as if people who are "sick" are not whole persons. It is as if wholeness and impediments, physical or otherwise, were incompatible" (*Mark in the Lectionary: An Ecumenical Guide to the Sunday Gospels*). However, Christ's greater challenge to the compassionate community we call the church is to be healed of its own illness, for illness is one way to understand alienation and brokenness as well as sin.

We are all on a life-long journey in search of wholeness and salvation. Jesus is seeking wholeness for the people of God. His preferred method of doing this is the proclamation of the message of the reign of God—good news for a people in need. Time and again the good news had to be embodied in action as people pressed in on every side, seeking their own form of wholeness in the desire to be healed, to be exorcized, to be cleansed.

We may be tempted to think that we've somehow progressed beyond a theology and a sociology that marginalizes some people as unclean and untouchable because of disease. Dr. Richard Swanson, professor and theologian, says that we are tempted to think that Jesus, being who he is, has knowledge of how safe it is to touch the man; in other words, he has a modern, informed perspective on disease. But don't



we modern, scientifically minded folks have people we'd rather not see, let alone touch? Skin disease is difficult enough, but for a long time people with cancer, and later those with HIV and AIDS, have experienced a distance that surrounds them once they're diagnosed. Where have all the people with leprosy gone? They may very well still be with us but now present in those with skin disease or disfigurement or HIV and AIDS or any number of socially isolating conditions, not all of which are medically related.

The real miracle for the leper in Jesus' story very well may have simply been that when Jesus "stretched out his hand and touched him" it may have been the first touch this man received since acquiring leprosy—the fear and stigma was that great.

We could so easily find ourselves on the margin, too, and most folks wouldn't want their lives to touch ours.

Once we get a sense of how a person with leprosy might have felt, we have to deal with Jesus' reaction. "Moved with pity" sounds very nice until we see the

footnote that other ancient texts read "with anger." The word connotes deep feeling, almost a violent reaction.

Ironically, as the leper is restored to his community, Jesus himself becomes a kind of leper, banished, in a sense, by his own popularity, by the overwhelming needs of the people, and perhaps by the already building tension between him and the priests. It's no wonder that he tries to keep things quiet by urging the man not to tell anyone what has happened.

I wish I could conclude this article with some wonderful affirmation that we have welcomed all the people with leprosy, all the sick and handicapped and diseased and outcast and blind and... (add any word you wish to the list but please be careful how you use such words), but the reality is that we continue to marginalize people and objectify people and ostracize people.

May God open the eyes of those of us who are still blind to the real miracle and the real message and the real meaning in what Jesus has done this day. Thanks be to God.

JUST WONDERING...



Submit your questions to connection@presbyterian.ca

Why do you switch comments off on some social media posts? Whatever happened to free speech in the PCC?

Answered by Callie Long,
Communications Office

In an ideal world, social media would support what I see as a strong foundation for the kind of communication the PCC should aspire to across the church: sharing information, encouraging others to connect positively, and inspiring individuals to be, as *Living Faith* puts it, ambassadors for Christ. It doesn't mean

that we avoid sharing information that might spark conversations or even upset some people at times. And turning off comments on certain social media posts isn't about stifling uncomfortable debate; comments are turned off because on social media, comments can quickly become unruly, harassing, and places where disinformation and misinformation are shared.

Turning off comments as a

last resort helps us counter divisive engagement and focus on an experience that fosters genuine connection. By doing so, we create a more meaningful community that values insight over conflict, understanding over harsh remarks, and, hopefully, nurtures a healthier social media landscape.

As Presbyterians, we have many opportunities to express our disagreements and opinions

so that others can hear them. We have open forums at the Session, presbytery and synod levels. There is also the General Assembly, where respectful and constructive debate is encouraged. We always encourage people to contact the national office staff to share their opinions and thoughts on specific topics. Whether we agree or disagree on various issues, this is how we all continue to learn.



PULPIT VACANCIES

Find all pulpit vacancies online at presbyterian.ca

Atlantic Provinces

Alliston, PE – WellSpring
(full-time minister)

Dartmouth, NS – Iona
(part-time minister)

Halifax, NS – Church of Saint David (full-time minister)

St. John's, NL – St. Andrew's
(full-time minister)

Quebec & Eastern Ontario

Almonte, ON – Community
(full-time minister)

Beaconsfield, QC – Briarwood
(Full- or part-time minister)

Inverness, ON – Inverness (full-time ecumenical shared ministry)

Lancaster, ON – St. Andrew's & Martintown, ON – St. Andrew's
(full-time minister)

Montreal, QC – Chinese
(part-time associate pastor for English ministry)

St. Lambert, QC – St. Andrew's
(full-time minister)

Central, Northeastern Ontario & Bermuda

Angus (Baxter), ON – Living Faith Community
(full-time minister)

Bramalea, ON – St. Paul's
(part-time minister)

Cambridge, ON – Central
(full-time minister)

Guelph, ON – St. Andrew's
(full-time lead minister and head of staff)

Grand Valley, ON – Knox
(part-time minister)

Huntsville, ON – St. Andrew's
(full-time minister)

Kitchener, ON – St. Andrew's
(full-time lead minister)

Kleinburg, ON – Cornerstone Community (part-time children's ministry worker/leader)

Markham, ON – Celebration
(full-time minister)

Midland, ON – Knox
(full-time minister)

Milton, ON – Nassagaweya
(full-time minister)

Mississauga, ON – Glenbrook
(full-time minister)

Orillia, ON – St. Mark's
(full-time minister)

Port Carling, ON – Knox & Torrance, ON – Zion
(full-time minister)

Scarborough (Toronto), ON – St. Andrew's
(full-time minister)

Toronto, ON – Ghanaian (part-time interim minister consultant)

Toronto, ON – Mimico
(full-time minister)

Vaughan, ON – Vaughan Community
(full-time youth minister)

Southwestern Ontario

Glencoe (Mosa), ON – Burns
(full-time minister)

Hamilton (Jarvis), ON – Chalmers (50%-time stated supply minister)

London, ON – Korean Christian
(part-time children and youth minister)

London, ON – St. George's
(full-time minister)

Moore, ON – Knox & Mooretown, ON – St. Andrew's
(part-time lay minister)

Moore, ON – Knox & Mooretown, ON – St. Andrew's
(part-time minister)

Presbytery of Essex-Kent, ON – General Presbyter (part-time)

St. Thomas, ON – Knox
(full-time lead minister)

Strathroy, ON – Caradoc
(part-time minister)

Tillsonburg, ON – St. Andrew's
(full-time minister)

Waterdown, ON – Knox
(full-time lead minister)

Manitoba & Northwestern Ontario

Winnipeg, MB – St. John's
(full-time minister)

Saskatchewan

Regina, SK – Norman Kennedy
(full-time minister)

Alberta & the Northwest

Edmonton, AB – First
(full-time minister)

Edmonton, AB – Mill Woods
(full-time minister)

British Columbia

Campbell River, BC – Trinity
(full-time minister)

Kimberley, BC – St. Andrew's
(full-time minister)

Burnaby, BC – Trinity
(full-time minister)

Victoria, BC – St. Andrew's
(full-time minister)

DEATH NOTICES

Read full obituaries online at presbyterian.ca

The Rev. Dr. Barry Mack
Deceased January 21, 2026
Cornwall, Ont.

Dr. Frederik Wisse
Deceased January 4, 2026
Vernon, B.C.

The Rev. Samuel Choi
Deceased December 11, 2025
Toronto, Ont.

The Rev. Robert J. Calder
Deceased December 8, 2025
Edmonton, Alta.

The Rev. Rosemary Doran
Deceased December 7, 2025
Brampton, Ont.

Marie Katherine Wilson
Deceased November 22, 2025
Portland, Oregon

The Rev. Dr. John F. Allan
Deceased November 20, 2025
Victoria, B.C.

The Rev. Dr. John R. Cameron
Deceased November 12, 2025
Charlottetown, PEI

The Rev. Jennifer L. Cameron
Deceased November 10, 2025
Kingston, Ont.