



PRESBYTERIAN Connection

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Moderator's International Visit to Cuba

*By the Rev. Dr. Dorcas Gordon,
Principal Emerita at Knox College
in Toronto, Ont.*

I was honoured to be invited to join the team and give leadership through the moderator's international visit, a visit designed to renew and deepen partnerships in various parts of the world. The moderator's visit was initially planned for Israel/Palestine, its departure scheduled for October 11—a visit that unfortunately had to be postponed.

Instead, on Feb. 22, 2024, six of us boarded flights to Cuba. Landing in Veradero we were warmly greeted by our interpreter, Yosmel, and driver, Andreas, who promptly chauffeured us to Havana, where we were housed in a historic pilgrims' centre in the Old City run by the Sisters of St. Brigid of Sweden.

Our first engagement was to meet over dinner with the leadership of the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba (PRCC). During the sharing of food, we learned much about the challenges of religious and societal life in Cuba and the determination of the church to meet those challenges despite what seemed to us to be overwhelming odds.

Later in the visit, we participated in a denominational strategic planning session, where concerns focused on women—especially elderly women—children, youth and the church's responsibility to civil society.

For four days, we visited church groups and individuals in and around Havana. We met with Pastor Joel Dopico, the President of the Cuban Council of Churches, who arranged for us to meet with the head of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in the Cuban government and with an expert on Indigenous life in Cuba. These meetings were extremely informative in that the head of the government ministry surprised us with the degree of knowledge and



positive attention and consultation the government paid to the diversity of religious life in Cuba. The Indigenous researcher, Enrique Gómez Cabrera, identified the ongoing search to discover what was thought to be lost, pointing out the growing scientific evidence that representatives of the Indigenous people of Cuba remained, even today, long after the Spanish invasion and its policy of ethnic cleansing, as well as the devastating effects of western diseases.

We spent time at the Martin Luther King Center, where we learned of the transformed ministry of a traditional Baptist church into a variety of ministries that focus on societal renewal and educational programs throughout the island. This is but one example of our increasing admiration for the number of church projects

dedicated to providing education, food and friendship for all in the community, particularly for the elderly whose families had immigrated to the United States. One inspiring visit with the ministerial team of the Presbyterian Church of Guanabacoa introduced us to a church that continues to renovate its building to make room for an inexpensive daycare, accredited by the Cuban department of education, that teaches Bible stories and citizenship lessons to children starting at age three until they go to school. It was a humbling experience to see the commitment of those who volunteered or were paid a small sum to administer, teach and provide medical care for the children.

Smiling, the team shared with us a particular incident related to the accrediting process. One requirement was to have appro-



Rector Carlos Ham and PCC delegates.

privately sized bathroom fixtures for the children—equipment that seemed unavailable in Cuba until they discovered it discounted at a store where it had remained unsold for an extended period. They

described this as a miracle. On Sunday, we worshipped in the Presbyterian Church of Los Palos, a rural area where the moderator of the PRCC, the Rev. Izett

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Sama Hernandez, serves. There, we experienced a full house with lively music and children of all ages from the community taking part and engaging us—especially one of us who was up to date on the latest “hip hop” music from Korea.

We then moved to Matanzas, where we spent three days at the Seminario Evangelico de Teologia. We began our visit by renewing our acquaintance with the Rector, the Rev. Dr. Carlos Emilio Ham, who had addressed the PCC General Assembly in June 2023. Rector Ham spoke of the challenges facing the seminary but also of the ways in which the faculty and administrators were working to overcome them. Like in Canada, few students can afford to be full-time residential students, so significant resources are being allocated to online learning. The upside of this is that all their educational programs are available to laity and ministry candidates throughout the island.

Three further projects at the seminary focus on serving the

people of the city of Matanzas. First, there is the Weavers of Hope, a project begun at least 20 years ago in which women from the community come together at the seminary to weave and to knit—the yarn and needles are provided by seminary donors. Throughout the years, this has provided circles of friendship and much needed financial resources that assist the women in supporting their families.

A second project, a significant garden built on the seminary hillside, is again financed by donations to the seminary. Local farmers are hired to ensure a robust crop, which is not only available to the seminary community but also sold at a reduced price to the people of Matanzas. Presently, the garden is underutilized as it needs a new irrigation system, not costly by our standards but beyond the financial capacity of the seminary.

The third, a water project, called Living Waters For the World, was begun by the Presbyterian Church (USA). We encountered Living



Presbyterian Reformed Church in Cuba ministers with PCC delegates.

Waters’ facilities in almost all the churches that we visited, learning that those who received access to purified water committed to sharing this source of health with all in their community. The hope is to continue to expand this much needed resource throughout the island, despite difficulty in accessing parts from the US.

We visited three congregations in the Matanzas area: the Juan G. Hall Presbyterian Church in Cardenas, the Kairos Christian Center for Liturgy and Arts, and First Presbyterian Church in Matanzas. In all cases, the ministerial teams were graduates of the seminary, and the focus of the congrega-

tions was on projects of community outreach to provide pockets of fellowship, meals, musical training and, in the case of First Presbyterian Church in Matanzas, education for children with autism. How much the dedication of the ministers and volunteers impressed us as they worked tirelessly to make their communities more inclusive, helping all become healthier physically and spiritually.

A common theme heard everywhere we visited identified the devastating effects of the US blockade on Cuban farming, industry, church and family life. Effected in 1962 under the presi-

dency of John F. Kennedy, with a period of relaxation under Obama’s presidency, the blockade was tightened under the Trump administration, with its ruinous effects remaining unchanged today.

Because of the blockade, farmers either pay an exorbitant price or are unable to obtain seed, fertilizer, fuel or parts for their machinery. When touring around between visits we saw farmers ploughing with oxen, fields lying barren or underdeveloped. We saw cars lined up for blocks at gas stations only to discover that no fuel was available. We heard of

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The Moderator’s Travels

Over the past several months, the Rev. Mary Fontaine, Moderator of the 2023 General Assembly, has been busy visiting congregations, partners and missions. A few highlights are listed here.

- March 4–5** Life and Mission Agency Committee meetings
- March 6** Preached at Knox College, Toronto, Ont.
- March 19** Led worship and spoke to students at St. Andrew’s Hall in Vancouver, B.C.
- April 7** Preached at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Newmarket, Ont.
- April 8–10** Assembly Council meetings at Crieff Hills Retreat Centre
- April 11** Visited Evangel Hall in Toronto
- April 11** Spoke at Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont.
- April 12** Attended PWS&D meetings
- April 14** Preached at Knox Presbyterian Church in Oakville, Ont.
- May 1** Preached at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Owen Sound, Ont., and visited within the Presbytery of Grey-Bruce-Maitland
- May 3–5** Gathered with St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church and St. Mark’s Presbyterian Church in Orillia, Ont.
- May 6–7** Took part in the WMS Council meetings in Mississauga, Ont.
- May 12** Preached at Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church in B.C.



Matanzas Seminary students and PCC delegates.



Wanda Hernández, Director of the Kairos Centre for Liturgy and Arts, and the Rev. Mary Fontaine.

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electricity shortages that caused blackouts on a rotating basis for at least four hours each day, affecting family life and industry throughout the island. We heard about and experienced food shortages. Although our hosts ensured that we received the best they had to offer, we saw how limited ordinary life can be with shortages of bread, rice and coffee, to name but a few of the scarce staples. We know that many children are going without milk or subsisting on a government policy that provides powdered milk for those under six years of age. One minister told us that it took almost her whole salary to buy two dozen eggs. In fact, while we were in Cuba, the government, for the first time since the revolution, appealed to the United Nations for food assistance.

The Cuban government is not without fault, as John Kirk's article below explores; however, life for the Cuban people could be much improved without the U.S. blockade, and without policies encouraging emigration from Cuba. Almost 500,000 Cubans



Seminary Rector Carlos Ham and the Rev. Mary Fontaine.

have left in the past two years, primarily young people or young families who no longer hold out any hope that things will improve. The Cuban American Adjustment Act continues to privilege those who leave Cuba, permitting any Cuban who has lived in the U.S. for a year to become a permanent resident—a privilege that is not available to any other immigrant group. Other benefits include Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA), Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA), to name but two.



Matanzas Seminary.

The Act is a deliberate way to further demoralize Cubans with the aim of bringing them once again under the colonial arm of the U.S. The statement by Lester Mallory, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, in April 1960, calling for the denial of money and supplies to Cuba with the purpose of decreasing monetary and real wages in order to bring about hunger and desperation continues to prove effective in the ongoing

destabilization of Cuban society.

After an intensive week, tired but animated by what we had seen and heard, we boarded flights home to Canada, aware in new and significant ways about how the church in Cuba strives to affirm life in a challenging situation. We also return committed to finding ways for our national church, its organizations and congregations throughout Canada to provide support for this struggling yet very much alive church.

Trying to Understand Cuba

By John M. Kirk, Professor Emeritus of Latin American Studies at Dalhousie University and the author of several books on Cuba. John met with the Rev. Dr. Carlos Emilio Ham, the international church representative who addressed last year's General Assembly.

Cuba is a complex, confusing and at times contradictory country. There are, however, two external historical influences that have left a clear mark on its development model—in political, social and economic spheres. The first is the stain of Spanish colonization, which was in place from 1492 until 1898. The second is the centuries-old interest of the United States in dominating Cuba—just 90 miles away.

The key to understanding this reality can be found in the roots of struggle—for both independence and freedom to choose its own model of development. Two key dates stand out in this historical process—independence from Spain in 1898 and the revolution led by Fidel Castro in 1959.

Prior to assessing the movement for independence (which lasted from 1868 to 1898), a brief study of the colonial structure of Cuba is helpful. As our history books have traditionally told us, Cuba was “discovered” in 1492 by Columbus. The term is ludi-

crous, since there were already three Indigenous nations living there (population estimates are between 50,000 and 300,000). In what we now know as Latin America there were approximately 37 million inhabitants.

Columbus termed the island “the fairest island human eyes have yet beheld” and took possession in the name of the Catholic monarchs in Spain. While the conquest might have held promise for the (white) Spaniards, it certainly wasn't for the original inhabitants. The vast majority of the Indigenous population were decimated by disease brought by the Spanish, as well as by exploitation and violence.

Colonialist domination of Cuba

The Spanish ruled Cuba from 1492 to 1898, some four centuries of total domination, with an insistence upon unquestioning acceptance of Spanish values. They developed a society with a rigid social structure, based upon a system of pigmentocracy (the lighter skinned at the top, with the Indigenous—and later the imported Black slaves—at the bottom). Catholicism was the only religious expression allowed. Almost all administration—in the military, church, commerce and political offices—was filled by Spaniards parachuted in from Madrid on

fixed contracts. Cubans were considered incapable of holding office, and untrustworthy.

This system lasted for fully four centuries. The purpose of Spanish colonization was simple—to exploit the riches of the colony for the benefit of the Crown, and Spanish society back home. No attempt was made to support the local economy in Cuba. Instead, the “Mother Land” kept it dependent by design.

Over the course of its colonial history, Cuba offered two major advantages to the Spanish—its strategic location (at the entrance to the Caribbean), and sugar. The island was used as a staging ground for the Spanish forces when they arrived to conquer the wealthy, and highly sophisticated, Indigenous Aztec and Inca empires on the mainland.

Cuba was soon discovered to have the perfect climate to grow sugar, and the first crops were planted in 1523. By 1860, Cuba produced about one-third of the world's supply. In terms of the national economy Cuba became dependent upon sugar—which at this time amounted to almost 80% of the country's exports.

Sugar, though, is highly labour-intensive. After the near destruction of Indigenous society, it became necessary to obtain a fresh source of workers, and slavery was introduced. By the 1840s, some 400,000 enslaved people from West Africa had been imported—roughly one-third of the island's population. And, while slavery was abolished in the United States in 1865, it continued in Cuba until 1884. (This was also

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Children with the Presbyterian Church of Los Palos, Cuba.

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Moderator of the General Assembly:

The Rev. Mary Fontaine

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



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Cuba had exchanged one form of domination for another

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an attraction for would-be American investors after their Civil War.)

After 350 years of this societal straitjacket, many Cubans became restless. Merchants were upset at the excessive taxes being sent back to Madrid and legislation prohibiting local businesses from competing with Spain's monopoly. The examples of the French and American revolutions had already showed that major governing systems could be overthrown, providing inspiration for those seeking independence. Frustration at the continuing Spanish political, ecclesial and commercial domination continued to grow, made worse by the refusal to grant any degree of autonomy to the colony.

Finally, in 1868, rebellion broke out, with the first phase of the War for Independence lasting until 1878, and then continuing off and on until 1895. The major push for independence was led by the Cuban writer and revolutionary, José Martí. Although killed in battle in 1895 his influence continued, and in 1898 the Spanish forces were overthrown.

But the end of Spanish control did not mean that Cuba was free. The end of Spanish colonialism was replaced by an era of growing U.S. control—in political, military and commercial matters. In many ways, Cuba had exchanged one form of domination for another. American trade interests, combined with geopolitical expansionist goals in Washington, resulted in U.S. intervention in Cuba—an interest that continues to the present.

U.S. interest in Cuba

From U.S. military intervention in Cuba in 1898 to claims by Donald Trump (March 2024) that he will adopt an even tougher policy on Cuba if elected, U.S. interest in Cuba has been a constant threat to Cuban stability. It remains so today.

In fact, U.S. interest in controlling Cuba goes back to 1809 when Thomas Jefferson first tried to purchase Cuba from Spain, declaring, "I have ever looked upon Cuba as the most interesting addition that could ever be made to our system of States." In 1823, John Quincy Adams likened Cuba to an apple on a tree overhanging the U.S. backyard, noting that if a storm blew it off the tree, "Cuba ... can gravitate only towards the North American Union."

U.S. troops occupied Cuba

from 1898 to 1902, promoting U.S. investment while controlling the island. Cubans were again treated as second-class citizens. The first two leaders of an "independent" Cuba were not even Cuban: General John Brooke and General Leonard Wood of the occupying U.S. forces.

The political system introduced after "independence" basically outlawed any participation by Afro-Cubans, and catered mainly to the wealthiest, most educated white Cubans. In 1901, the Platt Amendment was signed—by which the U.S. agreed to withdraw military control of Cuba, but allowed U.S. forces to intervene any time there was a threat to stability. They did so, on several occasions. They also retained the military base in Guantánamo, which continues to this day—with 6,000 American personnel on Cuban soil. Unsurprisingly, Cubans would like them to leave their island.

Washington supported several corrupt administrations in the 20th century, particularly the brutal governments of Machado (1925–33) and Batista (1940–44 and especially 1952–59). Eventually, the Cuban population, frustrated at the abuses of Batista (whose forces are alleged to have killed 20,000), rose up and overthrew him on January 1, 1959.

Once again, as in 1898, there was a nationalist goal for the insurgents. The revolutionary government was particularly disturbed by foreign ownership of arable land (75%), and in particular U.S. control of services (90% of electricity, transportation and water), sugar production (40%), mines (90%) and banking (25% of all deposits). Reforms were introduced nationalizing foreign-owned properties—which mainly affected U.S. interests.

In 1961, the Eisenhower government broke diplomatic relations—a situation which existed until Barack Obama reopened them in 2015. During the many decades since the Cuban revolution, Washington has consistently maintained a policy of aggression toward the island.

U.S. policy toward Cuba can best be summarized by a memo from Lester Mallory, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, in April 1960. His memo started by noting that since the overwhelming majority of Cubans supported Fidel Castro, the only feasible

solution for Washington was to wreak havoc on the population in an effort to cause internal opposition: His tactic suggested making "the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government." That has been the basis of U.S. policy since—with the clear exception of the Obama presidency.

Many people have forgotten the secret war against Cuba sponsored by Washington against Cuba. The many assassination attempts against Fidel Castro, organized by the CIA and supported by extremist Cuban exile groups (mainly in the 1960s), are worth remembering. By any definition these were acts of terrorism, often sponsored by the U.S. government.

To make matters worse, the economic embargo against Cuba has been in place since 1962 and has a major impact on living conditions for all Cubans. The UN estimated in 2020 that it had cost Cuba \$144 billion (U.S.).

There was a huge improvement in bilateral relations with Cuba during the Obama years (2009–17). Diplomatic relations were renewed, U.S. tourism increased dramatically, trade and investment grew, as did educational and cultural ties. Restrictions on remittances from Cuban Americans were eased. Both countries reopened embassies, and in 2016 Obama became the first sitting president to visit Cuba since 1928. He also took Cuba off the list of countries allegedly supporting terrorism.

The Trump administration, keen to obtain political support from Cuban exiles in Florida, introduced several policies designed to make life difficult for Cuba. He sought to reverse all of the Obama-era changes, and reimposed



sanctions on Cuba's economy. He also placed sanctions on Venezuela, seeking to cut off oil supplies from Cuba's ally.

People-to-people contacts, and educational and cultural exchanges, were stopped. U.S. tourism, including cruise traffic, was outlawed—which is why we Canadians don't see Americans on the beaches there. Americans travelling to Cuba were banned from staying at hundreds of hotels linked to the Cuban government. Remittance funds were severely limited, and over 400 Western Union offices in Cuba closed. In the last week of office, Trump again placed Cuba on the terrorist-supporting list, causing major commercial difficulties for Cuba.

The Biden administration has done very little to change the Trump policy on Cuba, despite an early commitment to do so, and again has been fearful of losing support in voter-rich Florida. His approach to Cuba is seen as being "Trump Lite." Little is expected if Biden wins a second term. A Trump electoral victory would result in a major deterioration of relations, and the social cost would be disastrous.

Concluding thoughts

The situation in Cuba at present is desperate. Milk powder for babies is hard to find, and flour is in short supply. Gas prices were recently increased 500%. Inflation is over 300% annually. And all this on an average salary of just over \$10 a month (U.S.). It's not surprising that over 400,000 Cubans have left for the U.S. in the last two years.

How did it come to this?

To a large extent, government planning is at fault. The bureaucracy in Cuba is immense, rigid and used to its privileges. In addition, economic planning has been poor—with excessive amounts spent on hotel construction, and a relative pittance on agriculture. As a result, while there are scores of 5-star hotels dotted around its fabulous beaches, Cuba is forced to import 80% of the food consumed on the island.

But there are also historical factors that need to be borne in mind. Here in Canada, we are well aware of the scandalous abuses of human rights faced historically by First Nations people. The same—and more—can be said about the rigid societal approach imposed upon the Cuban population by four centuries of colonial exploitation.

What we also need to understand is the role of U.S. policy toward the island for over 60 years. The unjust embargo, which was condemned last year at the United Nations General Assembly by 187 nations (with only two, the United States and Israel, opposed) speaks volumes of the universal rejection of U.S. policy. That is a terrible injustice and must be reversed.

Cuba is complex and contradictory. Its people are suffering, and we would do well to support them to overcome this long, deeply rooted crisis and enjoy some peace. Martin Luther King, Jr., put it well: "True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice." Cubans need that now.



Guidance for Property Redevelopment

By Betty Kupeian, Presbyterian Church Building Corporation

We all know that change is difficult. But that knowledge doesn't lessen the experience of anxiety and grief during times of change. This is true especially for congregations that find it difficult to nurture or even sustain ministry to meet congregational needs, while also engaging the community outside their front doors.

Amazingly, under these difficult circumstances, some congregations are responding with an often radical examination of their resources and needs, especially when it comes to their buildings. This examination can yield proposals for congregational building projects. These can present great opportunities to support, expand or revitalize congregational ministry. They can also present risks for which congregations need to prepare.

The following offers a sequence of planning steps congregations could follow in the process of redevelopment. The best practice is for presbyteries to partner with congregations under their care to review and approve major steps in the redevelopment of church buildings.

Missional assessment

The project planning phase is focused on identifying the missional character of the project and its alignment with the congregation's ministry goals. It is key for the congregation to review and confirm that the mission and vision of the congregation agrees with this initiative. The congregation could ask, "How will this project further the mission of Jesus in and through our congregation?"

Establish need

Congregational building projects consume scarce resources (financial and human) and will change the congregation's operational budget. Getting clear and honest as to what the need is for such a project is key to ensuring that a project is warranted. Examples include helping to provide subsidized housing, offering substantial space for multiple users in a community hub model, setting up to accommodate the tenant(s), selling part of the church property/land to a developer.

The risk presented by a lack of clarity on the objectives for redevelopment is that congregational resources are expended on a project that isn't needed or could have been better served in a different way. It's important that the needs being addressed are grounded in the congregation's objectives for ministry. It's also important to know that others are not already taking steps to address the need—e.g., neighbouring churches building housing while not being aware that a local housing project is already underway.

A good place to start is to prepare or update the congregational vision and mission. This should be refined through consultation with key people to get as specific as possible on what the congregation wants to do, how it aligns with their vision, and how this project would enable that vision to be realized in ways that it cannot otherwise be realized.

The Session plays a key leadership role in this process, along with the presbytery and national office staff, who are available to support these activities. This may seem time-consuming, but done well they can help ensure the project successfully realizes the ministry goals.

Consider alternatives

We are often quick to assume that a building project is required. But owning real estate is expensive and commits the congregation's resources to activities that may, over time, erode other ministry goals. Engaging an architect to discuss specific functional needs of the project can help focus the planning process. Engaging a real estate professional may suggest alternate ways to realize ministry goals, such as leasing or buying/selling, or partnering with another church or agency to deliver programming. These initiatives may be rewarding opportunities for collaboration with others who have similar interests in the community. As a result, new connections, volunteers and adherents may be identified. If there is a local ministerial, this might be a way to know what other congregations are doing in the area.

Determine location

In tandem with considering al-



Construction work at Central Presbyterian Church in Cambridge, Ont.

ternative means of delivering the congregation's ministry plan, getting clear on the ideal location for the ministry is an important consideration. While many forms of ministry can be readily delivered from just about anywhere, others are location specific. Just because a congregation owns a particular building or piece of property does not mean that it is the most suitable location to carry out a new ministry initiative. Determining if the new idea is location-specific and why, and what features in a location would allow successful program delivery, will help to realistically assess available location options.

Assessment and validation

When the work outlined above has been completed, the presbytery may be asked to evaluate whether this work has been developed, reviewed and approved by the Session and congregation in an appropriate manner.

Resource assessment

In addition to confirming that the congregation has discerned God's calling and that a building project appears to be required for the work to go forward, it is also necessary to do a detailed assessment of congregational resources, such as available vol-

unteers, leadership, professional services, finances, etc. Note that one of the most important initial steps would include a proper appraisal of the property owned by the congregation.

Congregational leadership

Leadership is related to the experience, competency and availability of the individuals who are responsible for assessing, undertaking and bringing the project to completion. Engaging the right individuals with the right gifts in carrying out the project is critical. The congregation may have members with financial acumen but lack real estate or other relevant experience. In those cases, congregations are encouraged to augment their leadership pool for the project, either by recruiting (inside or outside the congregation) and/or supplementing with professional advisors.

As much as possible, plan to maintain continuity of leadership throughout the project development and delivery process. Looking seriously at the demographics of the project leadership group and considering their ability to serve for the next two or more years is a key test of the leadership capacity for undertaking a major project. This leadership team will need staying power and

institutional memory to ensure that, as issues emerge and decisions are needed in later years, the original strategic intent and legal, tax and other considerations are known and observed. (In more complex congregational projects, the interaction of multiple non-traditional congregational activities like leasing commercial space, filing HST/GST returns, running a social housing project, being a landlord, etc., can have multiple and conflicting demands on the leadership team. Decisions taken without the benefit of a thorough understanding of the original strategic intent and context can have major adverse consequences.)

Prepare project pro forma

A pro forma analysis is a set of assumptions and calculations that projects the financial return that a proposed building redevelopment is likely to create. It begins by describing the proposed project in quantifiable terms. This is best done by professional advisors.

Every number in the pro forma is an estimate and therefore subject to uncertainty. The advisors need to assess the overall effect of those uncertainties (or risks) and attach numbers to them, so that an overall estimate of project cost contingency, or allowance for risk is known and included. Pro forma will also give the internal rate of return, or the investment return on the congregation's investment in the project, which may be positive, zero or negative. By understanding this, the investment in the building project can be compared, on a financial basis, with other investment options to understand its relative financial merit.

The above considerations are significant and may be overwhelming for any congregation, and even for a presbytery. There is a growing list of organizations who are offering their services to help churches navigate the process of determining needs, presenting several viable alternatives and helping them to choose the one that would best align with their vision, mission and values. There is a working group within the PCC following these organizations, who can provide further information upon request.



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Church Support for LGBTQI+ People Facing Persecution



By Carragh Erhardt,
Life and Mission Agency

On May 29, 2023, Uganda's President, Yoweri Museveni, signed a bill into law that imposes harsher punishments on LGBTQI+ people, including life imprisonment as punishment for same-sex sexual acts. The Anti-Homosexuality Act also imposes the death penalty for what the Act describes as "aggravated homosexuality."

This law is one of the harshest examples of the ongoing rise in anti-LGBTQI+ sentiment around the world, which encompasses

a rise in hate crimes, the use of scapegoating in political campaigns and the introduction of legislation that would limit the rights of LGBTQI+ people in many countries, including Canada. The 2023 General Assembly adopted several motions in response to the rise in anti-LGBTQI+ hatred, legislation and violence, locally and globally.

Commissioners at General Assembly agreed "that the International Affairs Committee and the Life and Mission Agency Committee work together to allocate \$50,000 to agencies in Canada

that help to settle people who identify as LGBTQI+ and seek refuge." The money from restricted funds will provide funds to fulfill this decision. A group representing the International Affairs Committee, Life and Mission Agency and PWS&D met and researched organizations that support LGBTQI+ refugees to settle in Canada. Eight organizations received funding, each of which engages in one or more of the following types of support:

- Provide assistance to individuals who need emergency travel arrangements to flee

persecution;

- Accompany individuals to navigate the process of claiming refugee status;
- Create opportunities for refugees to build connections with one another and their wider community upon arrival in Canada;
- Help to find appropriate housing and employment for refugees.

The General Assembly also encouraged congregations "to consider responses in their local communities to acts of hate and harm towards the LGBTQI+

community and sponsorship support of LGBTQI+ refugees."

The article "A Faithful Response to the Rise in Anti-LGBTQ+ Hate" on page 13 of the Spring 2023 edition of the *Presbyterian Connection* newspaper describes ways that Presbyterians can learn more about the needs of LGBTQI+ people in our communities and discern meaningful, appropriate ways to positively contribute to the safety of all.

Communities are safer for everyone when neighbours know and take care of one another. This is

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Why We Worship As We Do: Hearing the Word of God

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

I wonder sometimes how many of us *really listen* to the scripture as it is read aloud during worship. I think lay people are better at this than preachers, who sometimes tend to think of the reading as a precursor to the sermon. How often do we stop and think about the fact that we are reading words written thousands of years ago—words handed down by handwritten manuscripts in Hebrew and Greek, translated by teams of Biblical scholars, and finally falling on our ears in Canada in the 21st century?

When scripture is read in worship, Christians believe that God is speaking words that we need to hear in our lives, our community and our church. And, as Presbyterians, we believe that we can only understand and interpret the scriptures through the power of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, we offer a Prayer for Understanding or a Prayer for Illumination before the scriptures are read and the sermon is preached. We believe that the Holy Spirit is active and present. *Living Faith* says, "The Holy Spirit gives us inner testimony to the unique authority of the Bible and is the source of its power" (5.2).

When we gather for worship, it is always a new and unique coming together. We have never



before assembled in quite this configuration, on this day, at this time. And so, when the Word of God is read, it is different from every other time it has been read. And because we believe the Holy Spirit is at work—always working something fresh and new—we can hear a unique word to the community, and to us, as individuals, each time we gather. Gail O'Day, in her essay "Shaped by Hearing," in the book *Questions Preachers Ask*, says "Communal hearing creates something that did not and could not exist prior to that moment" (p. 9).

I was once asked to read scripture for the conference preacher and was given the text at the last minute. It was the genealogy of Jesus, as written in Luke 3:23–38. There are a lot of very difficult names in that text, but a great teacher once told me that if you read with confidence, people

will think you know how to pronounce them! The lectern that I was to read from was too tall for me and the congregation could barely see me over the golden eagle that was mounted on the front of it. I plunged into reading it, trying to imagine the people I was speaking of—from Jesus, son of Joseph, all the way back through the generations to Isaac, son of Abraham, and to Seth, son of Adam. I got caught up in the reading, feeling the momentum, and when I got to Adam, I took a breath, and read the last words, "the son of God." And when I stopped, there was complete silence in the room. It was as if everyone was holding their breath. I felt it, and others felt it too. There was a sense of God's presence in a palpable way and an expectancy of what might come next.

In the same way, the sermon on any given Sunday morning is

an event, an experience, that we all participate in and in which we all have an active role. Although the preacher is (usually) the one doing most—or all—of the talking, sermons are not meant to be lectures, monologues or informative essays. Sermons should have a conversational tone about them, inviting people into an experience of God's word—an experience that may be comforting, challenging, inspiring or thought-provoking. As a teaching elder, the preacher's job is not merely to *explain* the scriptures but *proclaim* good news. Sermons are not about passing on information or knowledge. O'Day says that if preachers try to "explain" the Bible to the people in the pews, the congregation becomes passive, while the role of the preacher is lessened and belittled from how Jesus envisioned it and God intended it. Rather, when the Good News is proclaimed, sermons invite people into an experience of holy possibility, transformative imagination and a shared experience in the new thing that God is doing now, among us.

The 20th century theologian Karl Barth talked about a threefold understanding of the word of God (see *Church Dogmatics*, Volume 1, 90–121). There is *the word of God written*, which refers to the scriptures. The Bible is the library of texts that recalls God's past revelation and promises. It forms our understanding of God and

God's action and interaction with God's people. *The word of God written* points to and depends on *the word of God revealed*, which is Jesus Christ, the Living Word, the Word made Flesh. God has graciously chosen to continue to speak through *the word of God preached*, working through the proclamation of the church and human speech to communicate Good News now.

In addition to this threefold understanding, and through the pervasive work of the Holy Spirit, there is also *the word of God heard*. People come to worship, seeking God's direction for their lives. They are looking to Jesus, the Word Revealed. They listen, in gathered and unique community, to the reading of *the word of God written*. They engage with the preacher in *the word of God preached*. And then, that Living Word interacts with their own lives, circumstances, thoughts, needs and faith so that individuals and communities are transformed by what they hear and receive. "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isaiah 55:10–11).



Continued from page 6

true whether in a neighbourhood, a city, a continent or in how countries interact on a global scale. The PCC's *Living Faith: A Statement of Christian Belief* reminds us that "justice stands with our neighbours in their struggle for dignity and respect and demands the exercise of power for the common good." In the PCC's *Confession to God and LGBTQI People*, we confess that the church has often perpetuated harmful lies

about LGBTQI+ people, resulting in stigma, prejudice and hatred against them. In this time of rising interpersonal and state-enacted violence, Christians are called to repent and go a new way; to use our power to demonstrate God's love and desire for all creation to experience healing, wholeness, forgiveness and the fullness of life. May God's love, Christ's example and the Holy Spirit's movement guide us.

The following organizations received funding for their work with LGBTQI+ refugees:

Rainbow Railroad, a global organization based in Canada and the United States that helps at-risk LGBTQI+ people get to safety worldwide through emergency relocation, crisis response, cash assistance and other forms of assistance. rainbowrailroad.org

The Rainbow Refugee Association of Nova Scotia, a grassroots organization based in Halifax, N.S., which has sponsored 32 LGBTQI+ refugees from regions including Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. rainbowrefugees.com

Capital Rainbow Refuge, an Ottawa-based organization founded in 2010 to support and sponsor LGBTQI+ refugees, helping them to arrive and thrive in Eastern Ontario. capitalrainbow.ca

Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention, which operates a refugee settlement program to assist HIV+ and LGBTQ refugee claimants from Africa and the Caribbean to settle in Canada. blackcap.ca/programs-services/refugee-settlement-program

SPECTRUM: Waterloo Region's Rainbow Community Space, which provides support and community opportunities for LGBTQI+ newcomers, refugees and immigrants in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ont., through its monthly Rainbow Newcomers Connect group. ourspectrum.com/services/newcomers

Reaching Out Winnipeg (ROW), a grassroots organization in Winnipeg, Man., that helps refugees who face persecution based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. ROW assists newly sponsored refugees with mental and physical health-care needs and finding suitable accommodation and employment. reachingoutwinnipeg.org

Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN), whose Rainbow Refuge program offers LGBTQI+ refugees culturally relevant, affirming supports in immigration, settlement, employment, mental health, community connection, education and advocacy. newcomercentre.com/program/rainbow-refuge-program

Rainbow Refugee, a Vancouver-based organization that provides support, information and systems navigation in British Columbia for people fleeing persecution based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or HIV status. rainbowrefugee.com

Global Loss and Damage Fund and the Climate Crisis

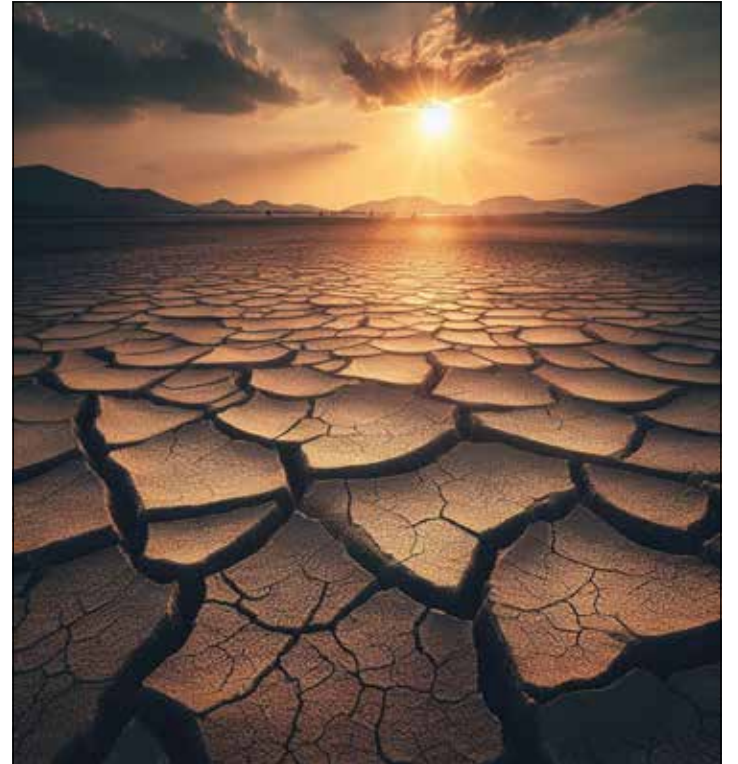
By Katharine Sisk, Justice Ministries

The year 2023 was the hottest year on record, with a global temperature increase of 1.48 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels. This is getting dangerously close to the 1.5 degrees considered by many to be a breaking point for climate damage on a scale we have not yet seen—and already, what we are seeing is significant. The changing climate is impacting everyone: humans, other animals, plants, waterways and the Earth itself. When climate-related emergencies—such as increased or more severe droughts, floods, storms and forest fires—strike, how is the cost of the damage and loss covered?

A report by the Canadian Climate Institute projects that the scale of climate-related loss in Canada alone in 2025 will be \$25 billion. These are estimates, but they are an important reference to keep in mind as we consider the global costs of loss and damage, especially in countries that have fewer financial resources than Canada. Many of the worst and most deadly impacts of climate change, for example, fall within the Global South.

Over the past several decades, various international climate agreements have committed funds to assist countries in the Global South with what are called mitigation efforts (reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and adaptation initiatives (intended to build resiliency to the impacts of climate change). What has been missing from these pledges is a recognition that countries are also already facing climate impacts that cannot be adequately mitigated or adapted to. Once a certain level of flooding and sea-level rise is reached, for example, the adaptation of building a sea-wall no longer goes far enough; at some point, some communities are likely to be under water or will be so frequently flooded that staying there is no longer possible. How do countries—or regions, or municipalities—deal with those types of situations? At the 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) last year, a global loss and damage fund was introduced to help address some of these impacts, alongside ongoing much-needed funding efforts for mitigation and adaptation.

Countries in the Global South



have advocated for years for a loss and damage fund, so the creation of this fund is an important success. But, like past pledges, the fund's effectiveness is tied to the voluntary participation of countries contributing to it. Countries in the Global North (including in Western Europe, Canada and the United States) have benefitted economically from over a century of unchecked industrial development responsible for a majority of the greenhouse gas emissions driving the climate crisis. These countries, including Canada, have a responsibility to assist lower-income countries in the Global South. To put it another way, countries that have historically contributed the most to the climate crisis have a duty to help, at a level that reflects their responsibility, those that have contributed the least to the problem.

Canada's current pledge of \$16 million falls far short of what is needed. The scale of losses in the Global South is estimated to be more than \$400 billion (U.S.) per year. Global pledges are approximately only \$700 million (U.S.) to date—wildly less than what is needed.

Some people may say "we can't afford to give more, we have our own issues to take care of." But this type of thinking doesn't acknowledge the interconnectedness of the world. Even "localized" climate impacts can have deeply significant ripple impacts across the globe. Drought can increase the likelihood of armed conflict and all its effects, as groups fight over control of resources; people in

communities devastated by floods or fires may be forced to leave their homes for somewhere safer, increasing human migration; a regional heatwave can impact crops that provide food not just for that region but for elsewhere too, driving the price of food up in areas around the globe. These are only a few examples of our global interconnectedness: even if the worst impacts of climate change aren't in someone's specific "backyard," inevitably it will affect us all. Helping to increase other people's safety and well-being, and their means to recover from losses, benefits not just the people directly impacted but all the people connected to them in our global web. It is also a way of loving our neighbours.

The choices we make today matter, and we can make a difference. Caring for creation—which God loved and called "very good"—and pursuing justice, including economic justice, are responsibilities to which Christians are called. Here are some things you can do:

- Learn more about the global loss and damage fund. PWS&D has a webinar on their website at presbyterian.ca/pwsd/about-pwsd/what-we-do/climatejustice.
- Advocate that Canada live up to its responsibilities and increase its commitment to the global loss and damage fund. Template letters can be found on the church's Social Action Hub advocacy page at presbyterian.ca/resources/advocacy.

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Wutao Hong
Bachelor of Theology
(with McGill University)

Lydie Santander
Master of Theology
(with Université Laval)

Corentin Messina
Master of Theological Studies

Jérémie Santander
Master of Theology
(with Université Laval)

Philippe Bédard
Master of Theological Studies

Lucie Brunier
Master of Theology
(with Université Laval)



KNOX COLLEGE

Rebekah Ruth Mitchell
Master of Pastoral Studies

Gustavo Seignemartin de Carvalho
Certificate in Theological Studies

Cassandra Ann Granados
Doctor of Philosophy

Todd Edward Nelson
Master of Pastoral Studies

Mark Wesley Buch
Doctor of Ministry

Bong-Chan Ko
Doctor of Philosophy

Sherise Bailey
Master of Pastoral Studies

Hyojae Lee
Master of Arts

Eun Suk Oh
Doctor of Philosophy

Samantha Erin Black
Master of Pastoral Studies

Sang Won Cho
Master of Divinity

Robert Crispin Revington
Doctor of Philosophy

Dawit Kim
Master of Pastoral Studies

Antonio Siracusa
Master of Divinity and
Diploma of the College

Sumi K. Jeung
Doctor of Theology

Anthea Cin Wah Lai
Master of Pastoral Studies

Sarah Elizabeth Stockford
Master of Divinity and
Diploma of the College

Taewan Kim
Master of Theology

Jennifer Lobo
Master of Pastoral Studies

Allyson Anne MacLeod
Master of Theology

Bianca Mathews
Master of Pastoral Studies

Agwu David Onuoha
Master of Pastoral Studies

Joshy Varghese
Master of Pastoral Studies

Pauline Yoon
Master of Pastoral Studies

Mi Hoa Yoon
Master of Pastoral Studies

Lu Wang
Master of Theological Studies



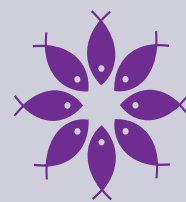
ST. ANDREW'S HALL/VST

Angie Song
Master of Theology

Brian McGuffin
Diploma in
Denominational Studies

Chandra Mannix
Diploma in
Denominational Studies

Nigel Parker
Diploma in
Denominational Studies



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New Space for New Possibilities

By the Rev. Victor Kim,
Principal Clerk,
General Assembly Office

Who doesn't get excited about moving into a new home! Recently, The Presbyterian Church in Canada signed a lease, along with the Anglican and United Church denominations, to share new national office space at the redeveloped site of Bloor Street United Church at 300 Bloor St. W. in Toronto, Ont. This move is scheduled for the Spring/Summer of 2026. The agreement reflects the churches' ongoing commitment to nurturing ecumenical relationships and cooperation, and to reducing costs and their carbon footprint.

"This opportunity to be together in this space came out of a relationship and conversation," said the Rev. Dr. Michael Blair, General Secretary for the United Church. We are excited about the possibility of the relationship and working together, with a commitment to mission and ministry. We collaborate to be witnesses in the healing of God's world. So, I am excited and grateful for the possibilities."

"The possibility of better ecumenical collaboration in this space will also allow us to make more effective use of our financial and human resources," said Archdeacon Alan Perry, the General Secretary of the Anglican



Pictured (left to right) are the Rev. Victor Kim, Principal Clerk of the PCC, the Rev. Dr. Michael Blair, General Secretary of the United Church of Canada, and Archdeacon Alan Perry, General Secretary of the Anglican Church of Canada.

Church. "Being so close to good public transit allows for easy access to visitors to our offices and means we will have less impact on the environment."

The new national office will be part of a development that includes a refurbished Bloor Street United Church, office, and commercial and worship spaces. The floor plans reflect a more efficient and flexible use of physical space for the new offices and were drafted with input from all three denominations. The denominational Archives will also be moved into the new building.


As with any significant move, there is much preparation to be

done and that work is already underway at our current location at 50 Wynford Dr. in Toronto. We are grateful to the staff for their collaboration around the upcoming move. A committee of Assembly Council has been given the task of discerning what will happen to the current national office building.

The hope for our new home is that it will be a place to make new memories and space for new possibilities for ministry that serve the vision of the kingdom of God. I am very excited about the possibilities of what this partnership will produce in the years to come!




The breaking of the ground ceremony for the new church offices at 50 Wynford Drive, Toronto, in 1965. Some attendees included Dr. E.A. Thomson, the Rev. Dr. J. Alan Munro, the Rev. Dr. David Hay and L. Fowler. PHOTO CREDIT: THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ARCHIVES.



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GENERAL ASSEMBLY


Moderator-Elect: the Rev. Dr. Patricia Dutcher-Walls

a lightly edited sample of Pat's answers.

What have been your most memorable experiences in serving the church, and how have those particular experiences shaped or guided your views?

When I was ordained in the Presbyterian Church (USA) before emigrating to Canada, one ordination vow particularly impressed me. When asked, "Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination and love?" my 26-year-old self sincerely but brashly answered, "Yes, indeed, I will." This has stayed as a guiding theme of my service to the church.

Early in my ministry, I discovered that by God's grace I had a gift for teaching, leading students in classes and congregations to discover insights about the world of the Bible and its meanings and interpretation. Teaching in the colleges of the church and through numerous workshops, lectures and retreats across the country, it has always been a privilege to share in the faith journey of the people of God. Thoughtful and informed biblical interpretation is a key element for following God's ways in and through the life and witness of the church.

When I was at Knox College, I served as a member and then president of the Board of Evangel Hall, a street mission in Toronto. This allowed me to help in the huge effort needed to fund and construct the current Evangel Hall building, which contains both program space and much needed housing. Through this service, I saw the possibilities for the church to live out the gospel in action. Being a Christian creates not only a private reassurance of God's mercy and love but also a calling to mission, to living out the same grace we have received in Christ through sharing that grace with our neighbours.

In recent years, with my retirement from teaching at VST, but continuing as an elder on Session, I joined an effort with other leaders of the presbytery to discern and discover ways to help the church meet the challenges of demographic and cultural

changes that have reduced its influence, size and impact. How can congregations imagine new ways to do mission with their neighbours or reimagine clusters or groupings of congregations to do ministry or use the space or the legacy of their buildings to become the church in new ways? I am persuaded that God is calling us outside of our comfort zones to discover new efforts in being Christ's church, in as many ways as we can imagine with the Spirit's leading.

What is your image and vision of the church at its best?

In recognizing the good work of the agencies, colleges, boards and committees of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, I offer the following as a vision of how a local congregation could live out their calling to serve Christ.

Each vibrant congregation ministers with a large and diverse group of people eager to worship, learn and engage with one another and with a world in need of God's love. As a welcoming multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-generational group, they let the love they have received through Christ's new life shape who they are in the world.

The church nurtures spiritual vitality as a worshipping community, recognizing that they must be rooted in dynamic worship and praise of the God who has graced them with blessings through Jesus Christ. Their lively worship services are vibrant; sermons are firmly based on scripture and thought provoking and

relevant. In music, a combination of inspiring praise songs and traditional hymns stir the soul. They have extended their worship well past the bounds of the building through online options.

Their ministries are grounded in ongoing education, both for their members and the community, including an online community. In addition to biblical teaching and spiritual practices, they offer discussions, podcasts and blogs on issues such as reconciliation with Indigenous neighbours, climate concerns and understanding between races and sexual identities.

Many people of all ages and backgrounds take part in worship, volunteer work and in the congregations' varied missions, events and groups. This welcome is rooted in their understanding that the community builds its life by reflecting the values of the incarnation—humans beloved by God are treated with compassion, respect, honesty and integrity. The pastoral leadership of the congregation works at involving folks in the life of the church and they are skilled at recognizing and employing everyone's gifts and strengths.

Compassionately embodying missional vitality means living out God's love through being connected and active within the broader community. Their focus is always on the caring, love and redemption represented by the life and teachings of Christ presented in a way that speaks to the culture. A variety of programs and services, including affordable housing and food security programs, either run by the church

itself or in cooperation with other faith and secular groups, meet the needs of the congregation's diverse local neighbourhood.

In all the congregation does, they remember a prayer from one of their members, "Help us, Lord, to not be afraid to live larger and wider lives so that we can reflect your glory. Amen!"

(This was adapted from the vision my home church, Trinity, developed during our amalgamation process.)

How do you understand the role of the moderator?

The first few days of a moderator's term are defined by the Book of Forms—the moderator's duties at the General Assembly include to open and close each sederunt with prayer, to see that the business is properly conducted, and to take the vote and announce decisions. For the other 361 days of the year, I understand the moderator's role as a roving ambassador and herald who connects a widely spread-out church, speaking and preaching, bringing news of the denomination, listening to the concerns and prayers of the people and congregations, meeting with committees and councils as needed or invited, speaking on behalf of the church to the wider society under the guidance of the statements of the General Assembly and theology of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, and holding all of that in prayer without ceasing. I would hope to do those tasks as I have tried to live my whole vocation—with energy, intelligence, imagination and love.

Some publications written by the Rev. Dr. Patricia Dutcher-Walls:

- *Reading the Historical Books: A Student's Guide to Engaging the Biblical Text*
- *Jezebel: Portraits of a Queen*
- *Narrative Art, Political Rhetoric: The Case of Athaliah and Joash*
- *The Family in Life and in Death: The Family in Ancient Israel*
- *The Commandments: For a Blessed Life* (for the Kerygma Bible study program)

The Committee to Advise with the Moderator will present the name of the Rev. Dr. Patricia Dutcher-Walls as the nominee for Moderator of the 2024 General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. General Assembly takes place June 2–6 at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ont. To learn more about GA2024, visit presbyterian.ca/ga2024.

Pat has been involved in service to the church throughout her career. She is an active Session member and minister-in-association at Trinity Church—a three-congregation amalgamation and transformational ministry in New Westminster and Burnaby, B.C. She retired as Professor of Hebrew Bible and Dean of the Faculty at Vancouver School of Theology in 2021. During her vocation as a professor, Pat published five books on the social world and interpretation of the Old Testament, authored several scholarly articles and presented numerous papers at academic conferences. She was Dean of the Faculty at VST from 2013 to 2020.

Beyond the colleges of the church, Pat has had an active teaching and preaching ministry across the country, offering numerous sermons, adult education courses, retreats, workshops and lectures for congregations, synods, women's groups and conferences. She has been active with the courts and committees of the PCC, including serving on the Church Doctrine Committee, as president of the Board of Directors of Evangel Hall, as convener with Hummingbird Ministries Council and Moderator of the Presbytery of Westminster from 2020 to 2021. Pat continues as chair of the Strategy and Leadership Committee of the Presbyter of Westminster.

Candidates for moderator are asked to submit their biography along with answers to a series of questions that are designed to help the church come to know the candidates better. Below is

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



Justin White (right, at the lectern), a Young Adult Observer from Toronto, speaking at the 1970 General Assembly at the Presbyterian Church of St. David in Halifax, N.S.

Remarkable Moments: Young Adult Observers

The picture above records the moment when Justin White, a Young Adult Observer at the 1970 General Assembly in Halifax, N.S., urged the General Assembly to increase stipends for deaconesses. The photo was first used in the July/August 1970 issue of the *Presbyterian Record* magazine. In that article, Justin White was quoted as saying, “The full-time workers of our church should cease being economic martyrs of our common cause.”

The matter of increasing stipends was a continuation of a discussion at General Assembly the previous year. Recommendations to increase the remuneration of deaconesses were adopted by the Assembly. As a result, deaconesses received an increase of \$300, bringing their stipends to \$4,200 annually, plus an incre-

ment for service, a travel allowance and other benefits.

The year 2025 will mark 150 years since four churches came together under the name The Presbyterian Church in Canada and 100 years since The Presbyterian Church in Canada took the shape it has today after most Presbyterian congregations and institutions decided to join with other denominations to create the United Church of Canada. To mark this anniversary, the PCC annual calendar, some worship bulletins, vignettes in the newspaper and social media posts next year will feature photos from the Archives and current photo collections that show remarkable moments in the life of the church as the ways it continues Christ’s ministry in the world has changed over the years.

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

Two endeavours where I find myself investing my energy these days draw from my experience and would be efforts I would enjoy contributing to the wider church as moderator.

First, I would love to share my enthusiasm for lively Bible studies that bring new insights to scripture and empower people to read

the Bible well—and have fun doing it! The Bible is the witness to God’s love for the world through the stories, psalms, prophetic writings, wisdom traditions, gospels and letters of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament; it is the heart of our faith. Learning more about the times of its writing and ways it communicates its truths can enliven and energize the people of God.

Second, I would be glad to bring whatever encouragement

I could for exploring ways the church can imagine new futures for itself. The cultural changes of Canadian society have presented challenges for congregations, but there are lots of possibilities for new life in reimagining what the church could be. It would be fun to learn about what congregations are already experimenting with and to encourage stories of witness and service for the neighbours whose lives we touch.

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Out Of the Cold: A Georgetown Story

By the Rev. Steve Boose,
Knox Presbyterian Church in
Georgetown, Ont.

Out of the Cold started in downtown Toronto in 1987 after a homeless person known to students at St. Michael's Collegiate School froze to death on the school's steps one cold night the year before. The priests and nuns who ran the school reached out to local places of worship with a plan to have them open their doors to the homeless in the winter months. Six churches and one synagogue ended up picking a particular night of the week when volunteers from the various congregations would serve warm meals and then allow a certain number to come back in the evening for a safe sleeping space, with breakfast served before the guests left in the morning. The model eventually spread to over a hundred North American cities.

Alas, in the 2010's, many overnight programs ceased when the opioid epidemic reared its head, leading to violence and aggression overrunning host sites, and resulting in volunteers refusing to stay overnight to watch over the guests.

Nevertheless, Halton Hills had (and still has) no official shelter program of any kind—all shelters in Halton Region are in Oakville or Burlington, more than 30 km south. Neither was there any kind of "refuge program," such as Out of the Cold. When the idea of being a host site for an Out of the Cold program was presented to

the congregation at Knox in early 2019, \$2,000 was set aside as a budget. We investigated how to make such a program a reality. By the end of 2019, the vestiges of a plan had formed, with support being offered from Halton Region, and as 2020 commenced, it was realized that something may well be possible by the end of 2020.

But then, of course, the world shut down in 2020. Two years later, the plan was revived. Rather than asking seven local congregations (including Knox) to be host sites for one night per week, it was envisioned that Knox, with its location beside the library, would be the single site and the volunteers would just come there. A question was, would it be one night per week? Two or three? Only on the coldest nights, or every night possible?

In September and October of 2022, word circulated that this program was being envisioned, and though it would be mostly administered by Knox folks, volunteers from throughout the community would determine how it operated. Many interested individuals came to information sessions. Some put their names forward to become part of a Steering Team that would oversee various aspects of the program. Local churches and community groups made donations of funds or goods to help get things started. The Presbyterian Church in Canada was approached about distributing a grant from the New & Renewing Ministry Fund, and \$10,000 was given for the first



year's operations. Six cots were purchased, and food was donated to help the teams provide meals and snacks to the guests.

The first two guests of the program were local people who had been chronically unhoused for some time—one with addiction issues and the other dealing with mental illness. It was quickly discovered that the Operations Manual was a great starting place for the program's thinking, but as had happened in so many instances throughout history, "The Plan" did not survive contact with reality. Adjustments were made. Copious notes were taken. The Steering Team's members, many of whom volunteered for various shifts, sent emails back and forth with their observations and suggestions. And the program evolved.

Due to user groups being in the building several nights per week, the program cannot be open until 8:30 in the evening. The first shift (the Evening Team), a minimum of two volunteers, arrives around 8:00 p.m., tasked with setting up cots for as many guests as may arrive on a given night, preparing some food for them, and engaging them in conversation. At 11:00, they are relieved by the Overnight Team that will be in the building until 6:00 a.m. Much of the Overnight Team's responsibilities are ensuring that the guests can sleep peacefully. At 6:00, the Morning Team arrives, tasked with cooking breakfast, putting away the cots as the guests rise and shine, cleaning up the kitchen and eating area, and getting everyone out of the building by 8:00.

In 2022–23, the program was open for 97 of a possible 126 nights between December 5 and April 8 (Easter Sunday). Twelve different individuals stayed overnight at least once; one guest was present for 95 of those nights, sometimes as the *only* guest. Of the other guests, two were refugee claimants, while another was a refugee from Ukraine who had been brought to Canada two



weeks earlier without any real support; her sponsor had cut her loose so the police brought her to Knox, and in the morning her only request was a ride to the airport, where she presumably returned to Ukraine—the war zone was preferable to what she had found in Canada.

For 2023, it was decided to open two weeks earlier, stretching the season to a full 140 nights. As Christmas approached, however, the number of guests expanded from two or three to five, six, even eight per night. It was learned that a local church with West African roots was taking in a dozen or so West African refugee claimants and hosting them as they processed their Canadian residency papers. Refugee claimants were flooding into Pearson Airport in Toronto and introduced into the already overloaded shelter system, and as those shelters filled up, claimants were getting pushed further and further out to the fringes of the Greater Toronto Area.

But Out of the Cold Georgetown had to hold the line at eight as its maximum. Only twice were that many guests in the building; often in January and February there were six, occasionally seven. Strangely, having more regular guests made things easier to manage, as they tended to police each other, telling each other that they had this warm place to sleep because of the volunteers, and if they disrespected the volunteers, they would find the doors closed more often. Morning Teams enjoyed cooking for more than one or two. Meals became very convivial affairs. An additional

effort was added to serve more complete meals on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, which was very much appreciated by the guests. The program continues to evolve. Flipping through the logbook shows that 34 individuals stayed for at least one night, with an average of four to five guests per night.

Plans for next year are already in motion. Grants have been applied for. A bank account has been established to track the increased money flowing in and out of the program's hands, because precise accounting is required to track the spending. Training in mental health First Aid has already been established, while First Aid training and Food Handler Safety courses are also being set up.

Most important, the mandate of the program was carried out: get these people to tomorrow. On 121 out of a possible 141 nights this season, guests have gotten to "tomorrow" after a night in the church. Job interviews are tomorrow. Rehab or detox starts tomorrow. Social workers or community resource helpers can be contacted tomorrow, but it's so much easier to work with them if a good night's sleep is had *tonight*. This was the vision. This was the challenge that was presented five years ago when the congregation had been told that I had been speaking with someone who had recently spent the night in a bank vestibule trying to warm up their feet with a hair dryer. Do something, they had said. Make something *happen*. What do we do, Lord, I prayed? "This..." had been the answer.

HOME > LOCAL NEWS

Georgetown church meets rising need for overnight shelter with Out of the Cold

Knox Presbyterian Church has been offering meals and a place to sleep for those in need since 2022.

Herb Garbutt
a day ago



The Out of the Cold program that started last winter at Knox Presbyterian Church has seen a rise in usage, but Rev. Steve Boose says the community has helped meet the need through donations and by volunteering.

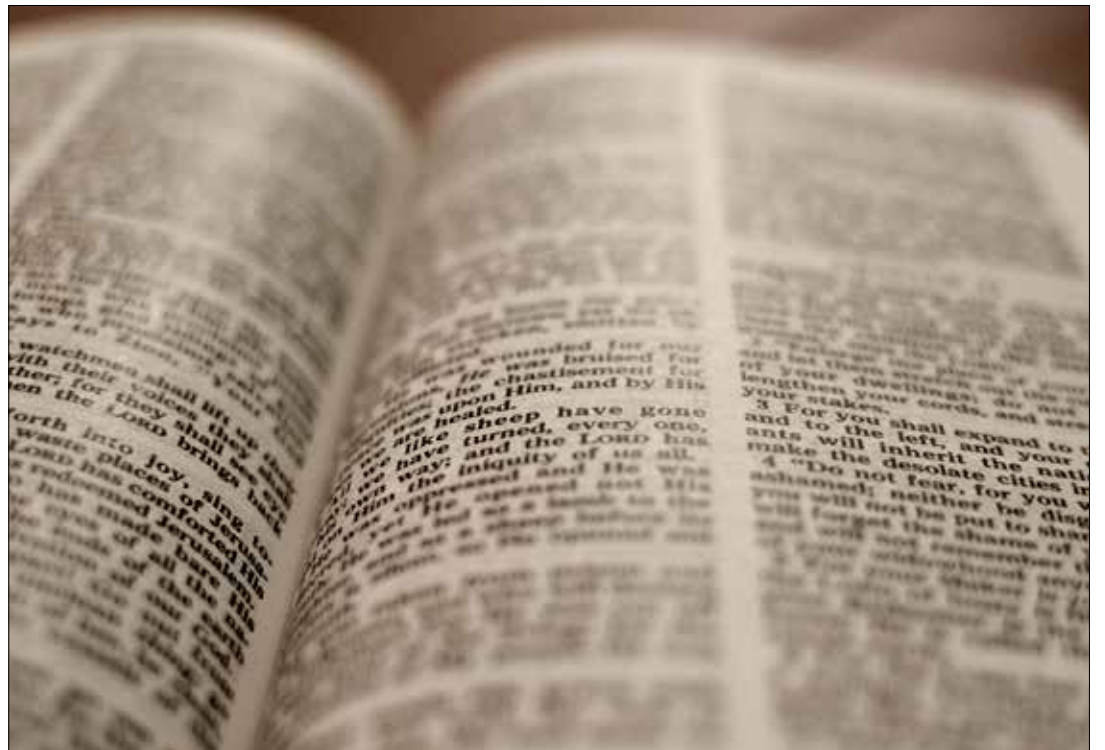
—Marianne Jamieson/TheBarb@76 Today

Update: Consultation on Common Texts

On April 15 and 16, the Consultation on Common Texts (CCT) held its annual meeting at St. Andrew's United Church, Bloor Street, Toronto. The Consultation is a joint American and Canadian ecumenical body that is responsible for the Revised Common Lectionary, a schedule of biblical passages read on Sundays and major feasts in congregations of multiple denominations in North America and other parts of the world.

Participants in the CCT worked on a draft statement about the use of passages of scripture in John and Acts of the Apostles

that have historically been used to justify discrimination and violence against Jewish people and a further draft of that statement is expected in August and will be circulated to member denominations for comment. The CCT also established a committee to consider lessons for a feast celebrating God's work in creation. The idea of such a festival, first proposed by the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios in 1989, has gained support in recent years from western churches. An ecumenical seminar held in Assisi, Italy, earlier this year endorsed the



idea of adding such a feast to the church calendar, but inclusion of the festival will be dependent on the actions of individual denominations.

The CCT heard reports on use of the Revised Common Lectionary and on the activity of mem-

ber denominations in relationship to worship. It learned that a recent project, the Revised Common Lectionary: Expanded Daily Readings is scheduled for print release this summer; it increases the number of daily lessons to include a psalm and three other

biblical readings, matching the Sunday pattern.

Resources for worship—including worship planners, lectionary resources and prayers—are available to download on the PCC website at presbyterian.ca/worship.

Five Years Serving the Community in Bradford

By Jaime Robertson,
Retirement Living Consultant,
The Elden of Bradford

The Elden of Bradford, a state-of-the-art retirement community in Bradford, Ont., celebrated its fifth year in operation with a residents' party, concert and other festivities. Over the past five years, The Elden has welcomed hundreds of local seniors and their families and contributed significantly to charitable and community-building initiatives across town.

"What began as a partnership between our development company and St. John's Presbyterian Church to meet the need for local seniors' housing in Bradford is now a staple of the community," said Dale Béasse, president and CEO of The Elden. "We are so thrilled to offer independent-supportive living and assisted-living housing and care to our seniors, and deeply value our special relationship with this great community."

Over the past five years, The Elden has significantly supported

a number of charitable initiatives as a company, to the tune of over \$100,000, and the residents' committee has donated funds totalling over \$20,000 to a variety of local charities, including the Helping Hand Food Bank, WOW Living's Out of the Cold Café, the Terry Fox Run and Southlake Regional Health Centre, as well as sponsoring local sports teams. The residence also employs hundreds of local staff.

The Elden hosts regular co-op students and popular local events, such as an annual trick-or-treating Halloween event with local children and seniors, and is a proud member of the local Seniors Engagement Committee. As partners with the Danube Seniors' Leisure Centre, CHATS, South Simcoe Police Services and other local retirement homes, The Elden helps plan events specifically tailored for seniors, such as the National Seniors Day Pancake Brunch at the Danube Centre.



The Newer Ministers' Forum

By John Borthwick, Director of the Centre for Lifelong Learning at Knox College and Curator of ministryforum.ca

Last Fall, a recent M.Div. graduate from Knox College in Toronto, Ont., reached out to Principal Ernest Van Eck with a story and a request. As I've connected with other ministers across Canada, it is a story that also rings true for other colleagues. It goes something like this: As a newer minister in a presbytery, I have lots of older mentors and wise guides whom I appreciate very much. However, whenever I start to talk about the future of the church or reflect upon innovating or changing things, I'm faced with the common refrain: "Well, good luck to you. I'll be retired soon!"

Now, I know this isn't the case of every veteran minister who is looking forward to retirement. Many have served the church with unwavering dedication for decades and deserve to be acknowledged as good and faithful servants. Having served the PCC for over a quarter century as a congregational minister, I've personally witnessed the changing demographics and capacity of our presbyteries exacerbated by the experience of Covid. These are particularly challenging times for those in congregational ministry. Our newer minister colleagues need more than luck to navigate the future that is before them. So, if you see yourself as the retiring minister in this story, please stop it! As a minister nearing retirement, you have much to offer.



Knox College graduates, 2023.

Perhaps not about what the future holds but more about sustaining oneself in ministry over the long haul. Be a sounding board and a listening ear. Your encouragement and support when others get discouraged is so appreciated. And where and when able and appropriate, seek to make space and room for innovations to our systems and institutions.

The request made by the graduate was to hold conversations online with newer ministers for the purpose of sharing, collaborating and even commiserating. The recent grad put it this way: "Becoming an ordained minister after the pandemic has been a little bit of a mystifying experience. There must be some kind of group of other freshly minted ministers who also have no idea what they are doing. But if there isn't, we should make one."

Forming a group like this was

something that I hoped we'd do through the Ministry Forum, so I was delighted when the request came in. We reached out to approximately 60 of our M.Div. graduates (covering the last eight years—I added a few years due to the experience of COVID-19). Within 24 hours, we had a cohort of about a dozen interested newer ministers. The group also includes (at the urging of the participants) a couple of graduates who are not currently serving as ordained/inducted ministers. We've met monthly since January. We have a list of topics that emerged from our first meeting: small wins in ministry, volunteer engagement/management, digital ministry, visiting and pastoral care. In April, we invited the Rev. Tim Purvis, Associate Secretary of Ministry and Church Vocations at national office, to join us for a Q&A session.

As I remind the group often, this

is their group and their agenda, so they are welcome to talk about what might be officially on the agenda that day or share what's pressing right now. Interestingly, since our first meeting, participants are choosing to talk about more immediate concerns and are discovering support, wisdom and encouragement from each other. They regularly say how much they appreciate having a space where they can share what they are experiencing in a safe and confidential way with others who understand what they are going through. As one of the participants said: "Meeting with colleagues in a similar stage of ministry to me is encouraging because it helps remind me that I am not alone on this journey. I appreciate being able to share stories and prayers with others in a safe environment."

Another put it this way: "Given that we are all newer ministers,

it's a nice time to discuss how we see the future of the church, our places in it, and what some common challenges are/unexpected successes are."

We will continue with this cohort for as long as the group would like to stick together. These conversations inform our work at Ministry Forum as we seek to fulfill our mission to empower ministry leaders to thrive. It is our hope to open another cohort this fall. At this time, we are reaching out to Knox College graduates but would certainly be open to newer PCC ministers who graduated elsewhere.

If you are interested in joining a future cohort, please contact John Borthwick at john.borthwick@utoronto.ca. Be sure to subscribe to our weekly email at ministryforum.ca to stay informed about coming events and relevant resources for ministry leaders today.

Changes in Collingwood

By Marlene Weatherall, First Presbyterian Church in Collingwood, Ont.

In July 2022, the Rev. Tim Raeburn-Gibson relocated from First Presbyterian Church in Collingwood, Ont., to Westminster Presbyterian Church in London, Ont. We were sorry to see him go but we wished him well as he and his family embarked on their journey. What did this mean for our congregation? Change was about to happen. We trusted God's plan for the Rev. Tim's future, and for ours.

And so, our journey began. The Rev. Dr. Neal Mathers, our appointed interim moderator, kept the doors open, filled the pulpit roster on Sundays and spearheaded the Search Committee on their mission to hire a new minister. Thank you, Neal!

A search committee of 12 members was established that worked diligently to follow the call process outlined by The Presbyterian Church in Canada. What initially appeared as a daunting task became an opportunity to work together to fulfill God's plan



The Rev. Dr. Heather Malnick, Acting Clerk of presbytery.

for First Presbyterian Church. The congregation is thankful for their commitment in our search for a new minister.

Parallel to the hiring process and Sunday Service, our weekly programs continued. Youth groups gathered twice monthly, inter-generational events were organized and children's Sunday school programs occurred weekly. Community dinners, Love Your Neighbour and grocery supply programs were ongoing. Thank you to everyone who continued God's work in our church.

On Oct. 25, 2023, just 15

months into the ministerial search process, the Session approved the recommendation of the search committee to invite the Rev. Alton J. Ruff to preach for a call, and we felt truly blessed.

Our Presbytery Moderator, the Rev. Barry Doner, coordinated the induction service on Sunday, March 3, 2024, which was the final step in the process but the beginning of something new at First Presbyterian Church. The weeks that followed brought faith-driven messages that were focused on the beginning of a new era of ministry. Thanks be to God!



The Rev. Alton J. Ruff.



The Rev. Jane Swatridge.

Unveiling a Memorial Plaque at Wexford

By the Rev. Sandrah Mashingaidze, Wexford Presbyterian Church in Scarborough, Ont.

On April 7, the church was filled with a vibrant tapestry of faces, representing diverse cultures and generations, all united in a powerful moment of remembrance and hope. The occasion marked the unveiling of a memorial plaque to honour those who served the congregation. It was a poignant symbol of our collective journey and the resilience of our faith community. As congregants gathered in the pews, the air was thick with anticipation and reverence. The ceremony was a testament to the enduring spirit of our church. But even as we looked back with fondness, our gaze was firmly fixed on the future. The cer-



The new memorial plaque.

emony was a powerful reminder that the torch of faith and tradition must be passed on to the next generation—a generation that is diverse, dynamic and eager to make its mark on the world. The new memorial serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges we have faced and the strength we have drawn from our faith to overcome them.

In the wake of unprecedented challenges that temporarily left our church pews empty, we now find ourselves at a pivotal moment in our faith journey. Yet, in the midst of uncertainty, there shines a beacon of hope—a symbol of resilience and renewal that was unveiled on April 7. Tears were shed for loved ones lost and for the trials endured. But amidst the tears, there was also laughter and joy, as we celebrated the resilience of our faith community.

The unveiling of the memorial plaque was not just a ceremony—it was a call to action. It is a reminder that our church is not defined by its physical walls, but by the people who fill them. The ceremony was more than just a commemoration of the past; it was a revival—a stirring remind-

er of the values and traditions that have guided us through the ages. As we shared stories and meals, we also shared our hopes and dreams for the future of our church.

The ceremony itself was a moving tribute to the past, present and future of our congregation. From heartfelt speeches to soul-stirring hymns, every aspect of the event was imbued with a profound sense of purpose and hope. It was a moment of celebration, as we honoured our history and embraced what is to come. As the veil was lifted to reveal the plaque, there was a collective sense of awe and reverence among the assembled worshippers. For many, it was a moment of catharsis, a chance to confront the pain of loss and find solace in the enduring legacy of faith and community. It was also a moment of renewal, as we reaffirmed our commitment to one another and to the ideals that bind us together.

As we look to the future, we do so with hope and confidence, knowing that our church is built on a solid foundation of faith, love and community. The unveiling of the memorial plaque was just the



The gathering at Wexford Presbyterian Church.

beginning of a new chapter in our church's history—a chapter filled with possibility and the unwavering conviction that tomorrow will be brighter because of what was done before us.

And as we continue this journey together, we will do so with gratitude for the past, hope for the future, and a steadfast belief in the transformative power of love. Together, we will continue to write the story of our church, guided by the lessons of the past and inspired by the promise of tomorrow.



The Rev. Sandrah Mashingaidze preaching.

Finding Catharsis in the Passion and Resurrection of Christ

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

Lent is the journey to the Cross, which can be traumatic for Christians. Wrestling with the death of the Saviour, the implications that our salvation will not be as expected and losing a valuable friend and mentor are onerous burdens to bear. As we walk this path fraught with emotions, we intentionally choose to live through the cycle of the church calendar. This year at the Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church, artist Jeanette Lee and I decided

to investigate what a cathartic and artistic Spirit-inspired way to journey to the Cross would look like based on Isaiah 25:6–9 and Mark 16:1–8.

The journey was inspired twofold by the Aristotelian definition of Catharsis and Brother Lawrence's belief in the practice of the presence of God. We understood that Aristotle's use of the word catharsis is not a technical reference to purgation or purification but a beautiful metaphor for the peculiar tragic pleasure, the feeling of being washed, cleansed or redeemed. It is almost as if catharsis was purging the emotions of pity and fear that occurred in the viewer of a tragedy to permit the community to have positive



Welder Jeanette Lee working on the cross.

growth.

Sometimes, we can feel like we are too imperfect for the growth and call that Jesus has in our lives. Yet we realized that, as Brother Lawrence shared, God

does not regard the greatness of the work but the love in which the work is done. Leaning into this idea that imperfect pieces can be made perfect for God's work, we did an artistic reveal of art created by welding old scraps together to show God's love.

The reflection of God's love comes together in a living cross inspired by the spiritual call to rise like Christ. It reflects the idea that we don't find death in the Cross but eternal life in Jesus Christ. It was a reminder that as damaged as we may feel—no matter how society may deem us to be unworthy scraps—through the resurrection of Christ, we are all empowered by God to be part of something more beautiful than we can imagine as an individual. Our Lenten journey is not to ignore the challenge of being called in a broken world but to highlight how the Cross will always be life-giving. We at the Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church got to experience a tactile reminder to help us follow our call to be transformed as we see how God can transform even scraps into works of art.



Celebrating What Our Youth Can Do!

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

On the evening of February 10, Richmond Presbyterian Church (RPC) and Oakridge Christian Ministry, a part of the Vancouver Chinese Presbyterian Church (VCPC) in Vancouver, B.C., worked together to host the prestigious Duke of Edinburgh's International Award ceremony. This event not only celebrated the achievements of young individuals but reminded us of how incredibly blessed we are to be able to come together and support one another as a community.

We were delighted to host both the Bronze and Silver Award ceremony, with music by Zabrina Ng. The following people earned their Bronze Award and had the opportunity to receive it from Richmond's Acting Mayor Chak Au: Alesha Chan, Claire Chiang, Jeremy Chiang, Nicole Chu, Makayla Dy, Ysabelle Lee, Faith Tang, Keira Uy and Eden Wu. Faith Tang also received her Silver Award. These award recipients were supported and encouraged by their leaders Heidi Dy and Jacqueline Cleland. The Rev. Curtis Bablitz kindly prayed for the youth and their inspiring future.

The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award challenges, empowers and recognizes youth ages 14–24. By highlighting the amazing things they do and learn outside formal education, the award empowers them to discover hidden talents, develop untapped leadership potential, and make a difference in their community.



Pictured at front (left to right): Leader Heidi, the Rev. Curtiz, Makayla, Faith, Keira, Acting Mayor Au. **In the back:** Jeremy, Ysabelle, Claire, Eden, Nicole, Alesha and leader/director Jacqueline Cleland.

Since 1963, the award has helped motivate young people in Canada to set goals and challenge themselves to take control of their lives and futures. Today, in Canada, the award is run coast to coast, engaging over 11,000 young people and over 1,400 adult volunteers annually.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Centre at Richmond Presbyterian Church originated through discernment and discussion with Dr. Anne-Marie Ellithorpe, Heather Campbell and myself during the

pandemic years. It has been a mission of outreach that has spread to the broader community with participants spanning from Richmond (through RPC) to Vancouver (through VCPC). It has encouraged youth to volunteer at RPC's community night, play for other churches' Sunday worship, and teach those younger than them skills they have refined. It was a sign of hope and growth that, as a church, we opened our doors in February to the award recipients, their families and the

community, demonstrating how tiny seeds can grow into beautiful fruit.

One of the highlights of the evening was hearing from two speakers who have personally gone through the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award program. Faith Tang, a recipient of the award, shared her journey and how the program has helped her grow in confidence, leadership and service. Heidi Dy, a leader in the program, also spoke about the impact of the award on young

individuals and how it aligns with the values of the Christian faith.

It was a night filled with celebration, encouragement and inspiration. The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award ceremony recognized the achievements of young individuals and brought together two churches to celebrate and support the youth in their community. It was a true reminder of what can be achieved when we support our youth, and was a beautiful reflection of the unity and love found in Christ.

Simcoe Treasurer Hangs Up His Calculator



Pictured (left to right) are Keith Main, the Rev. Mikal Schomburg and Deb Melnyk.

By Deb Melnyk, Clerk of Session, St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Simcoe, Ont.

During a Sunday service in January, the congregation at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Simcoe, Ont., recognized Keith Main for his many years of volunteer service as church treasurer. Keith has been the only person doing the treasurer's job since I have been attending St. Paul's. However, his journey as our calculator master has spanned not 10, not 20, not 30, but over 40 years!

The Session expressed their gratitude for his tireless dedication and diligence as church treasurer. A special "golden calculator" was presented to Keith by St. Paul's minister, the Rev. Mikal Schomburg, and me, as Clerk of Session. The treasurer's job required many extra hours past our monthly Session meetings and I'm sure a few sleepless nights! Helping us steer the church in a fiscally sound manner has not always been easy in difficult times but we have appreciated Keith's caring commitment to St. Paul's.

His retirement began in January 2024, and he has spent time assisting our new treasurer.

We are pleased that Keith has continued to serve our church in other ways as a lay reader, teller and as an active Session elder. We have certainly appreciated his 43 years of service in the treasurer's capacity, and he has been a good example of the scripture: "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10 NIV).

Narratives of Hope and Possibility

By the Rev. Dr. Jean Morris, Interim Moderator, Grace Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., and the Rev. Victor Kim, Principal Clerk

Narratives have the power to tell the story of organizations. Narratives can tell the story of denominations as well, including The Presbyterian Church in Canada. What are the stories being told about our church and our denomination today? We recognize that these are challenging times for the church and the stories we hear about the church, congregations and ministries often reflect the realities of changing demographics, closing congregations, an inadequate resourcing of ministries, increased secularization in our society, and of course the repercussions of a pandemic that continue to contribute to the challenges we are facing, just to name a few. The Assembly Council is concerned about the present and future ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, its congregations and structures.

The Assembly Council is a group of people appointed by the General Assembly from across the country, responsible for the implementation of the policies established by the General Assembly. It has both a coordinating and prophetic role, and in its prophetic role the Assembly Council will, among other things, “present a vision for the mission of a church that looks to God for continual renewal and will dream about the future of the church and seek to be a leading edge of what the church might be in the future.”

Beginning in the autumn of 2022, the Assembly Council has engaged in thoughtful consideration and exploration of what its prophetic role may be at this time and how God’s Spirit may be guiding The Presbyterian Church



in Canada through the narratives that shape our story and ministry. In effect, the narrative is the manager in which Christ is laid. This image affirms that at the heart of the church’s narrative is the person of Jesus Christ.

At the 2023 General Assembly, commissioners participated in times of conversation called Narratives of Hope and Possibility, including stories we tell about ourselves and how our structures serve our stories. Building on the feedback received from the General Assembly, the Assembly Council appointed a working group to consider narratives of hope and possibility. The working group consists of up to 20 members drawn from across the denomination, from a diversity of cultures and ministries. The Assembly Council is aware that previous attempts at denominational revitalization have not always resulted in what was originally hoped for. The Council begins this work with the prayerful expectation that good fruit might be borne through God’s acting and leading.

The working group is convened by the Rev. Dr. Jean Morris, supported by the Rev. Victor Kim, Principal Clerk of the General

Assembly, and is charged with exploring and recommending pathways that position The Presbyterian Church in Canada in an attitude of openness and possibility regarding the church’s future, and will report to the Assembly Council and through Assembly Council to the General Assembly.

Working group responsibilities:

1. Reflect upon, review, publicize and reinforce faithful, Christ-centred narratives for the denomination that clarify and encourage The Presbyterian Church in Canada to imagine, learn and act upon narratives that could lead to renewal, transformation and vitality for congregations, courts and agencies of the church.
2. Provide a theological rationale that underpins any narrative and invitation to transformational change.
3. Present to the denomination faithful stories of hope and possibility that would lead to a renewal in the structures of the denomination.
4. Present an ecclesiology that informs any proposed changes to the current

structures of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

5. Explore good practices and experiences of other Christian denominations, both in Canada and beyond.
6. Reporting via the Assembly Council through at least one in-person joint meeting per year, aim to bring a report to the 2025 General Assembly, intended to inspire direction and vision for the future of The Presbyterian Church in Canada as guided by Christ.

The working group has met twice. While still in the initial stages of its work, the working group has discerned some consistent themes that have arisen during its meetings.

- We believe that The Presbyterian Church in Canada bears witness to the faithfulness of God in all things and seeks re-orientation by God’s active agency in our world.
- We wonder whether The Presbyterian Church in Canada is being called to a season of engaged waiting on God, with renewed time and energy in prayer, scripture and telling stories of God’s

faithfulness as the PCC seeks God’s direction for our future.

- We believe that, as a denomination, telling stories of hope and possibility, along with stories of suffering and struggle that are part of our life together in Christ, are important as we consider the pathways of possibility that may be before us.
- We understand that the church needs a theological framework to tell, or remember to tell, our stories again. We need to recover language that helps us as Christians speak about God and how God acts in the life of the church and in the world.
- We recognize the need to address the structures that shape the ways by which we are organized and act. We realize that our stories will have a primary role in shaping our structures.

While we intend to bring through the Assembly Council in its prophetic role a full report to the 2025 General Assembly, the working group offers this brief and initial update to the church and seeks the prayers of the church for the work of its members.

Solar Eclipse in Brockville



By the Rev. Marianne Emig Carr, First Presbyterian Church in Brockville, Ont.

First Presbyterian Church in Brockville, Ont., held its third PA Day Camp of the 2023–24 school year on April 8. As it was a very special day with the solar eclipse, the camp theme was built around this rare celestial event! Campers made eclipse-themed crafts, read stories and watched the eclipse through totality—with proper eye protection, of course!

For the camp mission project, campers heard from the John Howard Society about the soci-

ety’s work in assisting those who have been in conflict with the law, as well as vulnerable youth, to find housing, medical services and other supports to help them toward fulfilling lives. The campers donated bags of personal care items for the society’s clients.

Everyone had a great time, and we are looking forward to the final PA Day Camp for this school year, which is on May 31. First Presbyterian Church has been hosting PA Day Camps for children in the Brockville area since 2014, and we are grateful for our wonderful staff and volunteers who so faithfully support this ministry!

Celebrating Eid Al-Fitr in Hamilton

By Mark Lewis, Interim-Moderator, St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont.

The Sunday school rooms at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont., are filled with children again. During my last visit, the children were in full celebration mode. The boys and girls wore their sharpest clothes. The room was decorated with balloons and lanterns—all symbols of unity, compassion and faith. The laughing children celebrated with games, contests, crafts and, of course, the search for candy and chocolate. It was like the Easter mornings that I remember from my childhood.

But this was not Easter; it was a celebration of Eid Al-Fitr, the joyful breaking of the fast after the month of Ramadan.

In 2023, St. Paul's became the home of the Al Amal Learning Centre, an after-school gather-

ing place for children newly arrived in Canada from Afghanistan and Syria. Al Amal supports the children in all subjects, particularly emphasizing the English language and Canadian culture. The school's Director, Mayada Abu Shanab, confided in me that while the school is concerned with the children's academic success, they are even more concerned with helping the children cope with the trauma of having witnessed war, death and violence in their home countries. In a world where ethnic hatred is becoming normalized, it is a joy and privilege for St. Paul's to provide a safe and loving space for these children.

As the meal was finishing, Mayada told the children, "There can be no food wasted...there are people in the world who are starving." Our moms told us the same thing, and we likely sighed or rolled our eyes, but these chil-



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

dren received the message with great solemnity. Mayada is Palestinian; she knows about starvation. The children know that the hungry people are not unknown strangers but their own cousins, aunts and uncles.

It is a joy to speak with the children. Many have experienced so much suffering. Most have arrived in Canada without having attended school, but now they are filled with light, joy and

good ambitions. As the evening was closing, one of the little girls came to me and said, "Thank you for letting us be here; we feel safe here." What a wonderful testimony to the value of a loving and open Christian church.

St. Paul's Hamilton is dedicated to missional transformation. We no longer ask, "How can we get more people? How can we get more money?" We ask, "Who needs our help that no one else



is helping? How can we use our resources to build the Kingdom of God where every person is equal and the dignity of all is honoured?"

Outreach Grants Reaching the Community

By the Rev. Dr. Teresa Charlton, Knox Presbyterian Church in Vernon, B.C., and Clerk for the Presbytery of Kamloops

The Presbytery of Kamloops was one of presbyteries of the Synod of British Columbia who were recent benefactors of the former Presbyterian Extension Fund and the Presbyterian Innovation Ministries, which were established to expand the work of the church in British Columbia. When the money arrived for the presbytery's consideration, the Rev. Emery Cawsey suggested that the pres-

bytery use this unexpected wind-fall in a meaningful way that was different than the way the presbytery currently distributed grants.

The presbytery decided that the money would be used to finance larger outreach projects to help congregations kickstart their ministry and mission work in their respective communities. The money would finance a project or the hiring of a part-time person to engage the community in new way. Money could not be used to finance the church budget or an existing program.

At Knox Vernon, an Outreach

Grant was approved to support the hiring of a part-time individual to visit the many local retirement homes and long-term care facilities, offering hymn sings, coffee and conversation, and conducting special events. With the support of volunteers from Knox, the hope is that this program will continue to serve the most frail and fragile of our city and build bridges to welcome seniors and their families to the life of Knox.

In Kelowna, Mountainview Presbyterian Church has used a grant to employ an Outreach Worker to create small groups



The Rev. Dr. Teresa Charlton officially welcomed Don McCaig to the position of Outreach Worker at Knox Presbyterian Church in Vernon, B.C., during worship on St. Patrick's Day. Don grew up at Knox, and while he currently worships with his family at another church in Vernon, he attends Knox once a month to provide the congregation with an update on his activities, encouraging volunteers from the pews to join in his expanding work.

and build up small ministries alongside the existing congregation. Hoping for four active small groups this year, the program has already expanded to six small groups.

And in Penticton, the recent closure of the United Church in

town left many seasoned worshippers at sea about their faith future. The hiring of an Outreach Worker to provide pastoral care to these individuals has meant a filling of the pews at St. Andrew's, as many now worship together with the existing congregation.



Hospitality As Evangelism at St. Mark's Malton



By St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Mississauga, Ont.

Jesus charged his disciples: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has for many years lived out the great commission by the work of many congregations across Canada. Our denomination has embellished the religious and historical landscape of Canada by contributing to the nation's fulfillment of Christian witness, education, and the development and strengthening of the social fibre for the upliftment and empowerment of many Canadians. The congregation at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Malton in Mississauga, Ont., is proud to be part of this legacy as we participate in keeping the Presbyterian heritage alive by ministering to lives in Malton and other surrounding municipalities.

Through witness, worship, fellowship and missions, we seek to continue to welcome people from across the world to our church family. We are a family in Christ united under the mission statement: "Out of many nations we are one family in Christ."

Canada continues to welcome immigrants from many countries and many of Canada's immigrants are people of Christian faith. Over the past two years, St. Mark's has experienced significant growth in the number of new visitors who worship with us each Sunday. Many of these visitors are new immigrants while others have moved from other



New members at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church Malton in Mississauga, Ont.

places in the Greater Toronto Area. There are yet others who have re-established their ties with St. Mark's and have travelled from significant distances to share in worship with us each Sunday.

We realized that in order for the church to grow we had to be deliberate in providing a place of welcome and warm embrace, where visitors and newcomers to our congregation would feel a sense of belonging. Through thoughtful engagement, discernment and prayer we started what many church growth practitioners call, "Hospitality Evangelism." Through this initiative and church growth strategy we engaged and created space for all who visit each week and we have extended welcome to everyone, which has resulted in our congregation's

growth over the past two years.

The evangelism through hospitality initiative became the driving force behind St. Mark's growth, and we thank God for all members of our church family who have worked hard and have been welcoming others.

What is hospitality evangelism and how do we carry out hospitality evangelism at St. Mark's?

The New Testament word that is translated to "hospitality" is a combination of two words which mean "love" and "stranger." Hospitality is how we love strangers.

Hospitality evangelism, then, is a means of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ through love of strangers. In the setting of our church, it refers to welcoming others into our church family so that they may see, hear and experience Christ's love for others.

As we practice hospitality evangelism in our church family, we strive to:

- Share the gospel through the word and our lifestyle so as to extend God's kingdom
- Provide opportunities for worship, mission, service and church family fellowship
- Support, encourage, teach and nurture those who come within our church family
- Reach out to those who are less fortunate and are struggling to get by
- Increase our mentorship of youth and encourage them to grow in faith.

As people visit our congregation each week, we invite them



to our after-worship fellowship where we get to meet them on a more personal basis. As they continue to come each week, we get them involved in the life of our church by asking them to read scripture, do candle lighting liturgies and other spiritual activities.

We are thankful to God that our church was able to welcome many newcomers into the membership of St. Mark's through Profession of Faith, membership reception and baptism. Over the past two years, we have welcomed more than 30 new members and a similar number of new people to our church are adherents who worship with us every Sunday. The growth of our church family is a great source of encouragement for us at St. Mark's as this ensures our

congregation's viability for some time to come. Through our Hospitality as Evangelism initiative, we continue to extend welcome and embrace everyone who comes to St. Mark's for worship. We continue to give God thanks that our siblings in Christ are finding a sense of belonging, welcome and embrace in our church family.

These children of God may come from different places, but they have all been blessed with different God-given gifts. They have already started to serve the Lord at St. Mark's in different ways through worship, service and witness. We look forward to all that God will do through them as they continue to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.





The mitten tree at Calvin Presbyterian Church in Halifax, N.S.



Trivia Night took place at Calvin Presbyterian Church in Halifax, N.S., with the Rev. Michael Koslowski leading the group.



Each year, the congregation of Kenyon Presbyterian Church in Dunvegan, Ont., holds a special "Old Tyme" service on the third Sunday in September. During this weekend, the community conducts a War of 1812 re-enactment that is staged at the Glengarry Pioneer Museum. This past September, Kenyon's Interim Moderator, the Rev. Jim Ferrier (pictured left) performed an 1812-themed wedding at the museum as part of a special event for the re-enactment. The other costumed volunteers in the photo are Rosemary Chatterson (church pianist), James Prevost (church elder), Carol Wibby and Les Wibby (town crier).



During the annual meeting in February at Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., a helpful Sandi Churchill kept a watchful eye as Finance Chair Len Gale prepared to burn an "IOU note." It signified the final payment on a \$1.2 million building loan taken out in 2011 and was due to be paid off by 2025. Generous donations and redirected facility revenue were key to the early closing of the loan. The congregation is grateful to God for the new opportunities realized in the building expansion and the ministries it provides for. (Note: Sandi, the Leading with Care convener, made sure there was a bucket of water at the ready!). PHOTO CREDIT: IAN CHURCHILL



On Sunday, Feb. 4, 2024, during the worship service, the Rev. Douglas E. Blaikie was named Minister Emeritus by the Session of Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Fredericton, with the approval of the Presbytery of New Brunswick. It is a title felt to be well deserved and long overdue. Celebratory cake was enjoyed by many well-wishers in the church hall after service.



The Rev. Elizabeth McLagan celebrated her 102nd birthday on Feb. 28, 2024. A member of Langley Presbyterian Church in Langley, B.C., she retired from Presbyterian church ministry while at Bradner's Presbyterian Church in B.C. She also served in Armstrong, Kerrisdale in Vancouver and at St. Giles, Prince George. She loved all her congregations and still stays in touch with many folks. Elizabeth also remains in contact with women from her many years in the Women's Missionary Society (WMS), and some women from the WMS White Rock group joined in for a birthday meal. It was a very happy day for Elizabeth!



The congregations of St. Andrew's, Cobden and Lochwinnoch around Arnprior, Ont., joined together for worship on March 3, 2024, to celebrate their minister, the Rev. Milton Fraser to mark his 60th birthday. There was music, food and lots of good vibes!



RESOURCES FOR WORSHIP
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On February 25, in a joyful celebration of God's grace, 19 members were received by affirmation of faith and baptism at Willowdale Presbyterian Church in North York, Ont. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).



Members of Knox Presbyterian Church in Kouchibouguac, N.B., are leading and participating in the "Zoomers on the Go" program. Zoomers on the Go was created to improve people's balance and reduce the number of factors that can increase the risk of falling for older adults. The program, developed by the University of New Brunswick, runs in 12-week sessions and is peer lead and designed for people 50 years and older. The classes consist of a warm-up, muscle strengthening activities, balance activities and stretching/cool down. The group meets twice a week at the local community centre. The program is free and is led by Karen Mazerolle, clerk of Session at Knox, who is a trained volunteer. The goal is to make a positive difference in the community by improving physical activity as well as giving the community an opportunity to socialize—which is good for mental health!



St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Lunenburg, N.S., Canada's oldest Presbyterian congregation, celebrated its 270th anniversary on Nov. 18, 2023, with a dinner and time for fun and fellowship. Entertainment for the evening included traditional Scottish reels and jigs, with the Rev. Tom Summers playing the fiddle. A special worship service on Sunday, Nov. 19, provided an opportunity to celebrate the church's history and give thanks to God for a long and vital ministry.



On St. Patrick's Day, the congregation at Knox Presbyterian Church in Georgetown, Ont., celebrated March birthdays for its members. Pictured with the Rev. Steve Boose are three of the birthday bunch: Joyce Golden and Joyce Marshall both turned 90, and Ethel McClure turned 96.



The Presbyterian Church of Saint David in Halifax, N.S., ordained and inducted two new elders on Sunday, Feb. 11, 2024. The congregation was delighted to welcome Sandra MacPherson (left) and Judi Henderson (right), and they celebrated with cake! The interim moderator, the Rev. Iona MacLean, is pictured at centre.



Crieff Hills Retreat and Conference Centre in Puslinch, Ont., hosted a clergy retreat in March, sponsored by the Ministry Forum at Knox College in Toronto, St. Andrew's Hall in Vancouver, and the Presbytery of Waterloo-Wellington. Ministers enjoyed an abundance of laughter, great food, worship and learning. Pictured are leaders Marijke Strong, John Borthwick, Ross Lockhart and Jeff Crawford, with music led by Drew Brown.



The Rev. Mary Fontaine, Moderator of the 2023 General Assembly, visited St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Newmarket, Ont., on April 7. She preached a wonderful and insightful message based on Isaiah 65:17-25 about connection, relationships and hope. The Rev. Laura Duggan, Diane Hamilton (clerk) and the Rev. Dr. Dan Scott (former moderator), with his wife Kelly Scott, enjoyed a lovely dinner with the moderator. The Session also had the opportunity to gather for lunch after worship on Sunday, with time to share stories and deepen connections. St. Andrew's congregation wants to thank Mary for her lessons, stories and time. Pictured above left is the Rev. Laura Duggan, Diane Hamilton (left) and the Rev. Mary Fontaine in the new sanctuary. Pictured in front of the old building is (left to right) the Rev. Laura Duggan, Diane Hamilton (clerk of Session), Carolyn Clementson (elder) and the Rev. Mary Fontaine.



The congregation at Knox Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., is reinforcing relationships with a Syrian family who began arriving in Canada after the 2011 Syrian War. A few years ago, a member of the family approached Knox to ask for assistance in co-sponsorship with PWS&D. The forging of the relationship thus began. Over the years, it has deepened into friendships with this growing family. Three large celebrations have been held at Knox. This photo was taken in April at a breaking of the Ramadan Fast and a milestone birthday party for a family member. Members of the Knox Refugee Committee were also in attendance.



The congregation at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Lethbridge, Alta., held a special "Sonrise" Service, followed by a potluck breakfast, and Sacrament of Baptism during Easter Service. It was a moving service for the congregation as well as for the minister, the Rev. Daniel A. Surya, who baptized his own son.



The congregation of First Presbyterian Church held an Easter Sunrise Service at the Stellarton Town Square in Stellarton, N.S. It was a cool morning but with a glorious sunrise! The square is directly beside the church, and the Rev. Charles McPherson led the service.



The congregation at Grace Presbyterian Church in Saint John, N.B., was happy to welcome seven new members on Palm Sunday. Pictured, back row (left to right): Rebecca Brown, Mike Monohan, Lorne Brown. Front row: Brian Foster, Susan Johnson, Marilyn Bogle, Al Morrison.



On Sunday, April 7, at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Caintown, Ont., Louie Gyarmathy, sole surviving pilot of humanitarian relief efforts during the Biafran War (the 1967 civil war in Nigeria) was presented with two Certificates of Recognition for his service. Louie flew 122 flights into Biafra under extremely dangerous circumstances. A member of St. Paul's, he plays a role in the new award-winning documentary "Operation Lights Out," which is hosted by Angela Onuora. (Learn more in the Winter 2023 edition of the *Presbyterian Connection*, p. 37.) In the world's largest civilian war airlift in human history, The Presbyterian Church in Canada played a huge role, and the movie is a must-watch for all Canadians. In the midst of horror emerged a story of hope, heroism and humanity as this group contributed to saving over one million Biafran lives. Louie is pictured here with event organizer Angie Cowan (left) and the Rev. Marianne Emig Carr (right).

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A special celebration was held at West Vancouver Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, B.C., when the Rev. Wolody Sosnowsky, Interim Moderator, presented a beautiful Japanese willow tree to Nancy Farran, an elder for more than 30 years. Nancy has retired from Session due to a move to Salt Spring Island. Following the church service, all Session members honoured Nancy with lunch at a local Vietnamese restaurant. Pictured are four elders, each with over 30 years of service: Jean Lawrence, Nancy Farran, Nancy Perry and Joan Cooper.

On Sunday, April 7, the congregation of First Presbyterian Church in Brandon, Man., celebrated their minister the Rev. Laura Hargrove's 60th birthday.



On February 11, Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., and their partner The Road Church, co-hosted the southern Alberta premiere of the film "1946: The Mistranslation that Shifted Culture." The film has played at independent film festivals across North America and relates the story of the mistranslation of key passages in the 1946 Revised Standard Version of the Bible, resulting in the specific word "homosexual" being used for the very

first time in any biblical translation. The RSV went on to influence the language of many translations and transliterations throughout the 1950s and '60s before the passages in question were revised in the 1971 translation. Through the story of the 1946 translation, the film explores the intersections of faith, belief, biblical scholarship and North American religious culture. The event was free and sold out well ahead of the night. Following the film, panellists Nicole Leyton-Toro, Art Houweling and Nancy Shadlock shared their perspectives and answered questions from the capacity crowd.



The 2023–2024 concert series at Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., recently wrapped up for another season. Music@Noon provides free concerts to the community, presenting a range of artists and showcasing a diversity of music. Coordinator Donna Murray and a dedicated team of volunteers run the program from Fall to Spring. The April concert featured the Harmony Guzheng Ensemble, under the direction of Shirley Wong. The guzheng, or Chinese zither, is a traditional Chinese instrument with a history of more than 2,000 years. A large crowd appreciated the performance, which featured pieces ranging from traditional folk songs to contemporary compositions.



A Coffee House fundraiser for Camp Cairn was held at Armour Heights Presbyterian Church, in Toronto, Ont., on Saturday, April 20.

The congregation at St. David's Presbyterian Church in Scarborough, Ont., celebrated its 70th anniversary on April 28. Members of St. David's family past and present gathered for a special service of worship, led by former ministry team the Rev. Noel Gordon and the Rev. Dr. Dorcas Gordon. A wonderful luncheon and time of fellowship followed. The congregation is inspired and hopeful for what the Lord can do in and through them in the years ahead! Pictured are former minister the Rev. Dr. Dorcas Gordon and Joan Watson cutting the cake.



During Lent, Lochwinnoch Presbyterian Church in Renfrew, Ont., filled a wire hen basket with plastic Easter eggs. Each egg represented a donation of \$20. By Easter Sunday, \$1,300 was raised and donated to two local food banks.



On Easter Sunday, March 31, several youth joined Gale Presbyterian Church in Elmira, Ont., after completing their confirmation classes, which they had been participating in since January. Of course the congregation celebrated with cake!



The congregation at Knox Presbyterian Church in Morrisburg, Ont., held their annual Fish Fry fundraiser at the Morrisburg Legion and served 225 people. The event is famous for the homemade desserts.



A joyful celebration at Knox Presbyterian Church in Bayfield, Ont., took place late last year and cake was served, of course! By profession of faith into the church family, the congregation warmly welcomed nine new members to their vibrant, spiritual community. These new members will help to shape the direction of Knox and its presence in the beautiful community of Bayfield. Joining the church, and pictured here, are (left to right): Marten Dykstra, Laurie Dykstra, Susanne Carter, Judith Roy, Lois Kacsandi, Gerry Roy, Pieter VanMeekeren and Teresa Steel. Absent for the photo were Jan Meyer and the Rev. Lisa Dolson.



The above photo is from the Nowruz Table in celebration of Persian New Year held at Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., with the local Iranian community, on Palm Sunday, March 24.

Al Beardsall, senior elder at Elmvale Presbyterian Church in Elmvale, Ont., has had an incredible and gifted ministry of music. His presence and wisdom are also gladly shared with Session. Al plays the bass guitar each Sunday at worship, but his true passion and gift is playing the piano. Accompanied by his wife, Lila, Al has faithfully tended to music ministry at the Sarah Vista Retirement Home in Elmvale for over 20 years, where they play familiar hymns and music for the residents. Their music brings great joy to residents who attend the service on their regular visits. Al is a modest and humble man, who shares his faith and outreach with many others, simply through his actions of love and caring. It is this strong witness of Christ in his life that draws people to the church. The Elmvale congregation and the folks at Sarah Vista are so grateful to both Al and Lila for all that they do!



The Sunday school at Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., was busy creating prayer flags for VAPC's annual Earth Sunday service. With the help of VAPC's Faith Education Coordinator, Kyle Agbing, and the convener of the church's Faith Formation Group, Jo Colgan, kids of all ages created the flags from up-cycled material. Prayerful messages from the kids, written on the flags, included: Protect the Earth, Love, Hope, No Emissions and Home. The flags will be strung and flown at the front of the sanctuary throughout the Spring.



Calvin Presbyterian Church in Abbotsford, B.C., held a special joint Good Friday service on March 29, 2024, bringing together members from four Presbyterian congregations: Bradner, St. Paul's, Langley and Calvin. The truly inspired Communion service included a special art installation, where, on the approach to receive the elements, people were invited to bring their burdens and troubles and lay them at the cross. Each person had the opportunity to dip the brush in red paint and place a mark on Jesus. It was a very powerful moment for all.



The congregation at Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont., is having fun supporting and enjoying God's ministry and mission. On Feb. 25, member Meg McCrae was recognized during worship for turning 99 years young. Her actual birthday was Feb. 28. In March, the Mission & Outreach team held a St. Patrick's Day-themed community pancake breakfast. In April, there was a community rummage sale.



The ministers of St. Paul's Lutheran, St. Matthew's United and Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in the Richmond Hill, Ont., area organized a time of spiritual reflection and fellowship during Lent. This was held on Thursday afternoons through Lent, where, through "Lenten expressions" of scripture, art, music and crafts, members opened their hearts and minds to what God has in mind for them. Pictured are the burning of the palms at St. Paul's Lutheran, and congregants learning about the intricacies of stained-glass windows at Richmond Hill Presbyterian.

Maundy Thursday, March 28, included an Ecumenical Worship Service at 7:30 p.m., held at Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont. The ecumenical event was organized by the Revs. Annette Smith (St. Paul's Lutheran), David Kim-Cragg (St. Matthews United) and Robert Hayashi (Richmond Hill Presbyterian). It included a foot-washing ceremony and the serving of communion.



Nearly 40 members of the Presbytery of Oak Ridges sent aside the morning of April 27 to explore congregational development at a workshop held at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Newmarket, Ont. The Rev. Dr. Jim Czegledi presented his research and findings on how small churches can be more vital and viable, while Karen Plater, Associate Secretary of Stewardship & Planned Giving, and the Rev. Jim MacDonald, minister at St. Andrew's, Markham, helped leaders learn strategic and practical ways to encourage generosity in their congregations by seeing stewardship as an important spiritual discipline and using planned gifts to support impactful mission and ministry. There was good energy among participants, who were committed to seeing God's mission continue through healthy Presbyterian ministries, far into the future.



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On May 5, the congregation at Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., took part in a Prayer Pilgrimage for Peace in the Holy Land. It was a time of praying, walking (5 km) and being together as a worshipping community sending out healing energies to the people in the Holy Land struggling to find hope and peace.



Gale Presbyterian in Elmira, Ont., undertook a community service project for Lent called "Project Purse." Pictured are Darlene Vandermay and Anne Church with over 40 purses filled with essential personal hygiene items. The purses were donated to the YWCA Kitchener-Waterloo Shelter.



Elmvale Presbyterian Church in Elmvale, Ont., is blessed with so many wonderful members and adherents. There is one very special connection and friendship within the congregation—that of Dolly and Annie, Elmvale's oldest and youngest members. Whether in the sanctuary or in the church's famous kitchen, the sharing and passing of faith through a love of Jesus Christ continues at Elmvale Presbyterian—and both Dolly and Annie wouldn't have it any other way.



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PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

Reaching Out to the Least of These

By Guy Smagghe,
PWS&D Director

When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy (Matthew 8:1-3 NIV).

PWS&D works with partners who seek to reach out to the "least of these." I interpret that as "the most marginalized, most left behind" people in society. I just recently returned from Nepal, where this was confirmed over and over again by our partner, International Nepal Fellowship (INF). Together, we went to the most remote places, where we saw how they reach out to those affected by leprosy, people with disabilities, and those who lost



The men's leprosy ward at the Shining Hospital in Nepal.

everything during recent earthquakes. In every case, they were working hard at helping people be better equipped to face life's challenges—with new opportunities for livelihoods too.

Nepalgunj is a town located near the border with India in western Nepal where PWS&D supports an INF leprosy program. Leprosy is a bacterial skin condition. For most of us, our immune systems protect us from those bacteria, but in places with extreme poverty, peo-

ple are vulnerable to it, and it can spread in communities.

Leprosy can be treated when diagnosed early. But a late diagnosis can create significant damage and may result in amputations of toes, fingers, or feet and hands. Nowadays, people who think they might have leprosy will seek attention from health facilities like the Shining Hospital in Nepalgunj, which has the expertise to diagnose and treat leprosy.

Leprosy only occurs in the

poorest of environments, where people's immune systems are weak due to malnourishment and poverty. All treatments through INF are free for those diagnosed with leprosy. The hospital staff also train government funded community health workers to identify cases of leprosy in communities and to do contact tracing to prevent further spread of the disease.

At the Shining Hospital, there is a ward for women and another ward for male patients. We visited both and interacted with patients. An old woman had lost all her fingers and all her toes as she had leprosy at a younger age when treatments were not so readily available. A man showed us the blisters he had on his feet after walking for days to get to the hospital to seek treatment.

Leprosy treatments can take time and it could be many months before a patient is released from the hospital. Patients form a small community during their time at

the hospital. They gather to wash the affected areas of their bodies in the courtyard of the hospital, which also provides an opportunity to get some natural light exposure, some fresh air and a time of fellowship. Many of the patients we met had beaming smiles on their faces. They were happy to see us and were so grateful for the care being provided to them.

INF is a Christian organization working in a largely non-Christian society. The staff we met were all so motivated and dedicated to their work, wanting to walk in Jesus' footsteps to bring back dignity to the lives of those who need a "hand up." It was obvious that they were all "willing," as Jesus was, to help overcome the afflictions of the "least of these." Having witnessed how INF goes about their work, I felt comforted in knowing that we have a strong partner in Nepal, and that together we are making a significant difference where it most matters.

Women Working Together in Nepal



A woman from the self-help groups shows their record books.

By Theresa McDonald Lee,
PWS&D committee co-convenor

In February 2023, Theresa travelled with PWS&D staff members Maria Carmona and Guy Smagghe to visit the work the church is supporting in Nepal.

In late February, I was in the rural district of Kalikot, on the north-western side of Nepal. Reaching this community took nearly 14 bumpy hours in a Mahindra Scorpio. This is a remote and poor area of Nepal, where farming is precarious and many must migrate seasonally to India for work. I was as far away from home as I had

ever been, but as I was sitting on the other side of the world, I was reminded of my grandmother and her friends from Glencoe Presbyterian Church in Glencoe, Ont.

For I was sitting in a circle of mostly women, who were part of a new self-help group that was determined to improve the lives of everyone in their community. Community mobilizers from International Fellowship Nepal (INF), a partner of PWS&D, had brought the group together. This is one part of a larger project addressing climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. With support and encouragement from INF staff, this self-help group was beginning to consider how to make change.

The women proudly showed us their meeting minutes and their financial record books. They shared their concerns for the community, which included drought, landslides, climate change and lack of income sources. They spoke of collecting wastewater for their kitchen gardens, about soil testing to determine the best crops for their region and learning to use their new disaster assistance kits. The women, in the face of great challenge, are acting together to encourage education, plant trees,

grow food, improve their income through small loans, prepare for disaster and create a healthy community.

One woman said, "One person cannot make a plan, but together we can do it."

This is why I was reminded of my grandmother and the women in my home congregation. Much like the women in Kalikot, they were rural women who found voice and action in meeting together as the WMS, the Women's

Institute and the Willing Workers. They shared their concerns and acted together, improving the lives of the people in their community and around the world. They worked to look after the children in the community, improve food safety and security, and raised and shared thousands of dollars over the decades.

I felt tremendous hope sitting with the women of Kalikot, as I know that committed women can create change that lasts. PWS&D,

working with INF-Nepal, is helping to provide the funding for the project in Kalikot. We visited just one self-help group, but throughout this vast region, there are 45 groups, with over 1,100 members. Each of those groups are being energized and supported by donations from Canada that will help them to respond to disaster and climate change, while helping their families and community thrive. It will not be easy, but together, they can do it.



The author (far right) with a women's self-help group in Kalikot, Nepal.

PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

Refugee Sponsorship Update



A sponsored family arrives at Ottawa airport in 2023.

By Biniam Goitom, PWS&D Refugee Sponsorship Coordinator

At a time when human displacement and forced migration have reached the highest levels ever seen, the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) estimates more than 110 million people are displaced globally.

In this difficult context, PWS&D is very grateful to everyone who contributes to the church's refugee sponsorship efforts. This includes PCC congregations, presbyteries and other groups. Over the course of the sponsorship process, with PWS&D's support, they develop applications, prepare to receive those they are sponsoring, await arrival and/or assist with the first year of set-

tlement in Canada—helping newcomers from around the globe build new lives.

In 2023, the Government of Canada allocated 82 sponsorship spaces to The Presbyterian Church in Canada. As has been the case for the past several years, requests to sponsor from Presbyterian congregations exceeded the spaces allocated by the Government of Canada. By the end of 2023, 28 applications were submitted to sponsor 82 individuals by 19 congregations or presbyteries.

For 2024, the Government of Canada has allocated the same number of spaces for named refugees as last year—82. Again, as in previous years, the request to sponsor exceeds the allocated spaces. A Refugee Sponsorship Selection Task Group will prioritize who will be sponsored based on PWS&D's Policy and Guidelines for the Prioritization of Requests to Sponsor Named Refugees. The policy considers individuals who are facing urgent or immediate threats to their life or physical well-being in their country of asylum, or those experiencing vulnerability based on factors such as gender, age, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, need for medical treatment, or experience of torture and/or violence. Family reunification in Canada and the duration of the time the individuals have been outside their coun-

try of origin are also considered.

For the Private Sponsorship of Refugees program, which Canada pioneered, to work effectively, timely processing should be a priority. We are still experiencing significant processing delays. There are many applications, from all immigration streams, still at the processing stage, and this has created a huge backlog within the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada system.

Over the course of 2023, 99 sponsored people arrived in Canada, originating from Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Iran, Myanmar, Pakistan, Somalia and Syria. This number reflects a significant increase from arrivals in 2022, when only 47 people arrived. In addition, there are 91 applications, representing 262 people, for which approval from the government and/or arrival is pending—some of these applications date as far back as 2017.

All these efforts, from start to end, to help vulnerable refugees are made possible by the welcoming spirit of the PCC congregations. We remain grateful for their ongoing and generous response to the needs of newcomers to Canada.

To learn more about how you and your congregation can become involved in refugee sponsorship, visit [WeRespond.ca/get-involved/refugee-sponsorship](https://www.werespond.ca/get-involved/refugee-sponsorship).



IMPACT 2023

In 2023, PWS&D and our partners undertook **58** projects in **27** countries.

116,274

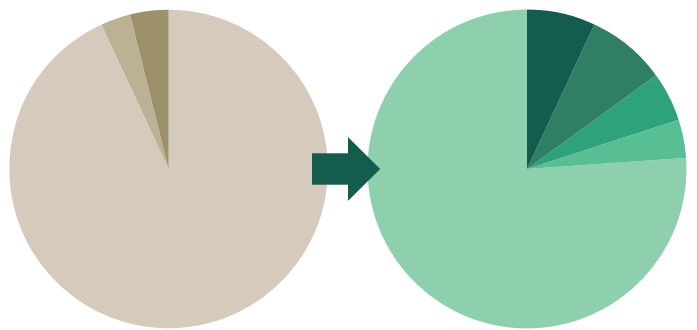
people participated in health, food security, livelihoods and human rights projects

129,580

people received food, water and sanitation, and other emergency assistance

PWS&D contributed to **\$10.8 million** worth of development and relief programs – **\$3 million** in development and **\$7.8 million** in relief.

This was possible because of **\$5.3 million** in donations from members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, including **\$2.6 million** in legacy gifts to the Loaves & Fishes fund and **\$369,000** to our Canadian Foodgrains Bank account.



For every dollar PWS&D spent in 2023*

- **93%** Development and relief programs (see following chart)
- **3%** Education and fundraising
- **4%** Administration

Program funds were spent on:

- Food security **7%**
- Health **8%**
- Human rights **5%**
- Livelihoods **4%**
- Relief **76%**

*This chart represents the full value of PWS&D programming in 2023—including Government of Canada matching funds through Canadian Foodgrains Bank and KAIROS.



JOURNEY FOR HOPE

Save the date! September 28, 2024

Gather your friends, family and congregation and join PWS&D's Journey for Hope. Cycle, walk, bake, or play and help those affected by food insecurity.

Visit [WeRespond.ca/JourneyforHope](https://www.werespond.ca/JourneyforHope) for more information!



To download or order the full 2023 Impact Report, visit [WeRespond.ca/Impact2023](https://www.werespond.ca/Impact2023)

PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

Improving Livelihoods for People with Disabilities

By Isaac Tiiga, Project Coordinator,
Presbyterian Community Based
Rehabilitation Centre in Garu,
Ghana

The partnership work of PWS&D in Northern Ghana has contributed tremendously to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities, their families and their communities, amidst daunting challenges of climate change and high poverty rates.

The Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) program provides training for people with disabilities in improved agricultural practices. This enables them to increase food production despite the effects of climate change. Improved techniques include producing and applying compost/organic

fertilizer to increase soil fertility, applying mulch to maintain soil moisture during times of drought, practicing early planting, and cultivating drought tolerant and early maturing varieties of crops, as well as dry season gardening.

Since 2021, a total of 2,015 farmers with disabilities have been trained in climate-resilient techniques and new methods of cereal, legume and vegetable farming, while a total of 794 farmers with disabilities have improved their livestock production skills to enhance their livelihoods.

Santos Amali, a project participant of the agricultural intervention has this to say: "In the past, I could not produce enough food to feed my family. The yields were poor due to poor rainfall patterns,

high temperatures and droughts. It was becoming increasingly difficult for us to survive. I am grateful to PWS&D and the CBR programme for coming to our aid with new farming methods and techniques that have been helpful in stemming the tide. I have been practicing the new methods of farming taught, such as organic fertilizer production and application and mulching. Now my farm yields have increased. I can produce enough for my family and to sell for income."

Beyond agricultural training, the program works to build the capacity of persons with disabilities to earn an income. Participants are equipped to engage in value addition/agro-processing, petty trading and vocational skills, and



Abdul Razak Ayawin received livelihoods training through the PWS&D-supported CBR program in Garu and is now a self-employed tailor.

together mobilize their resources through Community Savings and Loans Associations. Since 2021, a total of 979 persons with disabilities have been trained to engage in myriad economic activities like shea butter production and groundnut oil extraction, as well as weaving, dressmaking, hairdressing, and soap and pot-made production.

A final part of the program is Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs). These groups engage in advocacy against negative social attitudes, thus promoting the rights of people with disabilities. They also mobilize resources by making connection with other organizations (like District Assemblies or civil society organizations, etc.) to support their members' economic production.

The project though, makes a real difference for participants. Abdul Razak Ayawin, one of the young participants in the project, points out: "I am so happy that PWS&D and CBR came to my aid. At first, I didn't have any work to do and could not earn money to meet my needs. I am now self-employed in my tailoring job after going through training through the kind courtesy of the PWS&D and CBR partnership. I sew dresses to earn money and it is so lucrative. Now, I have enough for my basic needs."

Just "Peckish" or Truly Hungry?

By Nora Martin, member of
Knox PC in Woodstock, Ont.

What is it like to be hungry? Not just peckish, as we often feel just before we eat our next meal, but truly hungry? Around the world, 783 million people are hungry, according to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Such numbers are too big for most of us to comprehend.

In November 2023, I had the privilege of going on a Food Security Learning Tour with Canadian Foodgrains Bank to Malawi, where The Presbyterian Church in Canada and PWS&D have worked for years. Gradually during this

tour, I experienced the numbers beginning to represent real people like me.

The highlight of the tour for me was spending the night with a family in a village in Mulanje district. Our overnight stay was arranged by CARD (Churches Action in Relief and Development), a partner of PWS&D, who were also in charge of a food assistance project that provided cash distributions for families affected by Cyclone Freddy.

From the moment I was welcomed by Mrs. Mpamba, until the moment she hugged me goodbye at the bus the next day, I was her honoured guest, a member of her

family. She graciously allowed me to help with some tasks, such as preparing the eggplant for cooking, and the following morning, heaping up the ridges in the field with a hoe, digging holes for the seeds of corn they hoped to plant when the rains came, and watering their eggplant seedlings.

Mrs. Mpamba, her husband and I spent the evening talking about our families and what it's like to live in Malawi and in Canada. They were as interested in me as I was in them!

The following day, I accompanied Mrs. Mpamba to the cash distribution point, where she was to collect the next instalment of cash. I did not know until then that her household was one of the 2,500 served by the project. It was an eye-opener for me; here was Mrs. Mpamba, chief of her village, a respected member of her community, with her husband, owner of a substantial brick house and some land, but because of one missed harvest, she was food insecure and in need of help. That's living on the edge! And 70 percent of Malawians are living at or below the poverty line.

It was humbling to realize how fortunate I've been all my life despite having grown up poor. This is true poverty, food insecurity—not knowing if the harvest will come, or how good it will be,

and asking, "What if it fails altogether?"

When Mrs. Mpamba sat down with me shortly before I left, she told me how honoured she was by my staying with them and "helping" with the work. I was almost speechless, but I managed to express how honoured I felt by her generous hospitality, and the way she had made me feel part of her family.

Mrs. Mpamba is just one of many people who are being helped by the Foodgrains Bank, PWS&D and its other partner organizations. I was moved over and over again by the hopefulness of the people we met, and by their faith in God. If you ever wonder about the importance of the work of PWS&D or the Foodgrains Bank, just think of Mrs. Mpamba and others like her. They see God



Mrs. Mpamba watering her bed of eggplant seedlings

in people like you, people who help them in their hour of need.

PWS&D is continuing to respond to the food security needs of people in Malawi, supported by the generosity of Presbyterians in Canada. Thank you for your commitment to this important work.



The author with a group of children from the village she stayed at in Malawi.

**Champions
for Change** 

COMING THIS FALL:

PWS&D Champions Retreat

Join other PWS&D Champions at Camp Kintail (Goderich, Ont.)
from October 4-5, 2024
to gather and learn about the work of PWS&D

Find out more and register at

WeRespond.ca/Champions-retreat-2024

INTERNATIONAL

Cutting Edge of Mission Award: Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries

Each year at the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, an award is given to recognize a person or group for their work on the cutting edge of mission.

The recipient of this year's Cutting Edge of Mission Award is Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries, whose mission is to equip the church at the local level to support mental health and well-being.

Mental health issues have recently been at the forefront of public discussions. They are raised in the broad context of pandemic recovery and economic pressures, as well as concern over climate change and global conflict. Pressures on educators, health care professionals and emergency responders, for example, also raise awareness

of such issues in the workplace. Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries is a worldwide, ecumenical network based in Vancouver, B.C., that provides resources that engage concern for mental well-being in the context of our faith. These resources have been developed in collaboration with theologians, mental health professionals and people who have experienced mental health challenges. The resources integrate theological, psychological and lived experience perspectives, and have been developed with the conviction that informed and empathetic conversations about mental health challenges can transform communities of faith.

Sanctuary resources are offered free of charge to congregations to raise awareness and understanding, reduce stigma



in talking about mental health, and promote mental and spiritual well-being. They are designed to open conversations in the congregational setting that can become vehicles of God's healing power and hope.

The Cutting Edge of Mission Committee is pleased to welcome Daniel Whitehead, CEO of Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries, to the General Assembly

of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in June 2024.

Learn more about Sanctuary Mental Health Ministries at

sanctuarymentalhealth.org. To view past recipients of the Cutting Edge of Mission Award, visit presbyterian.ca/cutting-edge.



SANCTUARY
Mental Health Ministries

WOMEN

Maitland Presbyterial Spring Rally

By Caryl Scheel

"Caring for Each Other" was the theme of the Spring Rally for the Maitland Presbyterial of the WMS, hosted by Knox Presbyterian Church in Kincardine, Ont., on April 10, 2024. Twenty-two members were registered and one guest attended this enjoyable day.

After coffee and registration, co-president Judy Watt welcomed everyone, and Joan Threndyle gave a brief history of Knox Kincardine, as this year marks the congregation's 175th anniversary. Many artifacts and pictures were on display.

After the meeting began with our purpose and aim, guest speaker the Rev. Dan West of Knox was introduced by Caryl Scheel. After

completing a 12-month residency to accreditation for chaplaincy, the Rev. West served six years as a full-time chaplain at Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto. Serving in the Emergency and Trauma unit provided him with many challenges and experiences that he shared at our rally. Support and care for the dying and their families was a concern for everyone in attendance, and learning a palliative approach to those in trauma was a lesson learned in connection with our theme. On behalf of everyone in attendance, Bev Faubert of Wingham thanked the Rev. West for his presentation.

Following the presentation of the nominating report and election of officers for 2024, led by presbyterial President Donna Sut-



Pictured (left to right), back row: the Rev Dan West, Caryl Scheel, Donna Sutton, Joanne Lennips. Front row: Norma Raynard, Mary Simmons, Betty Johnson, Mae Raynard.

ton, the Rev. West led the installation of officers and closed with a prayer. A delicious lunch with social time was enjoyed before resuming the business portion of our rally.

Lucknow WMS led the worship service with Joanne Lennips, Erima Haldenby and Betty Johnson presenting on a devotion by

author Gwyneth Whilsmith. This portion of the meeting closed with the singing of the hymn "Brother, Sister Let Me Serve You."

Mary Simmons of Belmore led the "In Memoriam" for Mary Eadie of Belmore, Lois Farrish of Lucknow and Joan Marr of Kincardine. The presentation of 2023 reports were seconded and

passed.

Joanne Lennips issued an invitation to the Fall Rally to be held in Lucknow in 2024, and Lorraine Clugston of Wingham gave courtesy remarks to Kincardine for hosting this day.

The lovely day of sunshine and fellowship was closed with the singing of a hymn.

WOMEN

Love in Action: Paris Presbyterial



The presentation of certificates to Kathy Thomson and Norma Wilson.

Submitted by Jane Ashenden and Deb Melnyk

“Sustaining our Love for the WMS: Love in Action,” based on Jeremiah 6:16, was the theme for the Paris Presbyterial annual meeting in February at Paris Pres-

byterian Church in Paris, Ont. After a hymn sing, Embro’s Marybel Brenneman lead the worship and memorial service. Her meditation was based on the scripture and a trip in 2000 in a 1951 Pontiac with no GPS to Route 66 in California, using only maps and trusting in

God’s Prayer System (GPS).

Guest speaker Deb Kallendar-Stimphl, a committee member of Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D), gave an interesting and inspiring presentation of the mission work in 20 countries with some 38 projects. Deb alluded to the great staff at PWS&D who have displayed a real heart for mission over 75 years.

Lunch consisted of delicious soups from The Raw Carrot with auxiliaries supplying extras. During the business meeting, a discussion of the future of the WMS was held. Certificates were presented to: Norma Wilson and Kathy Thomson in gratitude for the hundreds of knitted pocket prayer shawls, which have been sent to Stratford Medical Depot to be included in containers to needy countries; retiring secretary of 20 years Elaine Stevens; and outgoing president Shirley Miller.

Gratitude was expressed for past service to the presbyterial to the Rev. Mark and Susan McLennan for their musical leadership at meetings, and Mark as a former presbyterial president. They will be relocating to the Maritimes. Susan McLennan, a former council president, inducted a full slate of officers. Incoming president Deb Melnyk of Simcoe, closed with prayer and shared that the presbyterial executive is planning for future events to draw our Christian sisters together in purpose, service and fellowship.

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Deb Kallendar-Stimphl presenting on the work of PWS&D.



Officers of the Paris Presbyterial (left to right): Shirley Miller, Deb Melnyk, Jane Ashenden, Marybel Brenneman, Marti Dreyer, Susan McLennan (Induction). Absent: Lisa McLaughlin-Kent.

WMS Brockville Presbyterial’s “Annual” Meeting

By the Rev. Marianne Emig Carr, Press Secretary, WMS Brockville Presbyterial

The WMS Brockville Presbyterial met again for its “Annual” meeting after a long break due to COVID-19. So the business of four years (from 2019 to 2023) had to be consolidated into one meeting,

making for a very full day!

Entitled “Forward in Faith,” the meeting was held at St. Paul’s Presbyterian Church in Kemptville, Ont., on March 15, opening with worship led by members of the current Presbyterial Executive. The attendees considered written reports from the executive, updates about presbyterial finances and

heard about the work that had been done during and after the pandemic by the presbyterial’s constituent groups. The presbyterial then reviewed and discussed “The Way Forward,” the letter recently issued by the WMS’ Council requesting input from groups, presbyterials and synodicals about the WMS’ future in an era of declining attend-



ance and aging members.

After a delicious lunch, Guy Smagghe, Director of Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D), gave an online presentation about his recent travels in Jordan and Nepal to visit PWS&D partners, followed by a Q&A.

An “in memoriam” ceremony for WMS group members who had passed away through the last several years was led by the Knox Morrisburg group. It was followed by the installation of the Presbyterial Executive by the Rev. Samer Kandalaft of St. Paul’s Kemptville. Janet Jones, Presbyterial President, expressed her thanks to those who helped to organize the annual meeting, and to everyone



who continued to do the work of WMS. The meeting closed with singing and prayer.

The attendees left with a sense of hope and excitement at being able to again gather to worship and serve. Planning is underway for a Fall Rally sometime in the autumn of 2024. Everyone agreed that the presbyterial would not wait another four years for the next “annual” meeting!



REFLECTIONS

Embracing the Jethro Principle:

Finding Strength in Community as a Woman of Colour in the PCC

By the Rev. Sandrah Mashingaidze, Wexford Presbyterian Church and Knox Presbyterian Church Agincourt in Scarborough, Ont.

In Exodus 18:21, Jethro counselled Moses to “select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.”

In the book of Exodus, Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, offers timeless wisdom that resonates profoundly with those navigating leadership roles within religious communities. Exodus 18:21 advises Moses to select capable, God-fearing, trustworthy individuals to share the burden of leadership. This guidance, known as the “Jethro Principle,” not only provides a blueprint for effective governance but also speaks to the essence of communal support and shared responsibility. As a woman of colour serving two congregations in the Presbyterian Church—Wexford Presbyterian Church, and Knox Presbyterian Church Agincourt—the Jethro Principle has been a beacon of assurance in my journey. The landscape of religious leadership often presents unique challenges, particularly for marginalized voices like mine. However, through the lens of Jethro’s counsel, I have found solace in knowing that I am not alone in my service. In selecting capable individuals to assist in the governance of the community, Moses was encouraged to prioritize qualities that transcend superficial distinctions. Similarly, in my experience, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has embraced diversity and recognized the inherent value that individuals from all backgrounds bring to the table. As a woman of colour, I have been empowered to lead and contribute, knowing that my voice is valued and my presence welcomed.

In this reflection, I wish to share my perspective on how the church is evolving toward inclusivity and diversity, and the significance of

this journey for our growth and vitality as a faith community. When I first entered ministry, I was acutely aware of the underrepresentation of women of colour in positions of leadership within the Presbyterian Church. However, the warm embrace and unwavering support of my congregations have been a source of strength and encouragement. Together, we have embarked on a journey toward a more inclusive and diverse church community, where women of colour are not only welcomed but celebrated for their unique gifts and perspectives.

The transformation I have witnessed within our congregations is a testament to the power of intentional inclusion. By actively engaging in dialogue, education and reflection, we have challenged long-standing biases and dismantled barriers that have historically marginalized women and people of colour. As a result, our church communities have become spaces where individuals from all walks of life feel valued, affirmed and empowered to participate fully in the life and ministry of the church. Embracing diversity is not merely a matter of political correctness; it is essential for the vitality and growth of the church. When we open ourselves to the richness of diverse voices, experiences and perspectives, we create opportunities for mutual learning, growth and transformation. In embracing inclusivity, we reflect the boundless love and hospitality of Christ, who welcomed all into his embrace without exception.

As I reflect on the journey of our congregations toward inclusivity and diversity, I am filled with hope for the future of the Presbyterian Church. I envision a church where women of colour are not only represented in leadership but actively supported and empowered to exercise their gifts for the flourishing of the church and the world. I envision a church where diversity is celebrated as a reflection of God’s creativity and love, and where all are welcomed as beloved children of God. The journey toward inclusivity and diversity is not always



The Rev. Sandrah Mashingaidze.

easy, but it is essential for the church’s growth and vitality. As we continue to embrace the richness of diverse voices and experiences, may we be transformed into a community that reflects the love and hospitality of Christ to all who enter our doors. In the Presbyterian Church, I have found a community that not only embraces diversity but actively celebrates it as a reflection of God’s boundless creativity. In a world often marked by division and isolation, the Presbyterian Church stands as a beacon of unity, where individuals from diverse backgrounds come together in

fellowship and solidarity.

The warm embrace and unwavering support of the people of Wexford Presbyterian and Knox Agincourt have been a source of immeasurable strength and encouragement throughout my journey as a Black female pastor. This support from my congregants has been evident in countless ways, whether through heartfelt words of encouragement, acts of kindness and hospitality, or a willingness to engage in difficult conversations about race, gender and privilege. Their openness and receptivity to my leadership have affirmed my calling and inspired me to serve with greater confidence and authenticity.

One of the most remarkable aspects of serving God’s people as a woman of colour is the sense of camaraderie and collaboration that permeates every aspect of our ministry. Equally impactful has been the support I have received from my colleagues within the Presbyterian Church. As fellow ministers of the Word and Sacrament, they have walked alongside me, offering wisdom, guidance and solidarity in times of need. Through shared experiences, mutual encouragement and collaborative ministry endeavours, I have come to realize that I am not alone in this journey. We are part of a larger community of faith, bound

together by our shared commitment to proclaiming the gospel and embodying the love of Christ in the world. In times of doubt or discouragement, it is the collective strength of this community that sustains me. Knowing that I am surrounded by a network of fellow pastors, elders and congregants, who are rooting for my success and cheering me on from the sidelines gives me the courage to persevere in the face of adversity. Together, we form a tapestry of diverse voices and experiences, each contributing to the rich tapestry of the church’s witness in the world.

My journey as a woman and a minister of word and sacrament has been both challenging and rewarding, but throughout it all, I have never felt alone. Just as Jethro advised Moses to delegate his responsibilities and appoint capable leaders to assist him in guiding the Israelites, so too do I find myself surrounded by a network of dedicated colleagues, elders and congregants who walk alongside me on this journey of ministry. I am blessed to be part of communities that embody the spirit of the Jethro principle. From my fellow ministers and elders, to the congregants who fill our pews each week, I am surrounded by individuals who offer unwavering support, encouragement and love.

A SPECIAL PLACE WITH A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU!



With 200 years of history, Boston Presbyterian Church is looking to the future! Serving the community of Milton (an hour’s drive from Toronto), we are in the beautiful Niagara escarpment, providing a combination of the excitement of city life and the tranquility of the outdoors.

Our church is seeking a spiritual leader to help us move forward and engage with the community. Learn more about this unique opportunity by going to bostonpresbyterianchurch.ca



REFLECTIONS

Knowing God

By Ann McKibbin, Professor Emeritus, McMaster University Medical School, The Gathering Place in Port Colborne, Ont.

I grew up in a small community, where our local United church was the centre of the community. My family has a strong faith background and by the time I left home for university I had 16 years of perfect Sunday school attendance. My teachers were, however, not always eager to have me in class as I was always asking tough questions. One of my big questions was: How can we know an unknowable God?

I still consider this question today, because I believe it is vitally important to try to know God. Knowing God is what God wants and ask of us. Hosea describes a people destroyed because they did not know God. Jesus says that we need to know God: Knowing God is equated to salvation (John 17:3). In Philippians 3, Paul states that his goal in life was to know God.

Yet, God is ultimately unknowable—we cannot comprehend God, for God’s thoughts are unattainable. Isaiah 55:8–9 says that the distance between our finite, transient thoughts and God’s infinite wisdom is higher than the distance between the heavens and the earth.

Still, we are encouraged to

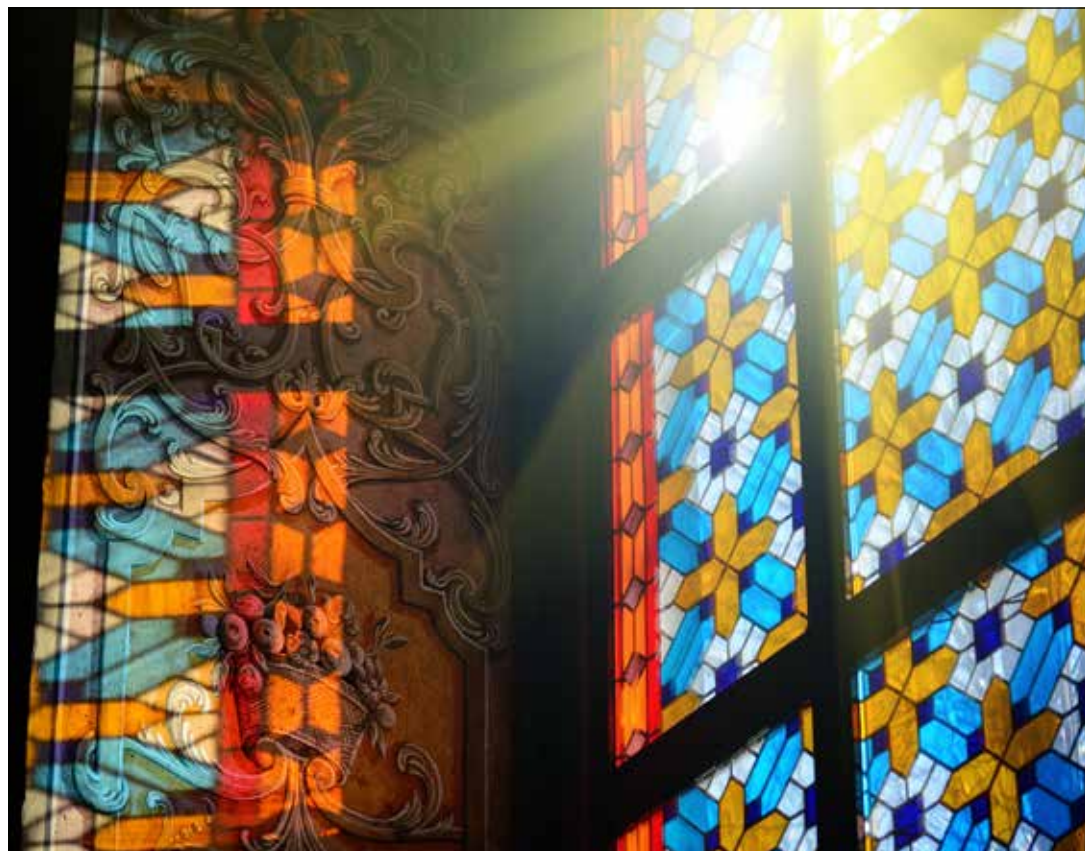
know God. However, as Paul writes, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12 KJV).

The Very Rev. Thomas Hopko, an Eastern Orthodox Christian priest and theologian, helps us somewhat in our goal of knowing God when he says, “You cannot know God—but you have to know him to know that.”

So how can we “know” God? Several ways exist and I want to talk about two of them. Both are biblical. We can use the Bible to learn about God through studying God’s attributes and images. Both attributes and images, or metaphors, give us small glimpses of insight into knowing God.

We know more about a person when we know their attributes. Many of us in our congregations have notable attributes. Any church I have been involved with has individuals who are musical, great cooks and bakers, carers and welcomers, designers and decorators, fixers of broken mechanical things, gardeners, organizers, teachers and treasure-holders. We know these people, partly because of their attributes, and these people help make our churches.

The Bible assigns attributes to God that can help us know more



about God. For example, God is Love. God is all kinds of love: friendship, family love, unconditional love, tough love, affection and even passionate love (Song of Solomon).

God is also Creator—past, present and future. God is inclusive, as God’s love includes everyone. God is caring, comforting, protecting and good. God is also mighty and powerful. Another attribute is that God is triune: father, son and holy spirit.

We also get to know about a person (and God) using images or metaphors related to them. Many images and metaphors of

God exist in the Bible, and these are glimpses that help us know God just a little bit better. Here are some that are important to me:

Wind

Wind—or breath—is often symbolic of the Holy Spirit (Job 33:4; John 20:22; Acts 2:2). In Ezekiel 37:1–14, the wind blows across dry bones in the desert and brings them back to life. I think about storms on the lake, tall ships sailing, summer breezes.

Fire

Our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29). God is also described as a pillar of fire to give light in Exodus 13. There’s also Moses and the burning bush in Exodus 3. When I think about God and fire, I think of warmth, campfires, hot chocolate, deep baths, long showers, flannelette sheets and furnaces that work.

Rock

My God, my rock in whom I take refuge (from Psalm 18). Also see Psalms 78:35, 62:6–9. I think of strength, permanence, foundations, beauty, beach rock, Northern Ontario, the Rockies.

Water

Water is mentioned more times in the Bible than faith, hope, prayer and worship. God as water quenches thirst permanently, cleanses us, and is living water. Think of our lakes, rivers, cold drinks and rainy seasons.

Sun and Light

In Psalms 84:11, God is a sun,

and in 1 John 1:5, God is light, and in God there is no darkness at all.

There are many other metaphors for God in the Bible: eagle, warrior, gardener planting the Garden of Eden, shepherd, potter, knitter who knits me together in my mother’s womb, teacher, and even lover. One metaphor is God as Father. This is a powerful image of God and is vitally important to many people. Father images associated with God connote protection, provision, unconditional love, intimacy, goodness, strength, family unit, discipline and so much more.

At the same time, those of us who have experienced substandard parenting, domestic violence or sexual abuse, either personally or in our family or friends, hunger for multiple or other images and descriptions of God in addition to father. These alternate images and names of God are refreshing, expanding and may even start a healing process.

God as Mother is also scriptural—birthing, nurturing, and caring for us as we grow. Other images show God as a mother bear or eagle, hen, midwife and milkmaid. Genesis 1:27 states that God created men and women in God’s image—a very powerful concept.

Spend some time with the Bible to discover the many images and metaphors of God that will help you better know God. We are children of a marvellous, wondrous, majestic God who cannot be fully known. We do know, however, that we are loved and blessed to be in God’s family. Amen.



Committee on History Collection of Stories

In recognition of the PCC’s 150th anniversary in 2025, the Committee on History is preparing a published collection of stories about where we have been, where we are, and where we are going.

Do you have a favourite memory of singing in choir, attending youth group, going to a potluck supper, attending General Assembly, or anything else that shaped your involvement in church?

What are some of the things your congregation is doing today to share the good news of Jesus in your community? And what are your hopes and dreams for the PCC as it approaches 150 years?

We want to hear from you! Please write to Ian McKechnie, Project Coordinator, at: pcc150book@gmail.com

Submissions will be accepted through December 2024.

REFLECTIONS

Honouring Sacred Spaces

The Rev. Dr. Nick Athanasiadis is a Transition Ministry Specialist currently serving with Central Presbyterian Church in Hamilton, Ont.

Perhaps you, like me, have grown up in church spaces. When I was a babe in arms I was taken to church. I was part of worship before I was conscious of worship, the prayers, the hymns, the organ sound, the human voices, the classic sounds so familiar to my ears, but also the smell of the wood pews, the paneling, the velvet covered mahogany chairs. But most of all as a child, I hesitate to admit, this was also my playground, where I and my friends tore around to the consternation of many an adult. Now an adult myself, conscious of safety, I caution running in church halls and church grounds with a slight grin.

Now, these spaces so familiar to many of us, the very architecture of buildings, and sanctuaries and furnishings, pulpit and font and table, are disappearing across North America, and they are being replaced by other living spaces: condos, or lofts, or offices, or even other worship spaces. We are right now amid the greatest shift in church buildings since, well, these buildings were first erected almost 200 years ago in North America, and though Cathedrals of the Middle Ages are maintained and re-

stored in parts of Europe, not all are. Some have disappeared, “and its place knows [them] no more.”

Are we just watching this happen? Well to a greater extent than we like to admit yes, we are just watching this transition happen—church buildings and spaces are disappearing. But—there is also a growing response, an attempt to manage, even steward, this transition rather than letting the chips fall where they may, rather than letting church buildings simply become real estate and letting the market dictate their fate.

Some are consciously being reoriented as places of refuge in their communities. Church buildings have traditionally located in the heart of the community, on “Church Street” in many a small town and village. Even in cities the local church, not to mention the Cathedral, is located in the most prominent areas. So now in the heart of town and city, the doors have been opened to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, even to become safe-injection sites, places for 12-step programs to gather, gathering places to hold vigil following a tragedy, places to reflect, to listen to haunting music as in the cathedrals and churches of New York City following 9-11.

We who are fortunate enough to still have ownership and therefore the privilege of stewarding these sacred spaces, also do not



have the luxury of receiving this heritage without deliberate planning for the future of what we hold dear, where the sacred still happens, where in good times and in bad we go steadily about the business of enfolding infants, nurturing the young, sustaining the mature, comforting the afflicted, proclaiming salvation,

celebrating the risen Lord, burying the dead, serving the least of these, who are Christ’s siblings in our neighbourhood and from places of conflict in other parts.

Change is a constant—we all know this. Nothing in the material world lasts forever, we know this too. All the more reason why we are being called to respond to the

change in ways which honour the eternal love.

“As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 103:15–17a).

Season of New Beginnings

By Susan Currie, Parish Social Worker for Place of Hope Indigenous Church in Winnipeg, Man.

I’ve always loved spring! Tulips and daffodils peeking through the earth. Robins, baby birds and frisky rabbits all speak to me of a new season. Leaves are budding and the grass is teasing shades of green as it waits for spring rains to wash off winter’s dirt and snow’s mold.

Spring also means Easter—resurrection and new beginnings!

New beginnings make me think

of new babies and the joy they bring. I am often asked what the purpose of Place of Hope Indigenous Church is. Besides healing and reconciliation, we encourage all to get an education and develop a relationship with Creator God, but I think our purpose begins with our babies. We love and teach and are consistent with everyone, but it all starts with the little ones. If a baby feels safe and loved, they can learn and grow and try new things. Babies grow into toddlers, preschoolers, school-aged children, youth and young adults. If we want

our youth and young adults to live positive lives, stay connected to the church and have a relationship with Christ, we need to love them unconditionally and celebrate their strengths. It takes a village to raise a child and our church family is that village.

Spring, with all its signs of newness, shows us that the seasons continue. Easter gives us hope that new beginnings are possible. Babies, like spring, show us that life goes on.

Be blessed with the season of new beginnings and love.



REFLECTIONS

Repositioning the Church in a Post-Christendom Age



Jiu-Jitsu students at a class held at First Independent Presbyterian Church in Ourinhos, Brazil.

By Eugênio Anunciação, Pastor at The Independent Presbyterian Church of Brazil and international student at the Vancouver School of Theology—Denomination studies

The following is a condensed version of the paper, "Dialogue and Pluralism: A Challenge to Repositioning the Church in a Post-Christendom Age."

It is practically impossible to think about Western culture and not associate it with the history of Christendom. In most of the Western world, Christian religion helped shape the countries' worldview and occupied a prominent place in many celebrations and public gatherings. However, the world in which we were created no longer exists; we are living in a moment of transition—the threshold of a new moment is unfolding.

This new moment, known as a "post-Christendom age," es-

tablishes that Christian faith is no longer a crucial element in the dialogue between those who say they believe and the culture in which they are inserted. There is evidence that much of contemporary culture is indifferent to Christian faith, which is no longer appreciated or considered culturally important. The Christian church and its traditional religious practices no longer seem to make sense in a world of constant transformation and questioning.

The cultural significance of Christian religion was immense during Canada's early years (see *Boundless Dominion: Providence, Politics, and the Early Canadian Presbyterian Worldview* by Denis McKim, 2017, p. 9.). In Canadian Presbyterianism, Scottish influence has been particularly strong, and there has been a profound impact of Presbyterian ways of thinking, both positively and negatively, on the social, po-

litical, economic, intellectual and cultural aspects in Canada (see *Burning Bush and A Few Acres of Snow: The Presbyterian Contribution to Canadian Life and Culture* by William Klempa, 1994, p. 4).

At one time, Canada identified itself as a religious country, and that religion was Christian. On July 1, 1967, in Ottawa, a crowd of 25,000 people gathered for the country's centennial birthday celebration. Prayers were offered, hymns were sung. Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson read from the Bible. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, accompanied by her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, was greeted by eight members of the clergy.

Consider that event with one held on Sept. 14, 2001, also in Ottawa in front of the Parliament Buildings, three days after the events of 9/11. Around 100,000 people gathered to mourn those lost in the attacks. Representa-

tives from many religions were seated on the dais. Prime Minister Jean Chretien, American Ambassador Paul Celucci and Governor General of Canada Adrienne Clarkson delivered brief speeches. There were no religious readings, hymns or prayers included.

We can see how much Canada has changed as a nation in just one generation. In the twenty-first century, no single religious faith, including Christianity, takes centre stage at times of national gatherings (see *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom* by Lee Beach and Walter Brueggemann, 2015, p. 17).

Based on data from Pew Research Center, there are facts about religion in Canada that point out that a declining share of Canadians identify as Christians, while an increasing share says they have no religion. Most Canadians say religion's influence in public life is waning, and relatively

few Canadians frequently engage in traditional religious practices. Two-thirds of Canadians say it is not necessary to believe in God to be moral and have good values.

In this postmodern and post-Christendom context, the disappearance of an institutional and privileged Christian narrative seems to be inevitable. Nevertheless, this secular age is not without the possibility of belief, transcendence and seeking deep forms of transformation. This does not necessarily indicate the end of the Christian faith.

A new reality is beginning to emerge, although we are only just beginning to glimpse it. Some scholars have identified this historical moment as a movement of shift for the Christian church. All the social transformations occurring at this moment are causing us to be drawn away from "business as usual"; we are on a "threshold" between the familiar and the unknown, and this can be challenging, disorienting and unsettling.

According to the Canadian Census, although membership at Canadian churches increased after World War II, the population percentage decreased in the same period. The number of members was growing, but the proportion of churchgoers in the population was declining. This decline has been a significant topic of discussion for many Canadian churches, especially for the mainstream Protestant denominations that observed a decline both individually and collectively in terms of their share of the overall Protestant category over the four decennial Censuses between 1971 and 2001.

Presbyterians went from 9% to 4% in the same period while, between 1991 and 2001, the number of people who identify with the Presbyterian church declined by 35.6%. As well, the major Protestant denominations in Canada tend to have an older demographic than the average population. This highlights the significant transformation that has taken place over the past half-century.

What could have happened to Canada's mainstream Protestant

REFLECTIONS

Continued from page 36

denominations in the last century to contribute to such significant shifts?

Reginald Bibby, a Canadian sociologist, has conducted surveys every four years for more than 25 years to demonstrate how religious affiliation has shifted among younger people in Canada. From 1984 to 2008, there was a decrease of 47% among Canadian teenagers who identified themselves as Protestant or Catholic, while at the same time, 32% of Canadian teenagers reported themselves as “nones” in terms of affiliation, and 16% reported themselves as affiliated with some non-Christian faith (see *The Emerging Millennials: How Canada’s Newest Generation Is Responding to Change & Choice* by Reginald Bibby, 2009, p. 176). It seems like Canada is rapidly becoming a different place religiously, and the fact that these changes are happening among younger generations signals that these changes are only beginning.

Understanding this moment of profound shifts is an opportunity for repositioning the Christian faith. We need to establish an essential dialogue between Reformed theology and pluralist society. It is time to ask questions like Jesus did in interactions narrated in the gospels. When we are willing to understand the heart of others, we improve our communication with them. An interesting

curiosity in the gospels: we find 141 questions addressed to Jesus and 217 questions asked by Jesus. He asked more questions than he had received. This signals something important in communication. The practice of dialogue entails adopting attitudes and behaviours that foster community life. Dialogue is decolonization.

For a congregation attempting to reposition itself in society, dialogue can be an essential tool for this transition. The church could start a movement of dialogue with different actors in society, like schools, colleges, other religions and political institutions. It is time to abandon the temptation of Christendom’s influence in society and return to be known as who belonged to the Way (Acts 9:2).

An excellent way to establish dialogue is to find and focus on common points of view. A perfect common point to start a dialogue is about the manifestation of evil in the world. Religious and non-religious people are concerned about this cruel reality. Reformed theology explains the reality of the evil in our world through the effects of sin.

“Sin alienates us from God. It offends the holiness of God, separates us from our Lord, and leads to spiritual death. It mars the divine image in us and infects our relationship with others and ourselves. Sin is a power present

in every human life, even at birth. It issues in such sins as pride asserting itself against God, indifference towards God and neighbour, untruthfulness, greed, lust, laziness, gluttony, envy, and selfish anger” (*Living Faith*, 2.5.2–2.5.3).

According to the gospels, our focus should be on loving God, loving others. This is how we avoid sin. And we love God when we love people. Sometimes, evil cannot be avoided, but we can face it through our love for God. Simply asking questions for society is a powerful way to demonstrate humbleness and attitudes and behaviours that foster community life.

Pluralism, in modernity, has become a globalized phenomenon. It is interesting that we are more and more connected in digital life but disconnected in real life. In theological terms, we are alienated. Alienation and disconnection are understandable concepts for postmodern and pluralistic people.

The effects of sin are evident in the relationship between colonization and religion. The Western, white influence of the Christian church has adapted to the materialistic and consumeristic worldview of North American culture, where the doctrine of “I did it my way” is prevalent. This has led to the view that God’s grace is “nice but not necessary.”

In this time of transformation,

not confusing *Christendom* with Christianity is crucial. Christendom refers to the cultural influence of the Christian religion, while *Christianity* encompasses all people who are disciples of Christ. “Christianity is the faith, Christians are believers in the faith, and Christendom is the collective culture and institutions of the faith” (see “How American Christendom Weakens American Christianity” by David French, 2021).

While the cultural influence of Christianity has been significant throughout history, the Christian faith is ultimately about following Jesus Christ and living out his teachings in our daily lives. As we face the challenges of a post-Christendom society, it is essential to remember that our goal is to share the love and message of Christ with others rather than simply preserving the influence of a particular religious culture.

As Christians, we need to humbly engage in meaningful conversations with diverse perspectives, including youth and those who have left our congregations. It is our responsibility to inquire about people’s concerns and offer gospel-centred solutions.

When I was pastor of First Independent Presbyterian Church in Ourinhos, Brazil, there were concerns with violence in the community. I considered the possibility to use space in our church

to teach martial arts—self-defence and Jiu-Jitsu. In a Session meeting, elders were uncomfortable with promoting any kind of violence. I explained for them the goals of this initiative and the importance of our relationship with our neighbourhood to testify the love of God in Jesus Christ. At the same time, I committed to attending all Jiu-Jitsu classes, to interact with the students, talk to them and learn from them. I was the first student enrolled. Some families started to visit our Sunday services and were integrated in the community life of the church. From an average of 50 participants in our Sunday services, we now have 250 people.

When I was pastor of the Independent Presbyterian Church of Itaquí, in the city of Campo Largo, the church was already a partner of city hall, providing a class for children aged 2–4 at a municipal school close to the church that did not have enough space for a classroom. When I started my ministry there, city hall asked the church to open five more classes to serve children until 12 years old. At the Session meeting, elders were divided whether they would accept the expansion of this partnership. I invited three elders to join me and visit other churches who have this type of partnership. During this time of research, visiting and praying, the Session decided unanimously to expand the partnership. For that, we needed to build more classrooms, but the church didn’t have the money. In addition to financial support from city hall, neighbourhood residents and businesspeople helped us build the teaching spaces. As a result, the church experienced an increase in the number of visitors to Sunday services.

Before my arrival at Independent Presbyterian Church of Itaquí, the church was already developing contemporary services. However, as a result, older people felt excluded from community life. I talked about this reality with the Session, and we started holding more traditional services, as an alternative to contemporary services, with the reactivation of the church choir. The result was that people who were away from the church returned to the community of faith, while other people who missed this type of worship in this city also became part of it. At this moment, the church has, between the two services, 650 people attending their celebrations on Sundays.



The choir at the Presbyterian Church of Itaquí in Campo Largo, Brazil.

STEWARDSHIP

Examining Data on Giving in Canada

By Dr. Lori Guenther Reesor, D.Min., speaker, writer and stewardship coach. Lori blogs at lgreesor.com, and is the author of *Growing a Generous Church: A Year in the Life of Peach Blossom Church*

Twenty dollars cash in an envelope for the weekly offering is quite common. Ask any treasurer. So, is a \$20 per week donation generous? Answer: It depends!

Tax filer data is the most reliable measurement of charitable giving. In studies asking people how much they donate to charity, people often describe themselves as considerably more generous than the income tax data shows. Humans forget that we're not great with numbers; we answer questions based on how we'd like to be. A weird but helpful comparison is alcohol consumption. People report drinking much less than liquor sales demonstrate. Charitable giving is the reverse: people self-report giving more than the charitable receipts demonstrate. Tax data is based on receipts. While there are reasons and ways people give that aren't receipted, most people who give \$20/week ask for receipts!

Generosity of the average Canadian donor

In Canada, someone who gives \$20/week or more is generous when compared to other Canadians. The fact is that the majority of Canadians don't give at all, at least in a receiptable way.

According to 2022 information recently released by Statistics Canada, the median amount Canadian donors gave that year was \$380: half gave more than \$380, and half gave less. That's to all causes.

Twenty dollars per week is \$86.60/month or \$1,040 a year (there are 4.33 weeks in a month). The typical Canadian donor gave \$380 annually; only 5% of Canadians gave \$1000 or more yearly.

So, \$20 a week is more generous than the typical Canadian donor. This aligns with many studies showing that people attending religious services regularly give the most overall.

But the story doesn't end there. Treasurers will also tell you that there are people in the congregation who give much more than \$380 every month. What do we know about those donors?

Let's zoom in on the smallest slice of the pie: the 5% of tax filers who donated more than \$1,000/year in 2022.

I removed the very few top donors who gave more than \$50,000 to eliminate the outliers. That left about 1.5 million donors who together gave over \$7 billion. The average for this group was \$4,692/year, \$391/month or \$90/week. (The median is probably lower, but the average still gives us a very good idea.) We should pause here to say, "Thanks be to God!" because these donors carry many places of worship and charities that benefit us all.

Based on church-giving data I've seen, that number rings true to me. It's this shrinking group of the most generous people who make it possible for churches to function well. They compensate for church members who don't give at all and for members who can't or don't give as much.

Older donors give more than younger donors

We can learn even more about these donors. In 2022, Canadians claimed over \$11 billion in charitable donation receipts. 34% of those donors were aged 65+, and collectively, they gave over \$5.4 billion. [1,684,145 donors x \$3,240 average giving = \$5.4 billion.] This means the Canadian donor aged 65+ gave an average of \$3,240. (The average is simply the total divided by the number of donors. The median is \$590. Half of senior donors gave more, half gave less.)

If you're sharp, you'll notice that older donors gave almost half of the total donations (\$5.4 out of \$11 billion). Correct! Forty-eight percent of the total giving in 2022 came from donors over 65, even though that demographic only comprised 34% of total donors. That's because older donors typically give more than younger donors.



While \$20 weekly in an envelope is more generous than the typical Canadian, it's not as generous as some of the faithful senior saints whose gifts carry many churches and charities in Canada. Our churches benefit from the generosity of these older generations, who will not be around forever.

Express gratitude

If you retain no numbers at all from this article, please remember that most Canadians don't give at all (in a receiptable way) and that our senior members tend to be some of the most generous people in Canada. It's their countercultural generosity which supports ministry. Their faithful giving expresses their gratitude to God. They have entrusted the church with their money to share as we participate in God's mission together. And thank the donors—they are giving when many aren't. Thank God for all the givers who support our churches.

Now, if you are wondering if you are a generous donor, we need to look at giving related to income.

Generosity related to income

Christians (and other faiths) believe in proportional giving. Give as you are able. If God has given you more, give more. If God has given you less, give less.

I'm reminded that \$1,000 a year looks different if you're making \$40,000 annually compared to if you're making \$100,000.

The median income of tax filers who gave gifts in 2022 was \$71,240, significantly higher than that of all tax filers, which was \$41,930.

Consider the typical tax filer who

made \$71,000 and gave \$380/year to charity. I wish there was a way to make that look more generous. It's about half of one percent. If that person gave \$1000/year (\$20/week) to charity, their gift still only reflects 1.4% of their income. If the person giving \$20/week is earning \$41,930, they are giving 2.3% of their income.

Since this is income tax data, we can look at total income and total giving. When we add it all up, Canadians gave 0.7% of reported income to charity in 2022. A quick refresher on percentages: 0.7% is not 7 cents on the dollar; it's 7 cents for every 10 dollars, 70 cents for every 100 dollars. Manitobans (with a big shout out to Winkler and Steinbach, the most generous cities in Canada) gave 1% of their reported income. I've talked to donors in both places. I can attest that Manitobans are not richer than their cousins in Ontario or British Columbia. They are more generous.

People who regularly attend church may be some of the most generous people in Canada, but when we look at what we are giving, the only way to answer the question, "Am I generous?" is by looking at what we have been given. Pray, "Lord, help me to be generous."

Generosity comes from learning

Now, some might say that we haven't looked at expenses. Someone making \$71,000 a year might support a family of four. Inflation has been crazy in the past few years, and the cost of living is high. In today's market, a young person or young family has to put a higher per-

centage of their income towards basic expenses, like rent and/or mortgage payments.

However, here's the thing: generous people don't wait until the economy or their circumstances improve. They find ways to give out of what they have. Many generous people give more during hard times, and people with lower incomes are often more generous (based on a percentage of income) than those with higher incomes. Generous people may volunteer a lot! They pray. Generosity means letting your money follow your prayers and sharing time as well as money.

Generous people might start small and grow their percentage as they have more discretionary income. They make an intentional, faithful decision about what they can afford to give and how to give that generously.

Generosity doesn't just happen. I've talked to lots of generous donors. They learned to be generous from their family, their church and their communities. They learned to give in grateful response to a generous God. They give in proportion to what they earn, and they do it before their other (often discretionary) expenses. Generous donors tell me, "Whatever I have given away, I have never, ever missed it."

Learning generosity comes from talking about money, seeing generosity and belonging to a generous congregation that both talks about giving and is generous in its giving—to the community and the world.

Generosity is a joyful and life-giving spiritual practice built by sharing stories and praying together. It grows our faith and communities. Thanks be to God!

DEATH NOTICES

Read full obituaries online at presbyterian.ca

Ruth Ann Drozd
Deceased April 30, 2024
London, Ont.

The Rev. Dr. Andrew Irvine
Deceased April 28, 2024
Hamilton, Ont.

The Rev. Dr. Charlotte Stuart
Deceased April 28, 2024
Toronto, Ont.

The Rev. David Sidney Heath
Deceased April 9, 2024
Kelowna, B.C.

Sheila Ann Cochrane
Deceased March 30, 2024
Stratford, Ont.

Frances Della Nugent
Deceased March 9, 2024
Kitchener, Ont.

The Rev. Stanley D. Walters
Deceased March 5, 2024
Toronto, Ont.

The Rev. William Campbell Smyth
Deceased February 29, 2024
Victoria, B.C.

Dorothy May Robertson
Deceased February 12, 2024
Halifax, N.S.

Margaret (Margie) MacLeod
Deceased February 3, 2024
Sydney, N.S.

Georgina Mary Bone
Deceased January 5, 2024
Saskatoon, Sask.



St. Andrew's Church in St. John's, NL, held its spring sale on a Saturday morning in the church hall. As she was leaving with her grandfather, Bruce Templeton, two-year-old Clara climbed the steps and sat by the church door. Bruce told her they would come back tomorrow for Sunday school, but she simply looked up and said, "I will wait, Grampie."

PULPIT VACANCIES

To see all pulpit vacancies, visit presbyterian.ca/vacancies

Atlantic Provinces

Alliston, WellSpring
(full-time minister)

Belfast & Wood Islands
(full-time minister)

Dartmouth, Iona
(50%-time minister)

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

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

Quebec & Eastern Ontario

Almonte, Community
(full-time minister)

Beaconsfield, Briarwood
(full- or part-time minister)

Inverness, Que. (full-time ecumenical shared ministry)

McDonald's Corners, Knox, Elphin & Snow Road
(part-time or stated supply)

Montreal, Snowdon Korean
(full-time minister)

Pembroke, First (part-time or stated supply minister)

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

Central, Northeastern

Ontario & Bermuda

Alliston, Knox & Mansfield, St. Andrew's (full-time minister)

Bramalea, North Bramalea
(60%-time minister)

Brampton, St. Andrew's
(full-time lead minister)

Guelph, Kortright
(full-time minister)

Harriston, Knox-Calvin
(50%-time minister)

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

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

Madoc, St. Peter's
(full-time minister)

Milton, Boston
(full-time minister)

Puslinch, Duff's
(half-time stated supply minister)

Toronto, Leaside
(full-time senior minister)

Toronto, Mimico
(full-time minister)

Toronto, St. Andrew's
(full-time associate minister)

Toronto, St. Mark's
(full-time minister)

Toronto, York Memorial
(half-time minister)

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

Vaughan, Vaughan Community
(full-time youth minister)

Waterloo, Joonim
(full-time senior minister)

Southwestern Ontario

Ailsa Craig, Beechwood
(part-time minister)

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

Arthur, St. Andrew's and St. Andrew's, Gordonville
(full-time minister)

Burlington, Brant Hills
(full-time minister)

Burlington, St. Paul's
(2/3-time minister)

Brussels, Melville & Molesworth, St. Andrew's
(full-time minister)

Dutton, Knox-St. Andrew's
(full-time minister)

Jarvis, Knox (full-time minister)

London, Trinity Community
(half-time stated supply minister)

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

Lucknow & South Kinloss
(full-time minister)

Mosa, Burns (full-time minister)

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

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

Stoney Creek, Cheyne
(full-time senior minister)

Stratford, Knox
(full-time minister)

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

Manitoba &

Northwestern Ontario

Selkirk, Knox (full-time minister)

Alberta & the Northwest

Calgary, Calvin Hungarian
(full-time minister)

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

Presbytery of Calgary-Macleod – General Presbyter
(part-time minister)

Red Deer, Knox
(full-time minister)

Sylvan Lake, Memorial
(full-time minister)


British Columbia

Surrey, City Centre
(full-time minister)

PULPIT VACANCY

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Churches - Lancaster & Martintown

The 2-point charge congregations of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Churches, Lancaster & Martintown in Eastern Ontario, are seeking an inspiring leader to succeed the previous incumbent of 35 years. We are eager to embrace new leadership by nurturing and encouraging a new minister and maintaining joyful, Christ-centered worship. Through God's Grace, the work of the Holy Spirit, strong leadership, and dedicated congregations, both churches continue to be a vibrant part of their rural communities.

 The churches are located in the Celtic Heartland of Ontario, situated along the St. Lawrence River between Ottawa and Montreal

 Learn more at: presbyterian.ca/lancaster-martintown-vacancy or email the Rev. Feras Chamas, Interim Moderator: interim-moderatoreoutlook.com

