



Wexford Language Lounge Café



With information provided by the Rev. Sandrah Mashingaidze, Wexford Presbyterian Church in Scarborough, Ont.



Located in Scarborough, Ont., Wexford Presbyterian Church serves a vibrant and growing immigrant community. Recognizing a need for local support, the church launched a program to help neighbours improve their English, develop computer skills and build meaningful connections—all over coffee and baked treats. Under the leadership of the Rev. Sandrah Mashingaidze, Wexford created the “Language Lounge Café” program, a welcoming, café-style environment where participants can practice English and gain digital literacy in a friendly, supportive setting.

At the Language Lounge Café,

learning goes beyond traditional classes. Participants join conversation circles, receive one-on-one guidance for tasks such as filling out forms or perform job searches, and can develop practical computer skills. The program’s attendance and retention have steadily grown, reflecting its reputation as a safe, judgement-free space.

The program’s success is rooted in intentional practices: small-group mentoring, life-skills lessons and consistent, trust-based support. Volunteers play a vital role in fostering a warm, inviting atmosphere that shares God’s

love and transforms learning into a shared, uplifting experience.

Participants have reported increased confidence, improved technological skills, reduced isolation and gained stronger social connections. Many have even become volunteers themselves, giving back to the community that welcomed them.

Looking ahead, the Language Lounge Café plans to expand

training sessions, introduce more conversation groups and bring in additional volunteers. The program remains dedicated to promoting education, dignity and a true sense of belonging for everyone who walks through its doors. In a world that can sometimes feel divided, the café demonstrates how sharing God’s love through community, care and connection can change lives.



Wexford Presbyterian Church received a multi-year grant from the PCC’s New and Renewing Ministry Fund to support the Language Lounge Café program. The total of capital and program grants distributed in 2025 from sources, over and above grants from Presbyterians Sharing, was \$1,994,543. **To learn more about funds offered by The Presbyterian Church in Canada, visit presbyterian.ca/funds.**

MESSAGE FROM THE MODERATOR

A Narrative of Love

By the Rev. Jeffrey Murray,
 Moderator of the 2025
 General Assembly

This has been a year of transitions. In addition to serving as Moderator of the General Assembly, I moved from serving in congregational ministry to serving as Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly. This has meant more travel and more opportunities to attend worship in different settings. I have delighted in opportunities to be in worship services as Jeff, rather than in an official capacity as Moderator, even in the congregation I used to serve, where I've been "benched," as one perisher joked. I have enjoyed many moments experiencing the warm welcome of many Christian communities and was drawn to the worship of God among God's people united by Christ's invitation to come, taste and see that the Lord is good.

The first worship service I was able to attend as a congregant happened to be outside in the Quiet Garden of the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul in Montreal, Que., where the Rev. Dr. Robert Faris (Moderator of the 2022 General Assembly) was co-celebrating Holy Communion with the Rev. Susan Brasier (Associate Minister of Community & Care). It was a special service held during Montreal's Pride festivities. In the garden, we gathered from scattered lives to be united around one table. Like all communion tables across the church, we are united in faith, drawn to the one Christ who loves each of the gathered, including—perhaps especially—those who were once unwelcome by the church.

Christ's table gives meaning to the rainbow banner often seen at Pride events that proclaims, "God's love includes everyone." The message in its simplicity is welcoming, but it also challenges the church as it reminds us that God's love extends an invitation. Whatever our individual stories were that day in the Quiet Garden, the love of God gathered us

there to be shaped by the love expressed in the sharing of bread and wine as a taste of something good: Christ's gratuitous self-giving love.

Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann beautifully describes the celebration of Holy Communion as "the journey of the church into the dimension of the Kingdom." In the feast, we arrive at a particular vantage point where, he explains, "we can see more deeply into the reality of the world." Individually, we come to the table bringing our lives, our identities, our gifts and aspects of ourselves that may not fit within other social settings. But at the table, Christ forms an unexpected new community that experiences the love of God, is shaped by it, and then sent out into the world as members of that new community.

The Narratives of Hope and Possibility report, presented at the 2025 General Assembly, gave focus to this foundational narrative of who we are and what motivates the church to be sent out into this anxious world. While a significant part of this work, continued by the Change Leadership Team (Special Commission), is in response to the current reality and the challenges many congregations are facing today with the mission, motivation and reason for being, the report articulated that the church of Jesus Christ is sent because of God's Love.

"Love is the motivation," the report stated. "Mission is rooted in love for the people whom God loves. 'For God so loved the world.' The world and all people are beloved. Jesus sends us to share in God's mission, empowered by the Spirit for the love of the world God loves. Mission that is not rooted in love (but in ambition or anxiety about our place in the world) ends up colonizing and learns little from where and to whom it goes." The centrality of Christ's love for the world, that gathers the scattered in worship and sends us out to share that love, honours all humanity, and grounds us precisely in the



The Rev. Jeff Murray (left) in Montreal with the Rev. Susan Brasier, associate minister; the Rev. Dr. Robert Faris; the Rev. Dr. Glenn Chestnutt, lead minister.

evangelical work of the church centred on proclaiming and living out the gospel.

The work of the church today of entering the world as God sees it, with love, is so vital and necessary because it presents a hopeful alternative to such false claims as Christian nationalism, which pursues power by conflating its policies with Christian faith and Christ's teaching. Frighteningly, the church's symbols, scriptures, traditions and the teachings of Christ are being stolen to support domination, war and the proliferation of ideologies that are inherently hateful and discriminatory. (For more on this subject, see page 12.)

This past winter, when the controversial Bill C-9 *Combating Hate Act* was being considered in parliament to amend the Canadian Criminal Code, letters were circulated to Christian communities, including a church where I serve as interim-moderator. The letter claimed that the "federal government is preparing to remove longstanding legal protection that allows Canadians to preach, lead and share their faith without fear of criminal prosecution." There was nothing in the Bill that supported this claim and assumption, but what the letter effectively did was cause outrage, even though it was misleading. The Bill further enshrined protections for people to access places of worship, where the word of God can be preached and faith shared, making it criminal to willfully intimidate or obstruct access. The misinformation in the letter was more divisive than unifying. What was particularly unsettling was that,

in response—the removal of the "good faith" religious defence—focus was not given to the gospel message but to a desire to defend proclaiming and sharing biblical passages found in Leviticus that give divine sanction to murder.

I don't believe the church or Christ is served well by exercising one's religious freedom to tap into divisive texts of the Bible that are used for hate. We know that leaning exclusively on certain Biblical text would lead us to reject many whom Jesus associated with; even Jesus himself was accused of blasphemy and ended up among the cursed being hanged on a tree. The hateful pursuit and lynching of Jesus was given religious backing. Yet, in his humility, he revealed a better way.

Pope Leo XIV's response to Trump's unhinged social media criticism of the pontiff's calls for peace around the attack on Iran and condemnation for bringing the name of God into the mix was a humble yet firm statement: "I have no fear of the Trump administration, or speaking out loudly of the message of the gospel, which is what I believe I am here to do." In quoting Jesus' beatitude for peacemakers, the Pope reaffirmed his commitment to "continue to speak out loudly against war, looking to promote peace, promoting dialogue and multi-lateral relationships among the states to look for just solutions to problems... Too many innocent people are being killed. And I think someone has to stand up and say there's a better way."

Jesus revealed God's love

through humility and by being in fellowship with the poor, marginalized, sick, oppressed and others dehumanized with labels like unclean and sinner. In contrast, Christian nationalism taps into the hateful, dehumanizing and even violent narratives of the world and finds scriptural text or theological language to give it divine support. When politics invites us to conflate Christ with violence, domination, war, or to tap into the more divisive and hateful passages lost among the laws of Leviticus, then it becomes all the more important for Christians to turn again to Jesus who shared the gospel and who invites us to taste and see what is good, that we might turn to discover God's better way.

As we are free to gather, to hear God's word preached and to celebrate Holy Communion, the church, and by extension each of us, overcomes the separateness of a divided world as we participate in Christ's Body. From the Lord's table we are sent out, a new community formed by God to love the world and to seek peace and reconciliation. While this profound work of the church may not have been heard widely or seen on the world stage by many in power or reported in the news, the majority of Christians gather in many spaces around the world, like the various congregations I visited this past year and like the Quiet Garden in Montreal. It is in these places the love of Christ is written repeatedly on the hearts of the gathered who are moved to go out into the world, unafraid to share the message of the gospel that God's love includes everyone.

What We Have Learned from Congregational Renewal

By Tim Dickau, Associate at the Centre for Missional Leadership, St. Andrew's Hall in Vancouver, B.C., and author of *Forming Christian Communities in a Secular Age*

Since Covid, St. Andrew's Hall in Vancouver has offered four iterations of our online Congregational Formation for Mission course at the Centre for Missional Leadership. We are excited to offer this course again in September, with a new name: Forming Churches that are Spiritually Alive in the Neighbourhood. This is a one-year program developed to educate, empower and equip church leaders and congregations.

Each time through the year-long course, together with congregational cohorts across the country, we have learned something new about how congregations can be reignited and more missionally engaged. Here are four key learnings that I hope will encourage congregations seeking renewal to consider taking the course this fall:

1. It's not your fault. One of the core elements of the course is a cultural analysis of secularism, individualism, consumerism and other powers misshaping our society that make being church—or for that matter any form of lasting community—more difficult. Naming these cultural realities has helped all of our congregational cohorts recognize and acknowledge the common challenges we face in being the church today. There is a liberating thrust to this naming that puts us all on the same footing, and that prompts us all to once again become reliant on God's spirit if we are going to participate in God's mission. As Richard Lovelace reminds us in his book on the history of church renewal movements, "Renewed reliance on the Spirit is part of every significant renewal movement."

2. We need to relearn how to be neighbours. One of the exercises we give to our leaders is to talk with their neighbours to learn about their neighbours' perceptions, not only of their own church but also of the church more broadly. I've noticed two important results of these conver-

sations. First, there is excitement in realizing that church members can engage their neighbours well. There is a joy that comes with being more public about one's faith. Secondly, many people discover that no one has ever invited them to their church and they know little about it. For some neighbours, there's even openness and curiosity about the church.

Another exercise we give congregational cohorts later in the course is to host a community meal with neighbours and friends not connected to faith. All of these exercises are meant to help us listen and learn from our neighbours, and to recover what it means for us to be a good neighbour again. This is not only Jesus' challenge to his followers in the parable of the Good Samaritan, "becoming a neighbour" is at the heart of every church I have known that experiences a renewed sense of mission.

3. Engaging in God's mission of witness, compassion and justice involves experimentation and risk. What has been so encouraging for me in the course is how the participating congregations have stepped out in faith to engage their neighbourhoods and cities in creative ways, including: starting a thriving "chair yoga" group in a city with many seniors; two congregations developing a deeper dialogue and relationship with their local Indigenous communities; inviting neighbours to redesign the outdoor space around church buildings followed by involving them in redesigning their indoor space; developing a Glee Club and music festival that linked a congregation with their small town in a delightful manner.

Part of the gift of this course has been the added courage it brings to congregations to experiment with mission. Not all experiments lead to lasting results, but all of them lead to significant learning and to renewed confidence that we can bear witness to God's restoring touch in our communities.

4. Good coaching helps. One of the key additions we have made to the course in the last two years is linking an experienced coach with each congregational cohort. We have observed how coaches

boost the congregation's learning and engagement, by both asking pertinent questions and by offering advice and support for doing the key exercises. Without coaching, we are all susceptible to either underestimate the challenge our church faces or to be overwhelmed by the path of transformation that God is leading us on. I am very grateful for all our coaches who have come alongside our congregations to offer the kind of support that bears much fruit for our churches.

Join us this September as we offer the course for a fifth time. You can learn more about the details of the course at thecml.ca/program/certificate-in-missional-leadership. Here, you'll find the dates, times and how to register your congregation. We have intentionally made this course affordable so that every congregation can benefit from taking it. All



you need to do to qualify is to find at least three people from your church willing to join five online sessions over the following nine months. Please feel free to contact one of our experienced team members if you have questions.

There is a path to renewal available to your congregation—and you don't need to navigate the upcoming transitions alone. Join us and together we will explore what that path of renewal can look like for your community.



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The View from the Outside

A New Study for Fall

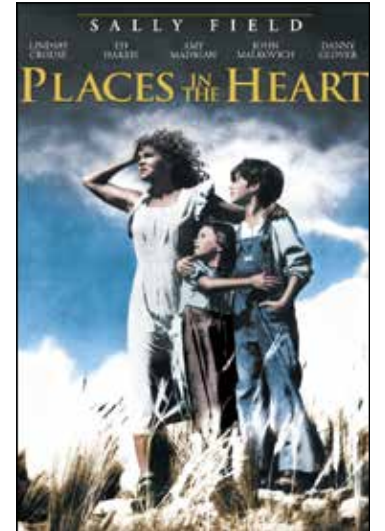
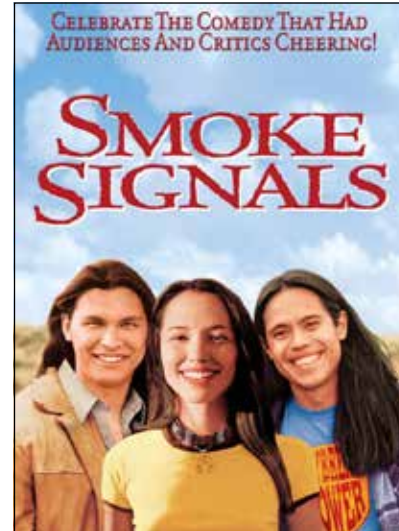
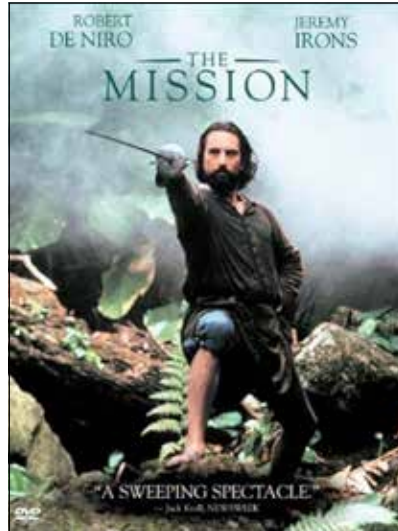
By Dr. Lee Johnson, Education Program Coordinator

Almost all of the gospel of Mark is contained in Matthew's gospel, but the passage in Mark 3:20–21 is one of the notable, but understandable omissions. Early in Jesus' mission, directly after he appoints the 12 as apostles and sends them out (Mark 3:13–19), Jesus finds himself with a huge following, some of whom were enamoured with him and some who were angry opponents. His family—mother and brothers—came to “seize him” (although some translations soften it to “rescue him” or “take custody of him”), the same language used in Mark 14:44 for Jesus' arrest.

The reason that Jesus' family wants to take control of him is because they thought he had

“gone out of his mind” (3:21). It makes sense that this perspective of Jesus through his family's eyes was not palatable to the writers of Matthew's gospel. And, in the same way that the verb “seize” is translated in various ways, this verb *eksistēmi* is rendered as “is insane,” “has lost his mind,” “has gone mad” and the one closest to the Greek, “is beside himself” (KJV and ASV). The root word of *eksistēmi* means “to stand” and the prefix to this verb is “outside” or “out of,” so the Greek image is one standing outside of oneself. The English idiom of “being beside yourself” is generally representative of frustration or confusion, but it is tied to the notion of losing your identity, of being outside of who you are.

In our lives, we rarely have the time or inclination to move out of



our understanding of who we are and where we exist in the world. And the older we get, the more difficult and uncomfortable that position becomes. Most obviously, international travel compels us to stand outside of ourselves. But the arts, as well, have the means to stir us out of our assumed posture. The best literature, music, paintings and films are heralded as “transcendent” in their ability to transport the viewer or listener to another place. Those who are able to stand outside of themselves are rewarded with a peculiar, yet enriching view of themselves and

the world. Great art can create *eksistēmi* time and time again, as do the biblical texts.

With this exhortation in mind, consider a journey this year into the film study, “The Church from the Outside,” prepared for individual, group study or congregational use. A study guide has been designed with three selected films that deal with the topic of the view of the church from different contexts. The study guide provides tips for viewing, highlights particular scenes, lists biblical passages and allusions, and has questions for further thought and group dis-

cussion. Your group can use any or all of these films and the timing of the study can be set at your convenience. The selected films are: *The Mission*, *Smoke Signals* and *Places in the Heart*, set, respectively, in South America in the 18th century, on a 21st century Idaho reservation and in depression-era Texas. Each film draws the viewers into a culture where religion is potent, for good and for ill.

The journey outside ourselves can promote empathy and understanding for alternative beliefs and practices. The return view is worth the trip.

For more information and a study guide, visit the **Presbyterians Go to the Movies** web page at presbyterian.ca/movies.

Saskatchewan's “Travelling” Messy Church Program



By the Rev. Devon Pattemore, Presbytery of Assiniboia

The Presbytery of Assiniboia's Messy Church program is a travelling Messy Church that meets eight times per year across three congregations within the presby-

tery's bounds. Organized by the Synod's Youth Coordinator, the program is hosted by First Presbyterian Church in Regina, Trinity Presbyterian Church in Grenfell and Knox Presbyterian Church in Weyburn. Each session features crafts, a themed story, worship and a shared meal that brings everyone together.

The program was originally designed to support congregations within the presbytery that were seeking new and creative ways to engage with their communities. There was particular interest in intergenerational ministry and in offering faith formation opportunities to families for whom Sunday morning worship is not feasible. Over the past year, each church has developed a faithful Messy Church “congregation” comprised of families connected

to the church and families from the surrounding community.

By engaging families unable to attend traditional Sunday worship, the program has revitalized struggling congregations, strengthened confidence among church leaders, and drawn in both church members and local families. Messy Church has provided congregations with a fresh perspective on ministry, demonstrating that it is okay to try new approaches rather than always follow tradition.

In some cases, congregations have more people attending Messy Church than attending church on Sunday. We are seeing children connected to the congregation through grandparents, kids who attend the churches, and families from the greater communities taking part.



Messy Church offers flexible, informal faith formation, fosters community connections and provides a creative, welcoming space for intergenerational ministry. It shows that meaningful outreach can be both dynamic and “messy.”



The Presbytery of Assiniboia received a grant from the PCC's **Creative Ministry with Children and Youth Fund** to support the rotating Messy Church program.

Becoming Intercultural

By Priya Andrade, Intercultural Program Coordinator

There is a Tanzanian folktale titled, *How the Monkeys Saved the Fish*. It teaches us about how we perceive difference in each other and how good intentions can lead to harm and conflict. Here's how the story goes:

That year, the rain was the heaviest anyone could remember. The river burst its banks, and the floodwater swept across the land. Animals fled to the hills. Many drowned. Except the lucky monkeys, who swung high in the treetops, above the danger.

As they looked down, they saw fish leaping and gliding through the water. One monkey pointed: "Look at those poor creatures! They're struggling—they're going to drown!" "Yes," said another. "It's a pity. Maybe because they don't have legs. We have to help them." So the monkeys climbed down to the edge of the water and began catching fish. They gently placed them on dry grass. Soon, there was a pile of still fish on the ground. "They must have been exhausted,"

said one monkey. "Now they're resting. If it weren't for us, they would have drowned... They'll be so grateful." The other nodded.

When we notice difference

Noticing differences is not a bad thing. Minimizing them, however, is a habit to pay attention to. *Habits* (in the story's context) are shaped by our underlying motivations, which are consciously and unconsciously influenced by the cultures we are immersed in. *Motivation* can be masked by so many layers. One of the most common aspects is people's *good intentions*. Think of those helpful monkeys in our opening story. They perceived the leaping fish as needing "help" and rallied up all the other monkeys to catch them and lay them to rest (quite literally!) on the grass.

It's safe to say that most of us act from a place of good intentions when we engage with newcomers or people from cultures different than our own. Maybe that's us masking the discomfort of not examining our own privileges, or worse, acting defensively.

Interrupting bias

There are four steps to interrupt bias when we find ourselves examining our good intentions:

1. Become aware: Own our biases
2. Notice: What prompts those thoughts?
3. Pause: Slow down and breathe
4. Act: Do one small thing differently

The spectrum of becoming intercultural

Understanding our motivation and habits when we engage with people who are different from us will deepen our cultural mindset. There are many approaches to differences, specifically in cultures. Borrowed from the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) tool, there are five distinct points on the continuum that illustrate a persona type.

1. Denial: Misses difference
2. Polarization: Judges difference
3. Minimization: Overlooks difference
4. Acceptance: Understands difference



5. Adaptation: Prioritizes differences

Our programs and resources in the Intercultural Office use this continuum framework to identify where people are on their learning journey to help them move along the spectrum toward becoming intercultural. It's a lifelong commitment, but it doesn't take a lifetime to see positive changes in relationships and mindsets. We know that change can be difficult, and we also understand how our brains work to maintain status quo. Our office focuses on relationship building, education and coaching for congregations who are ready to commit to the journey.

Together, we are laying the groundwork for transformation:

not just in welcoming, but in belonging; not just through diversity, but through justice; not just living in coexistence, but living in true community in Christ.

Important terms

To end, here are some thoughts on important terms that are often misunderstood and used incorrectly.

Multicultural means different cultural groups are in the same space together but remain separated. There isn't much depth to their interactions with one another.

Cross-cultural is when there is a short-term interaction between cultural groups, such as a mission trip or an exchange program.

Intercultural means there are deep, ongoing relationships where cultures actively influence and change one another. There is mutual interaction, dialogue, sharing of resources and decision-making power.

Visit presbyterian.ca/io to learn more about our team and our ongoing and upcoming programs. We currently have 63 people across the country engaging in our first nine-hour online learning journey course. If you would like to join the course or want to subscribe to our newsletter, email intercultural@presbyterian.ca.

Richmond's Robbie Burns Dinner



Richmond Presbyterian Church member Allan Fairbairn—a true Scot!

By Sharon McKenzie,
Richmond Presbyterian
Church in Richmond, B.C.

On January 24, Richmond Presbyterian Church (RPC) in Richmond, B.C., once again revived the welcomed Robbie Burns Dinner for a celebratory evening with church family and friends. It was also a fundraiser to benefit the RPC Community Meal, which serves up to 185 guests from the community each week. A very festive Scottish atmosphere prevailed, including decorated tables, all with Scottish heather and rose flower centrepieces.

The Rev. Richard Watson, minister of Kerrisdale Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, proudly piped in the haggis, carried by RPC member Allan Fairbairn, which was then followed by the Address to the Haggis by emcee Jim Gallacher. After the Selkirk Grace, a generous delicious roast beef dinner of tatties, turnips and carrots, and haggis was enjoyed

by all. Large bowls of delicious trifle were set on each table for family-style serving.

Jim Gallacher ably emceed the evening with plenty of humour. A delightful program of Scottish music followed, including performances from RPC minister, the Rev. Curtis Bablitz, who treated us to his voice as he sang "Scots Wha Hae" and "O, My Love Is Like a Red, Red Rose," and elder Mary Hanson, who sang a beautiful rendition of, "Corn Rigs" and "Ae Fond Kiss."

We received a reminder of the immortal memory of Robbie Burns by Anne Davidson and enjoyed a Toast to the Lassies by Allan Fairbairn, with a witty reply from Karleen Gill. A hearty sing-along of well-loved Scottish songs topped off the evening, as well as door prizes. All in all, it was a most delightful time.

It is occasions like this one that add to the varied church fellowship opportunities held throughout the year and assist with



Guests at the Burns dinner.

financial contributions. With many RPC church members and friends of Scottish heritage in the congregation, it was truly enjoyable to celebrate and share the Scottish culture with others in our church community.



Festive tables with the haggis.

A Sure Pledge of God's Love:

Friendship with Christ in a Suffering World

By the Rev. Dr. John Vissers,
 Professor of Systematic Theology,
 Knox College in Toronto, Ont. This
 article has been adapted from his
 new book, *Friendship with Christ: A
 Biblical, Historical, and Theological
 Account* (Baker Academic, 2026).

In 2012, I visited partner churches in Malawi as Moderator of the 138th General Assembly. Near the beginning of the visit, I had the privilege of visiting a young mother in the north, outside Mzuzu. Her body was racked with AIDS. We met in her home, a small mud-and-brick structure with four small rooms. Her name was Jaclyn. With her was a friend, Maria, an older woman and volunteer at the local hospital; she also carried HIV. Almost daily, Maria made the difficult journey to Jaclyn's home, several miles outside of town, along a rough and dusty, bending and twisting road—not so much a road as a compacted path, a dry riverbed.

Jaclyn was often depressed, anxious about her children and family, and worried about death—all perfectly understandable emotions considering that she was a victim of a terrible virus that had attacked her, her family and her nation. Maria made sure Jaclyn ate and took her medication. The day I entered Jaclyn's house, I sensed it was a holy place. These two were not alone.

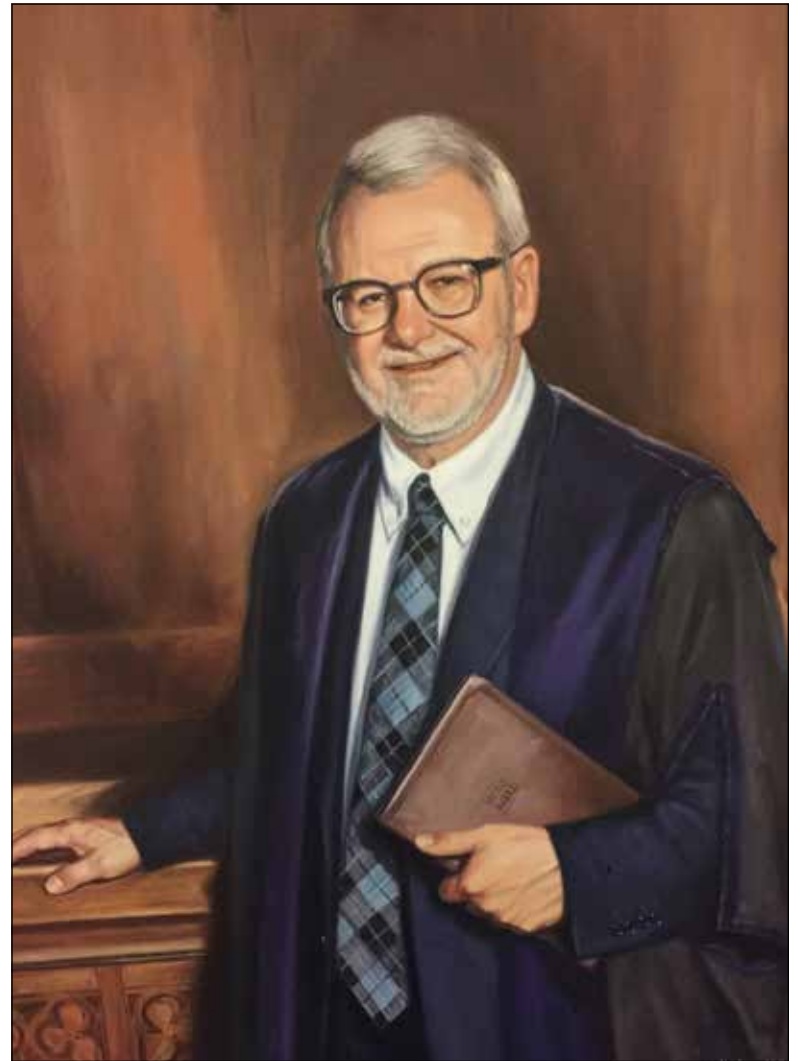
There was a third in their midst—Christ. Jaclyn spoke about her friend Maria, about Maria's faithfulness in visiting, the way Maria talked and prayed with her, and the way she felt that Jesus was with them. Jaclyn died two weeks after my visit. Maria was a faithful friend to the end, and through her, Jaclyn experienced Christ's love and friendship (see the *Presbyterian Record* magazine, January 2013).

Throughout the history of the church, friendship with Christ has been a staple of Christian faith. This is the friendship described in the Gospel of John (15:12–17), when Jesus called his disciples "friends." That friendship with Christ continues to sustain believers today, creating networks of love and friendship among people of faith and providing a sense of being loved by God—deeply, personally, and relentlessly. The good news of the Christian message is that Jesus calls his followers to be his friends. The Christian life, I suggest, is about becoming a friend *like* Christ, in friendship *with* Christ. But what does it really mean to be a friend of the Messiah Jesus?

In a secular age and a suffering world, friendship with Jesus sometimes sounds like a pious platitude or a biblical bromide. In our hymns and spiritual songs, friendship with Jesus is often

reduced to a personal feeling ("Jesus is my best friend!") or an ethical ideal ("What would Jesus do?"). That said, I have been a minister and theological teacher now for more than 40 years, and I have seen friendship with Christ in action. It matters! The poet Maya Angelou said it well: "Nobody, but nobody, can make it out here alone." We all need friends. Life is hard. We are wounded people who live in a wounded world. It is an age of anxiety and insecurity. We feel besieged. Our familiar ways of being Christian are crumbling. Our traditional protections are being stripped away. There is a spiritual sickness in the air, a sickness unto death, a pandemic-like virus that respects no one. It takes out people of faith and spiritual leaders left and right. It empties our churches, and it destroys our communities. Anxious and unloved pastors make for anxious and unloved church members, and vice versa. The cycle repeats itself endlessly. Churches and religious institutions chew up the faithful and spit them out. Burnout, depression, anger and resentment are everywhere. It does not have to be this way.

I am convinced that the first and most basic task of spiritual leadership today is to help people know that God loves them, to assure them of Christ's friendship, and to walk the good road of friend-



A portrait of the Rev. Dr. John Vissers. ARTIST: SERGEY MALINA

ship in the Spirit with them, so that they can live their lives in love and friendship with others. Genuine spiritual leaders have entered the suffering of their people. They point their people to Christ. They assure them of God's relentless love and Christ's faithful heart of friendship. We sometimes experience the love and friendship of Christ through the hearts of those who lead us; our spiritual leaders sometimes experience it through the hearts of those they lead. But how should we think about the friendship of Christ in a way that gets us past spiritual sentimentality?

Presbyterian theology helps us here. One of the distinctive doctrines of the Reformed faith is called the threefold office of Christ. This doctrine teaches that, as the Messiah, Jesus is a prophet who reveals and teaches the Word of God; a priest who acts and intercedes for us; and a king who exercises a royal reign of justice and love. The threefold office of Christ is the foundation of the PCC's doctrine of ministry and mission. Thus, the preamble to its ordination questions says, "All ministries of the church proceed from

and are sustained by the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Prophet, Priest and King, the Minister of the covenant of grace. By the operation of God's Word and Spirit the church is gathered, equipped and sent out to participate in this ministry."

Now, what if we consider Jesus' friendship in terms of Christ's threefold office? Might this offer us a more robust spiritual theology? The theologian Jürgen Moltmann thought so and invited us to think just that in his book *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*: "For in his divine function as prophet, priest, and king, Christ lives and acts as a friend and creates friendship." In John 15, Moltmann notes, we see the friendship of Jesus expressed in each aspect of the threefold office. In my theology and teaching, I have tried to develop this basic insight.

First, as prophet and friend, Jesus reveals everything he heard from his Father (John 15:15). Prophets and friends have this in common: They tell the truth. They bear witness. They speak the truth no matter what the cost. They speak truth to power. They



speaking the truth in love. Moreover, they do it all for the sake of others. If you do not have friends who will tell you the truth, you do not have friends—not really. In this sense, Jesus is a prophetic friend who told the truth, spoke truth to power, and did it all for the sake of others. He did it for love. As a prophetic friend, he shared the heart of God with his friends. Jesus' first friends constituted the earliest Christian congregations, who gathered to remember his prophetic teaching. Without the prophetic friendship of Jesus, there would be no church.

Second, as priest and friend, Jesus offered his life as a sacrifice for his friends (John 15:13). No greater love than this. Priests and friends have this in common: They make sacrifices. They intercede. They advocate. They stand in the gap. They plead. They do it for the sake of others, acting on their behalf. They do for others what others cannot do for themselves. This is the essence of priesthood and friendship. In his life, death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus is priest and friend. In John's gospel, Jesus' priestly friendship is focused on two acts: First, in his death on the cross. Jesus laid down his life for his friends. In the words of *Living Faith*: "Christ died for our sins. The innocent one bore our condemnation of the cross. He suffered and was put to death for the sin of the world" (3.4.2). One of the ways scripture describes this mystery of love is laying down one's life for a friend.

The second act: Christ's intercession in prayer. Throughout his short ministry, Jesus spoke for those who could not speak for themselves. He interceded for outsiders, those who were shut out from access to the priests and the religious leaders of his time. As the Reformed theologian Cornelius van der Kooi says, Jesus has compassion for "those who experience misery, regardless of whether they themselves share in the guilt, have isolated themselves, or have been victimized by oppression or injustice."

Jesus also taught his disciples to pray (Matt 6:7–14; Luke 11:1–4). Jesus prayed with them and for them. John 17 is often described as the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus. Before he died, Jesus interceded for his disciples and for all those who would become his friends through their witness. After his ascension, the exalted Christ is seated at the right



hand of God the Father, where Jesus prays for his people and the world God so loves. Without the priestly friendship of Jesus, the church could not exist. The early friends of Christ gathered to pray the prayers he taught them and to remember his sacrificial friendship by sharing bread and wine. The church lives and moves and has its being in this unbroken apostolic friendship with Christ.

Third, as a royal friend, Jesus possesses the authority to choose and command his disciples (John 15:16). He commands them to love one another. However, he chooses to exercise his power for good and for service to others. Kings and friends have this in common: They have power. Power to create relationships. Power to gather and build up communities. Good monarchs and good friends use this power for the good of others. They use their power to serve. They use their power to empower others. They often lower themselves to lift others. The power of government and the power of friendship are given for service, to enable people to live in peace, with justice, freedom and joy.

According to the book of John, Jesus is a servant-king, a friend. When he entered Jerusalem on a donkey, Jesus was hailed as a king (John 12:12–15). When, on the night before he died, he picked up a towel and a basin and washed his disciples' feet, he commanded them: "Love one another" (John 13:34; 15:12, 17). When Pilate asked Jesus whether he was a king, Jesus did not deny it. Throughout his ministry, Jesus made it clear that his kingdom was not of this world. On the cross, one of those crucified with Jesus prayed, "Remem-

ber me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Without the royal friendship of Jesus, the church—and its hope for the reign of God and the life everlasting—would not exist.

Thus, when we think about friendship with Jesus in the register of the threefold office of Christ, we see not only who Christ is as a friend, but also what friendship means in terms of Christ, and we see how the church came to be. We are invited to ask: What are we called to be, and what are we called to do, as the friends of the Messiah Jesus? How do we read the Bible as the words of a friend with other friends, celebrate the Lord's Supper as friends who are eating and drinking with Jesus, and pray in the name of friendship with Christ? How do we

experience this friendship with Christ in a way that does not turn the church inward, into a holy huddle or an exclusive club, but outward, into an open community that embraces neighbours and strangers and enemies alike, which reaches those on the margins. Simply put, how can we be the prophetic, priestly and royal friends of Jesus today?

It starts with love. In 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul describes love as a "more excellent way" (12:31). The theological virtues—faith, hope and love—these three remain, says Paul, "and the greatest of these is love" (13:13). In John 15, Jesus says, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." The good news of the gospel is that in Jesus Christ, God has

befriended us with the greatest of all loves, the sacrificial love of a friend: "This is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). The sacrificial friendship of Christ is, in John Calvin's words, "a sure pledge of the divine love toward us." The divine love is relentlessly faithful. God's love does not let go. God's love is sovereign. God's love is transformational. God's love wins. Simply put, God's love in Christ is friendship, and God's friendship in Christ is love. In this sense, as Michel de Montaigne once said, "The end of friendship may be more important than love." That may be worth thinking about the next time your congregation sings "What a friend we have in Jesus."

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Master of Theology



Remembering the 1918 Influenza Pandemic

By the Rev. Shelly Chandler,
St. Andrew's Presbyterian
Church in Orillia, Ont.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Orillia, Ont., is celebrating 175 years of mission and ministry in the community. Recently, we reflected on the church's role during the 1918 influenza pandemic with help from David Town's *Spanish Flu: Orillia's Ordeal in 1918* (Impression House, 2021).

On March 4, 1918, a new flu emerged on a U.S. military base and quickly spread worldwide through troop movements during the First World War. In Canada, infected soldiers travelling by train carried the disease across the country.

With no national public health system and limited communication, local leaders like Dr. John

McLean prepared Orillia for its arrival. Having read reports that described healthy people falling ill in the morning and dying within a day, Dr. McLean anticipated that the local hospital would soon be overwhelmed. Realizing the need for a temporary hospital, the Presbyterian and Methodist churches offered their spaces. The Methodist church was chosen and efforts were taken to turn its Sunday school into an emergency hospital in October. Despite widespread fear, beds, bedding, supplies and food were all donated and volunteer nurses were recruited.

On October 15, all public spaces, including schools and churches, were closed. Volunteer nurses tended to the sick both in the hospital and in homes, where entire families were often inca-

pacitated. They provided essential care, from feeding and cleaning to basic medical support. The Presbyterian church prepared and delivered meals daily to patients and caregivers. Thanks to strong community cooperation, Orillia managed the first wave well, recording only 15 deaths. Churches reopened on November 10.

When the flu returned in 1920, the town acted quickly, closing public spaces again. This time, St. Andrew's housed the emergency hospital and kitchen. Volunteers, including the women's auxiliary, supported the effort by sewing linens and assisting patients. At its peak, the hospital treated 70 patients.

After three weeks, the town reopened. Volunteer nurses were credited with saving many lives. By March 1920, the epidemic had



Author David Town, the Rev. Shelly Chandler and Councillor Tim Lauer.

passed. Over 17 months, Orillia recorded 32 deaths—remarkably low compared to other communities across Canada.

In his book, historian and author David Town wrote: "When all was said and done, though, the volunteers went back to their lives and the whole episode quickly receded to history. The spring of 1920 was a difficult time in Orillia, which distracted attention away from the tragic events and splendid community rallying to combat the Flu epidemic in 1918 and

1920. There was no grand reception to acknowledge the efforts of the volunteers. There were no plaques put up commemorating the remarkable joint effort. No, new urgent challenges forced attention in a different direction" (p. 93).

On Jan. 18, 2026, St. Andrew's placed a commemorative plaque in the church to acknowledge the contributions of the church and the many volunteers. David Town and local councillor Tim Lauer both attended the unveiling.

Serving the Community in Orillia



A fantastic turnout to the fundraising dinner.

By Laura Anderson and the Rev. Shelly Chandler, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Orillia, Ont.

For 14 years, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Orillia, Ont., has been serving community meals twice a year. One meal is prepared in March, around St. Patrick's Day, the second meal is served just before Christmas. The meals are organized and cooked by Barry and Laura Anderson, with dozens of volunteers helping to prepare and serve them.

Our most recent meal was our 14th annual pork dinner, served on Saturday, March 14. Prepara-

tion began the day before, when about 35 volunteers came together in the church to prepare the food. They cooked approximately 450 pounds of pork and peeled approximately 450 pounds of potatoes and 200 pounds of carrots!

The next day, another 35 volunteers showed up (some came both days) to package the meals and help distribute them. The menu included pork, mashed potatoes, corn, carrots, gravy, coleslaw and buns, along with cake for dessert. Volunteers stood outside on a very cold and snowy afternoon to give the meals out to anyone in the community who

could use a warm, home-cooked dinner—360 meals provided.

But the volunteers weren't finished. Later that evening, the church hosted a fundraising dinner attended by 120 people. Proceeds from the dinner, donations from members of the congregation, and donations from local stores and businesses all helped to cover the costs of the free community meals.

For organizers, the purpose of the initiative has always been simple: make sure people who may be struggling know their community cares. The volunteers say that these events reflect the



church's belief that small acts of generosity can make a real difference in people's lives. And for those who purchase a \$20 ticket for the fundraising dinners, they love knowing that three people from the community are also fed for every ticket sold.

Volunteers for the community dinner.

Tracing the Past, Protecting the Present



The Rev. Kenneth Rowland performing a baptism at Glebe Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., c. 1974.

By Alex Kay,
Presbyterian Church Archives

Interest in genealogy has grown significantly in recent years. Increasingly, people are exploring their family histories and The Presbyterian Church in Canada Archives offer a wealth of resources to support this work. The Archives holds records from more than 600 congregations across the country, including vital statistics registers, congregational histories, communion rolls and minutes. These records contain information that is invaluable to family historians and genealogists alike.

Like the Archives, congregations have a responsibility to balance access with privacy.

Researchers often contact congregations directly or are referred to them by archivists. Churches want to be as helpful as possible to those seeking information about their families, but they also have a duty to protect personal information. The denomination maintains policies on privacy and records ownership to help congregations navigate access.

Privacy policy and restricted records

The PCC outlines its policies on records in Appendix G of the Book of Forms. These policies are designed to protect sensitive personal information until records can be made available for historical research. In archival practice, institutions often implement access restrictions—specified periods during which records are closed to the public or available only to defined groups. The church's policies reflect this approach. In brief, baptismal records less than 100 years are closed, as are marriage and death/burial records less than 75 years old.

These restrictions reflect the church's obligation to safeguard personal information in accordance with federal privacy legislation, including the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (S.C. 2000, c.5).

Such laws require organizations to protect personal information and to disclose it only in appropriate circumstances.

Responding to requests for information

Congregations may receive requests from individuals seeking their own records or those of family members. When records fall within the restricted time periods noted above, access must be handled appropriately.

If a record is less than 75 or 100 years old (depending on the type), information may only be provided to: the individual to whom the record pertains; the parent or legal guardian of a minor; if the individual is deceased, their next of kin (such as a spouse, common-law partner, child, or sibling); an authorized representative (such as an estate trustee, executor, person with power of attorney, or a legal guardian).

When disclosure of a record is permitted, congregations should consider how best to provide that information. In some cases, it may be appropriate to photocopy a page from a register—particularly if the page contains only the requester's information. However, many historical registers, especially baptismal registers, contain multiple entries on a single page.



Baptism and marriage registers from Church of the Redeemer in Deseronto, Ont.

Providing a photocopy in these cases could inadvertently disclose personal information about other individuals.

A better approach is to prepare a letter that provides the relevant details from the entry—names, dates, officiating minister, witnesses, and so on. If a copy of the register is required for legal purposes and the record is within the restricted period, any other personal information on the page should be properly redacted.

Ownership of records

In recent years, genealogy websites have been approaching congregations offering to digitize records free of charge in exchange for hosting them online. While this may sound like an attractive offer that saves time and resources, congregations should decline these proposals.

As outlined in the Book of Forms, records created by all courts of the church are the property of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Vital statistics registers, including baptisms, marriages and burials, are not to be shared with outside organizations

for circulation or inclusion in fee-based or subscription services, such as commercial genealogical websites like Ancestry.

The Archives operates on the principle that records created for church purposes should, when appropriate, be freely accessible. Allowing third parties to host and profit from these records goes against church policy and risks compromising the restrictions designed to protect individuals' personal information.

A shared responsibility

Balancing access and privacy is not always simple. Both the Archives and congregations share the responsibility for preserving records for future generations. These records tell the stories of faith communities and the families who shaped them. By following established policies and guidelines, congregations can support researchers while remaining responsible stewards of personal information.

If you have any questions about managing your records or how to respond to requests for information, please contact the Archives at 1-800-619-7301.



A baptism, c. 1980s.

Celebrating a Long History in Montreal



The silver communion set used at the anniversary communion service was donated to the St. Gabriel Street Church in 1833 by Marianne Somerville, daughter of the Rev. James Somerville, minister of that church, which was the first Presbyterian Parish Church in Lower Canada.

By Howie Dearlove and Ann Blott, Kensington Presbyterian Church in Montreal, Que.

March 12, 2026, marked the 240th anniversary of the Presbyterian church in Montreal, Que., and the congregation at Kensington Presbyterian Church joined in the celebration during a special church service held on March 8.

In 1786, the Rev. John Bethune organized services on Notre Dame St. for fur traders of the North West Company and for officers of the Montreal gar-

ison. Presbyterians had been worshipping with Anglicans in the old Jesuit church, sharing space with Franciscan monks. In 1792, the Rev. John Young established the first Presbyterian church in Montreal: the St. Gabriel Street Church, or the "Scottish Kirk," a small stone church within the old walled town.

From these beginnings, many new congregations formed in Montreal as the population grew and the city expanded. Disasters like fires altered the landscape and destroyed some churches,



Congregation members Laura Kabayashi, Nora Brown, Rose Mbenoun, Ruth Wright and Dean Brady.

but church numbers continued to grow through the post-WWII period. The Japanese Presbyterian Church worshipped in the Kensington Presbyterian Church sanctuary, sharing music, events and fellowship.

Over the years, churches in Montreal closed or amalgamated with others. On the walls of Kensington Hall, photographs and charts tell some of their stories graphically. By 1984, Kensington

had united the histories of 14 different Presbyterian congregations and were stewards of hundreds of years of artifacts now shared with the Church of St. Andrew and St. Paul, the Presbyterian Museum and the Canadian Centre for the Great War.

Kensington Presbyterian Church continues its mission of reaching out to others: Christians sharing God's love with hospitality, hope and healing for the community and beyond. We have supported many local groups like Montreal food banks, Head and Hands, the Montreal Children's Theatre, the 50 Plus Club, and the New Hope Centre for Seniors with the Meals on Wheels program. As well, our congregation helps support the work of Presbyterian World Service & Development in its worldwide projects.

Stewardship Associate Secretary Announcement

The Rev. Corrie Stewart is the denomination's new Associate Secretary for Stewardship in the Life and Mission Agency. He is working remotely from Sydney Mines, N.S., and continues to minister part-time at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in North River Bridge. He plans to travel to the national office periodically and will visit presbyteries and ministries throughout the country.

Corrie brings over 30 years of experience in financial management, organizational leadership, project management and entrepreneurialism to this role. He holds degrees from Cape Breton University, St. Mary's University (Halifax, N.S.) and Knox College (Toronto, Ont.). Corrie is a Chartered Professional Accountant with 26 years of experience. He was ordained in 2015 and has served part-time in rural, pastoral ministries. Prior to joining the Life and Mission Agency, Corrie was Executive Director of the Hospice Palliative Care Society of Cape Breton County.

Corrie has served the church locally, regionally and nationally. He has been the moderator of the Presbytery of Cape Breton, treasurer of Camp MacLeod and has served on the Pension and Benefits Board, Trustee Board and finance committee. He is currently convener of the finance committee of the Synod of the Atlantic Provinces.

The role of the PCC's Stewardship department is to help



Corrie and his wife, Rose Hall.

individuals and communities of faith within the denomination discover ways they can use their resources to support the work of God's mission in the world. While stewardship includes the use of all resources—human (time and talent), financial and infrastructure—the work of the Stewardship department substantially focuses on financial matters.

The Stewardship department is active in educating the church about the missions and ministries supported by their contributions and encouraging the church in its ongoing generosity. Some of this is accomplished by produc-

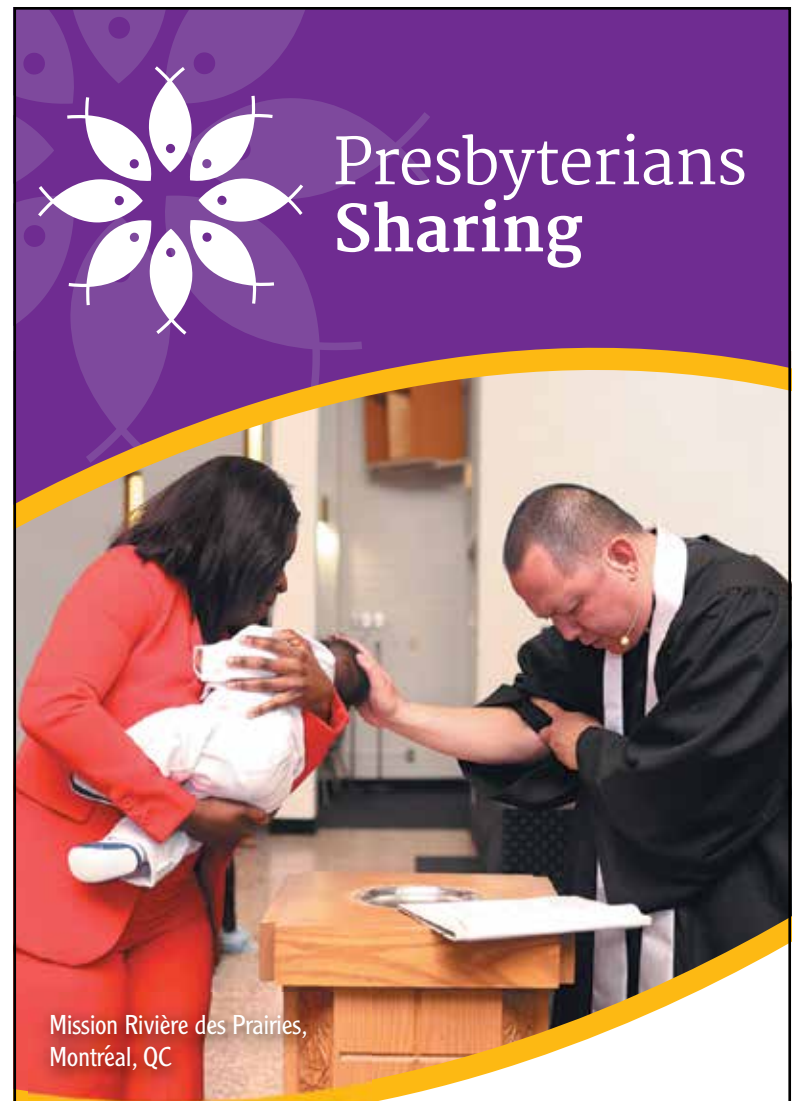
ing resources for worship such as Presbyterians Sharing Sunday and Legacy Sunday. Making and nurturing relationships with synods, presbyteries and church leaders is very important in keeping the church informed and excited about the mission and ministry of the denomination.

"My first priority is to continue the great work Karen Plater and her team have been doing for several years," Corrie said. "Working with colleagues in the Life and Mission Agency, I hope to help church members better understand Presbyterians Sharing. The department will also look to offer more help to congregations in their efforts to encourage generous giving as they remain faithful to their ministry and that of the wider church during a period of declining numbers and escalating costs."

As stated in Genesis 12:1-9, God blessed Abram and his descendants, not only for their sake, but also for the sake of others. Abram was blessed and was called to be a blessing to others. As followers of Jesus and members of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, we have been blessed and we, too, are called to be a blessing to others.



The Rev. Corrie Stewart (right) with family members at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Sydney Mines, N.S. This was Corrie's childhood church and where he served as treasurer, chair of the board of managers and ruling elder.



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The Church and Christian Nationalism

By Allyson Carr, Justice Ministries

God's justice is seen when we deal fairly with each other and strive to change customs and practices that oppress and enslave others. Justice involves protecting the rights of others. It protests against everything that destroys human dignity. *Living Faith* 8.4.3–3

Christian nationalism is a growing threat across the world and in Canada. It is characterized by the belief that one's nation was founded as a Christian nation (and that God willed it thus), therefore the nation's laws and structures must be guided by "Christian" beliefs and values, or the nation will come to ruin.

The ideology teaches that Christians must seek control or influence over all means by which power operates in a society, including the government. Additionally, its linking of national identity with Christianity devalues anyone who is not Christian—or even not Christian "enough" in the eyes of its adherents—as implicitly somehow "not Canadian" (or "not American" or "not my nation," etc.). Christian nationalism routinely demonizes people or institutions who do not align with its avowed values, and yet the values it espouses and demonstrates often fail to exhibit core Christian teachings, such as love of God and neighbour or Jesus' teachings in the beatitudes.

There is a range of understanding of what Christian nationalism means, even among Christian nationalists; thus, not everyone who embraces Christian nationalist teachings would embrace this label for themselves. This is in part because there is no single centralized structure to the movement, since it is an ideology rather than an organization. A common thread, however, is

exhibiting a love of power and influence, and that rather than pursuing the reign of God through the kind of ministry Jesus proclaimed at the start of his ministry (namely, such things as "good news to the poor," "freedom for the prisoners," "recovery of sight for the blind," and setting "the oppressed free," Luke 4:14–21), Christian nationalism calls for such things as humanitarian aid to be withdrawn, medical coverage to be stripped, detaining, deporting and imprisoning people seeking safety, and removing human rights protections from those facing oppression.

In addition to opposing the kind of ministry Jesus proclaimed, Christian nationalism actively seeks cultural and political dominance. It purposefully entrenches itself in the powers and social or political structures of this world, trying to shape them in what it considers "godly" ways. Christian nationalism often claims that society is unravelling or degenerate (we see this with Christian nationalist claims in the United States, but the same is true here in Canada as well) and that the only way to save the nation is through "making the nation Christian again." One way that proponents of Christian nationalism work to "make the nation Christian again" is through pursuit of what it calls the "seven mountain mandate," sometimes also called the "seven mountains of cultural influence." This mandate names seven areas or spheres of society—things like entertainment, education, religion, government, etc.—that it teaches Christians need to take control of in order to weed out all "demonic" influences within them. If one controls these "mountains," the teaching goes, one controls the nation.

Looking at Project 2025—a blueprint for reshaping the entire United States government under American Christian nationalist goals that were created by the



Heritage Foundation, which the second Trump administration has drawn extensively from—one can see the kinds of things the movement considers "demonic" and the breadth of cultural-political control and worldly power that is sought. So too can one see the disastrous results the project of Christian nationalism is having, not only within that nation but on the world.

A fascination with violence and control rooted in a love of power

The means through which Christian nationalists pursue social and political power do not demonstrate the two greatest commandments as conveyed across Judeo-Christian teachings: love God with your entire self; love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:34–40, cf. Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). Instead, Christian nationalism is often comfortable with violence and bigotry, as many people (both Christian and not) have been warning for a long time now. It is also power-seeking. Some echelons of the movement have wedded tacit or even explicit support for white supremacy with Christian dominance, such as Christian nationalist influencer Joshua Haymes, who is influential enough to have hosted Pete Heg-

seth, the current US Secretary of War (also a Christian nationalist), multiple times on his "Reformation Red Pill" podcast. On the "Is the Bible Pro ICE Raids? Debunking Progressive Lies about Immigration and the Bible" episode of that podcast, Haymes claimed that the Bible supports the Trump administration's efforts to enact mass deportations, arguing that people (who he calls "global liberals") opposing the deportations "want open borders and they didn't hide it, right? They, and specifically, they want more non-Christian, non-white people to come supplant and replace the white voting population."

This claim that there is a plan to "supplant and replace white people" within a nation is called "the Great Replacement Theory" and it is racist to its core. Christian nationalists like Haymes excuse and occasionally go so far as to call "good" such evils as slavery. They call for physical violence against 2SLGBTQ+ and nonbinary people. They work to disenfranchise immigrants and minorities, and buy into a supposed racial hierarchy that defies the baptismal creed recited in Paul's letter to the Galatians: "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all

one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26–29). Moreover, Christian nationalism often also embraces strict patriarchy as the supposed only "natural" social and religious structure. Some of the more vocal and radical elements of Christian nationalism, exemplified by leaders such as Doug Wilson of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches, are not only focused on entrenching "Christian" dominance in all aspects of civil life, they are specifically focused on re-establishing (Christian) male dominance in all aspects of civil life, arguing that voting—not only in the church but also locally and federally—should be done by household, rather than individually, and that women, unless they are single or widowed with no household, should no longer be allowed to vote.

Even leaving aside these more radical voices which overtly support racial, gender, and sexual orientation hierarchy, and call for violence against queer people and advocate for repealing women's right to vote, (since not all Christian nationalists would agree with all of the particulars above or even realize that significant figures in the movement do advocate for such radical actions), the movement's overall desire for domination and power

In response to claims made by the President of the United States of America and his administration, The Presbyterian Church in Canada reaffirms its rejection of the sinful use and misuse of the church's scriptures, language, symbols and theology to condone or justify violence, killing, and the shame and inhumanity of war. The PCC also rejects anything that destroys life and diminishes our ability to fight hunger, poverty and disease, and to seek justice in the world.



The Social Action Hub is constantly adding new resources! See the “Civil Strife, Protest and Nationalism” page of the Hub for more information about Christian nationalism.

Visit presbyterian.ca/civil-strife.

through its central teaching that Christians must wield cultural and political control within society is undeniable. Love of influence, wealth, power and authority has long been among the strongest lures for humanity, yet we see in the story of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, related in three of the Gospels (Matthew 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13, Luke 4:1–13), how Jesus himself responds to such lures. The devil tests Jesus’ devotion to his mission by offering him the “authority and splendour” of all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for Jesus’ loyalty. Jesus’ rejection of these things in favour of service to God is an example that everyone who calls themselves “Christian” must follow; the desires of the Christian nationalist thirst for power, influence and domination must be called out as the perverse anti-Christian movement that it is.

We see throughout much of his ministry and teaching that Jesus did not work to gain political power, authority or the “splendour” of the kingdoms of his time. Held up to scrutiny against Jesus’ own life and actions, the idolatry of Christian nationalism’s desire for domination, wealth, civil influence and power is clear.

The fruits of Christian nationalism

Within the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns about false prophets and calls for diligence against them, saying: “by their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:15–20; see also Luke 6:43–45). In the case of Christian nationalism today, many of those fruits are already devastatingly clear. Going just by one small part of the impacts of Project 2025 (a sweeping Christian nationalist political project driven by the American Christian nationalist group the Heritage Foundation), we can already see the catastrophic fruits it has borne in the name of Christ: one of its policy goals was the significant scaling back of USAID and supposed “deradicalizing” of its programs to align with values the Heritage Foundation and associated networks espouse. The

Trump administration, however, went even further than the authors of the project suggested and basically completely shuttered the aid agency.

For all the issues with it, USAID supplied billions of dollars of food and medical aid to people all over the world. Looking at this Christian nationalist “win”—taking away food and medicine from hungry and sick people—current estimates are that *hundreds of thousands of people* have already died in the last year alone from the sudden withdrawal of medical and nutritional aid that USAID used to fund. Children and newborns who were receiving nutritional supplements are among the hardest hit.

That is just the estimate from the first year of this lack of aid. There are no plans to reinstate most of the aid, and the Christian nationalist authors of Project 2025 have not spoken out about how far the administration went in withdrawing nearly all aid, despite all of Jesus’ teachings and demonstrated actions about the importance of feeding those who are hungry and healing those who are ill. An article by researchers published in the *Lancet* estimated that the dismantling of USAID could result in more than 14 million deaths across 133 low-income and middle-income countries by 2030. (Cavalcanti, DM, de Oliveira Ferreira de Sales, L, da Silva, AF et al. “Evaluating the impact of two decades of USAID interventions and projecting the effects of defunding on mortality up to 2030: a retrospective impact evaluation and forecasting analysis” *Lancet*. 2025; pp. 283–294.)

The toll of human suffering and the intergenerational trauma this one decision with its roots in Christian nationalism has unleashed is so vast as to be unquantifiable. But that makes it no less deadly, and it is only one decision among many the Project calls for. Christian nationalists were among those lobbying hard to target this aid, painting the nations (and people) it was going to as criminals or otherwise degenerate and arguing that rather than focusing on caring

for “foreigners” America should be taking care of its own. This despite all the things the Bible has to say about helping those in need—including foreigners. They then did nothing when the impact was significantly more harmful even than they had asked for. “America first” (or “Canada first” or “my country first”) is a rallying cry of Christian nationalism; it is, after all, a form of *nationalism*, whatever Christian language it tries to hide itself under.

Much more could be said on a variety of topics about the toxic fruit Christian nationalism produces, but from this and many other words and deeds it is painfully clear that Christian nationalism does not exhibit recognizable discipleship or demonstrate a love of God. Jesus says, “if you love me keep my commands” (John 14:15) and this movement simply ignores them, using the name of Jesus as a means to garner moral authority, support and power while working against organiza-

tions and projects that aid the kind of ministry Jesus proclaimed in Luke 4:14–21—good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, sight for the blind and setting the oppressed free. Christian nationalism demonstrates contempt for “love your neighbour as yourself,” and insofar as it turns its back on “the least of these” who are hungry, thirsty, unclothed, sick or in prison (Matthew 25:31–45), it turns its back on Jesus, demonstrating contempt for a love of God, as well.

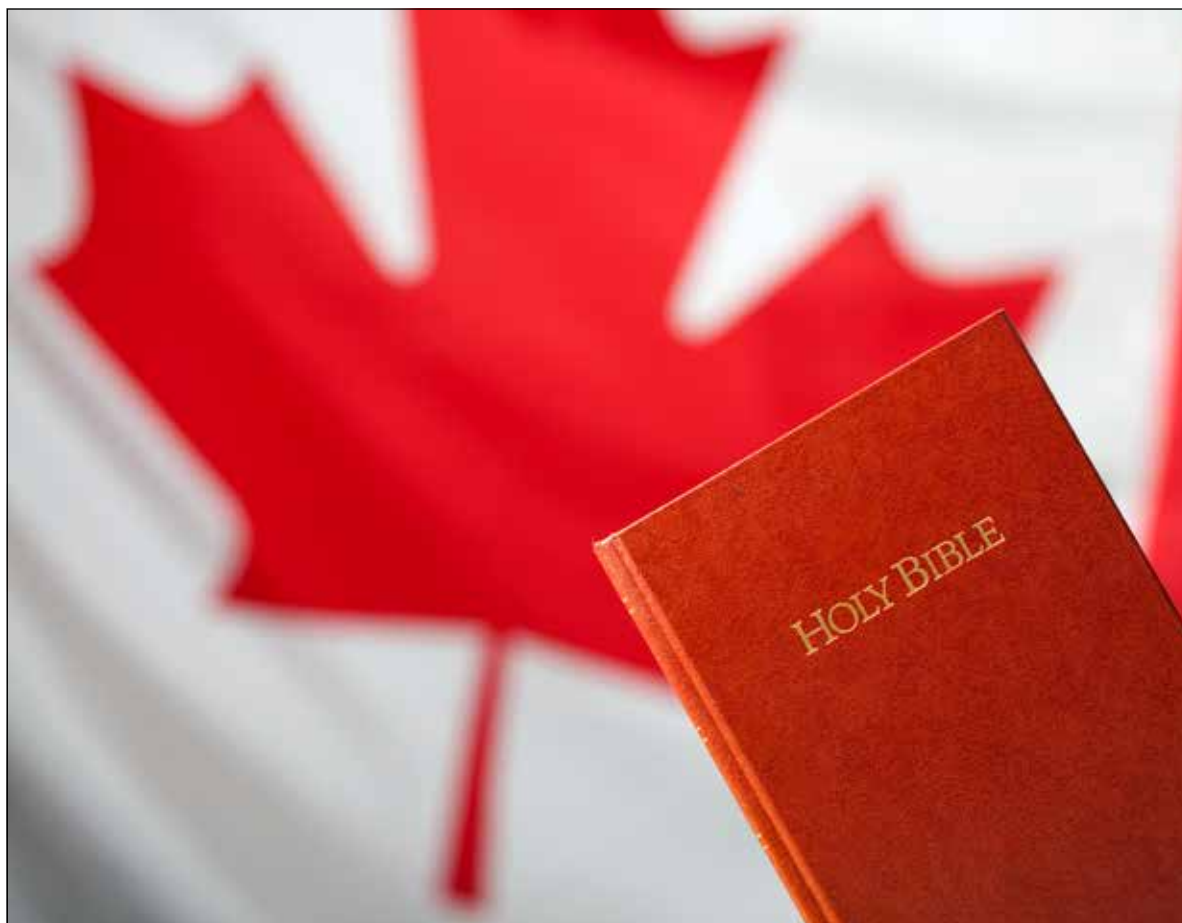
The issue of Christian nationalism cannot be ignored. Canadian churches are already beginning to speak out against it. A statement released in December of 2025 by the Anglican Church of Canada reads in part, “Christian nationalism demands that Christianity be privileged by the state and implies that to be a good Canadian, one must be Christian. This ideology can provide cover for discrimination against marginalized groups and can increase threats and violence against religious communities at home and abroad. In that light, we denounce Christian nationalism as a distortion of the gospel of Jesus and a threat to Canadian democracy” (“Statement on Christian Nationalism from the Anglican Church of Canada”). Prior to this statement, the Evangelical Lutheran Church

in Canada issued a letter from its national and regional bishops, stating, “We must be careful as a church not to fall into patterns of Christian nationalism that we see being manifested in other countries around the world. God’s call for us is to walk humbly as the baptized, loving our neighbour as ourselves.”

In sum, Christian nationalism claims to be working in God’s name for God’s will, but both the methods it uses and the goals it pursues run counter to the gospel. Its concrete, measurable impacts wreak devastating havoc on the world God loves. In this way, it is not only a threat to democracy, attempting to marginalize anyone who does not conform to its definition of “Christian”, it is also a threat to Christianity itself because the witness Christian nationalism gives is a false witness of who Christ is and how Christians should act as Jesus’ followers. If the body of Christ does not want that false witness to stand, then Christians are called to address and reject it, speaking the truth in love instead.

Note that this piece was written before the start of the war in Iran and the surrounding region and therefore does not address the ways in which Christian nationalism is also being used to frame and support that war.

The Life and Mission Agency brought forward a report about Christian nationalism for the General Assembly to consider and this article is adapted from that report. Further education will be available during the year to increase understanding of Christian Nationalism.



Eroding Protections for People Seeking Refuge in Canada

By Allyson Carr and Katharine Sisk, Justice Ministries, and Biniam Goitom, PWS&D's Refugee Program Coordinator

Christians are called to welcome the stranger and to care for those in need. Xenophobia, often defined as fear of, or prejudice toward, people perceived as “strangers” or “foreigners,” is rising in Canada and across the world. One significant guise that xenophobia often takes is anti-immigrant or anti-refugee sentiment and legislation. Having a safe and secure place to live is foundational to a person's well-being, and the church has a long history advocating for the need to protect vulnerable people, including refugees and asylum seekers. Recent changes to the Government of Canada's immigration policies are eroding established protections for people seeking refuge in Canada.

On March 26, 2026, Bill C-12, *Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Borders Act*,

received Royal Assent and became part of Canadian legislation. The government described the bill as “strengthening our immigration and asylum systems and providing law enforcement agencies with more tools to keep our borders secure, combat transnational organized crime, illegal fentanyl, and illicit financing.” However, hundreds of organizations, including the Canadian Council of Refugees and the Canadian Bar Association's Immigration Law Section, called for C-12's withdrawal.

Bill C-12 introduced a provision that set a 12-month limit on asylum claims, starting from the *first* time a person enters the country. This is problematic because circumstances in a person's country of origin could change drastically, making their home country an unsafe environment for their return. But if those circumstances changed more than a year after the person first entered Canada—even if they exited Canada and are



now returning years later—they would not be able to apply for asylum.

The bill also made this provision retroactive to 2020 and grants power, if it is deemed “in the public interest,” to suspend “certain applications” or cancel documents issued under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. Yet, no guidelines or definitions for what constitutes “the public interest,” or under what sort of circumstances such suspensions and cancellations might be warranted, are enumerated in the bill that has now become legislation. Many organizations voiced concern that, with these powers, entire groups of applications can be suspended or denied without investigating the merits of their claims—and these concerns have been proven apt.

On April 10, the CBC reported that the federal government had sent letters informing some 30,000 people that they may now be ineligible for refugee hearings, procedures that many of those claimants would have had access to before the bill was passed. These processes would not have guaranteed a particular outcome but rather were part of due process to establish the merit of a claim—a process that many people now no longer have access to.

Canadian Bar Association's Immigration Law Section wrote a submission to the Chair of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in November 2025, stating: “we are con-

cerned that the Bill undermines principles of accountability, transparency, and fairness that are foundational to Canada's immigration system.... Bill C-12 grants the Minister significant new powers to cancel categories of visas and applications, including by Order in Council, without notice to the public. The Bill contains no statutory limitations on these powers.... [This] allows for potentially arbitrary or discriminatory application of the law without recourse or review.” On the new one-year deadline for applications that C-12 put forward, the Association was particularly blunt, stating, “The one-year ineligibility rule appears arbitrary and without legal justification.... What makes the proposed rule particularly draconian is that the one-year period begins from the date of *first entry*, not most recent (Bill s.73(1)(2))—precluding individuals who came as minors (on vacation with parents, for example) but later returned in genuine fear for their lives.”

The government is also lowering the number of refugees that can be sponsored for resettlement in Canada. The government sets annual caps for the total number of refugees that Sponsorship Agreement Holders, like the PCC, can sponsor. As a Sponsorship Agreement Holder, Presbyterian congregations can sponsor refugees to resettle in Canada. Reductions to the Global Cap reduce the number of people that can be sponsored (even if there

are sufficient resources to sponsor more people). In 2024, the Global Cap was 13,500; in 2025, it was 10,800; in 2026, it was drastically cut by more than 50% to 5,000. In 2026, the PCC will only be able to sponsor 25 people, compared to over 80 people just two years ago. The church has joined other SAH organizations advocating that the Global Cap for 2026 be increased to 10,000 people, but as of the time this article was written, those efforts had not been successful.

In a world that is increasingly insecure, very often it is already vulnerable groups of people who bear the impact of increasing vulnerability. Policies that enable mass suspensions or cancellations of categories of visas and immigration, refugee or asylum applications, and limit sponsored resettlement possibilities in Canada in a time of growing need for such protections, are examples of targeting already vulnerable groups and should be resisted.

What can you do?

Write to your federal MP. Raise concerns about provisions in the *Strengthening Canada's Immigration System and Borders Act* that reduce Canada's ability to provide safety for asylum seekers, and advocate for an increase to the Global Cap so that more sponsored refugees can be resettled in Canada. Template letters are available on the church's Advocacy page at presbyterian.ca/resources/advocacy.

Information on the PCC's lengthy history of advocating for refugees and asylum seekers is available on the Social Action Hub section of the PCC's website.

Visit presbyterian.ca/social-action.



Coldwater's Caring Closet



By Aubrey Hawton,
St. Andrew's Presbyterian
Church in Coldwater, Ont.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church is a small congregation with an average worship attendance of 35–40 in the charming village of Coldwater, Ont. While the congregation may be small, it has a huge presence in the village and the greater area.

With the minister's position vacant since December 2024, St. Andrew's has been blessed with numerous outstanding pulpit supply ministers and with the services of two commissioned sacramental elders from the congregation. Average worship attendance has increased by about 10% during this time, thanks to the vibrance of worship leadership! In January 2026, Patrick Voo agreed to provide 40 Sundays of pulpit supply for the year, providing much needed and greatly appreciated continuity.

For almost 30 years, St. Andrew's has worked with Best Lifestyle Residence, a home for about 30 adults who have very limited incomes and who require significant daily support. Volunteers from the congregation provide weekly BINGO games—complete with much-appreciated prizes—craft events, colouring and reading activities, and doggie visits. We also hold an annual outdoor summer BBQ and an indoor Christmas party at which each resident is given a gift purchased by a member of St. Andrew's.

In 2019, two large, raised garden boxes were donated and built, allowing residents to grow some much-appreciated fresh produce. A donated covered gazebo, along with several chairs, are useful for a hang-out space in

the residence's yard.

Several residents from Best Lifestyle attend St. Andrew's worship services regularly, accessing the taxi service that the congregation provides for them. Over the years, several residents have also become members of the congregation and have participated by reading scripture or providing special music and assisting with after-service coffee times.

The free Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving dinners that St. Andrew's hosted before Covid were always well attended by community members. Our 2020 Christmas dinner provided over 200 people with full Christmas meals—including turkey, ham, potatoes, vegetables, stuffing, gravy and dessert.

Two members of the St. Andrew's congregation participated in the recent Justice and Joy Study Tour in South Africa, marking the third time congregants have participated in PCC-sponsored trips to learn about the work of the church around the globe. The two previous trips, to Malawi and Ukraine, were eye-opening and rewarding experiences for the participants and for the whole congregation.

In 2016, the Inreach-Outreach Team of St. Andrew's met to consider further outreach opportunities. Team member Michael Snively suggested the idea of a "clothing bank," similar to a food bank, using one of the unused rooms in the basement of St. Andrew's. The rest, as they say, is history—and it's been almost 10 years of it!

The idea was shared with the congregation and with the neighbouring Coldwater-Eady United Church Pastoral Charge and St. George Fairvalley Anglican Church, both of which had worked with St. Andrew's in our sponsorship of a Syrian refugee family. Within a very short time, thousands of items of used and new clothing and accessories had been donated. Volunteers from St. Andrew's and the community purchased shelving units and clothing racks, and the Caring Closet was soon in operation.

Initially open for eight hours a week and staffed by church and



The Caring Closet, operated by St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Coldwater, Ont.

community volunteers, word-of-mouth, print and online advertising spread the news of the Caring Closet's existence, and soon, customers were arriving daily, and a decision was made to add additional hours to our schedule. We are currently open 14 hours a week, spread over mornings, one afternoon and one evening.

COVID-19 prompted several shut-downs and conditional reopenings. In late 2021, the Caring Closet was able to reopen permanently. All volunteers, plus several new ones, have returned. Our valued customers are back, and our advertising and word-of-mouth promotion reach customers up to a one-hour drive from Coldwater. We often see 50–75 people each week, and about the same number of bags and boxes of donations.


From 2021 to the end of 2025, the number of customer visits increased by about 90%, and the number of donations increased by almost 100%. If our 2026 numbers continue as we anticipate, we'll see about 2,800 visitors, and 2,500 bags/boxes of donations this year. We now occupy about four times the initial one-room space in which we had begun almost 10 years ago and are contemplating how to reimagine the Caring Closet's ministry in the upcoming years.

We're excited that new members of St. Andrew's have become volunteers and that one of our community volunteers, who has assisted us since the very early days, is now a regular attendee at our worship services,




organization working with vulnerable youth in Barrie; La Maison Rosewood Shelter, an emergency shelter in Midland that provides support to abused and homeless women and their children; Uplifting Blessing Bags in Orillia; The Lighthouse Homeless Shelter in Orillia; and Evangel Hall Mission in Toronto, as well as Kenora Fellowship Centre, in Kenora, Ont.

If you're looking for a nice weekend excursion or a day trip, head over to beautiful Coldwater and drop by St. Andrew's and the Caring Closet. We'd be glad to see you!




THE PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGE MONTREAL

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The Board of Governors of the Presbyterian College in Montreal, Que., is seeking a Principal who holds a doctoral degree in theology (PhD, ThD, DMin) or related discipline, who is a proven, credible church leader within the wider Reformed and Presbyterian tradition, and who is actively engaged in personal spiritual disciplines and discipleship.

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To apply, contact Marilyn Scott at msscott@pcmtl.ca by **August 31, 2026.**

Moderator-Elect: the Rev. Lara Scholey

The Committee to Advise with the Moderator will present the name of the Rev. Lara Scholey as the nominee for Moderator of the 2026 General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The 151st General Assembly will meet at York University (Keele Campus) in Toronto, Ont., from Sunday, June 7 until Thursday, June 11, 2026.

Lara grew up in Brampton, Ont., and attended St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. She received a Bachelor of Science (Psychology) from Queen's University (1994) and a Master of Divinity from Knox College (1997). She was ordained by the Presbytery of Brampton in 1997.

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

In the greater church, Lara has served as moderator of the Presbytery of Pictou and mod-

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

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

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

Below are answers to some of the questions posed to candidates for Moderator. Read additional answers and learn more

about the Moderator-Elect at presbyterian.ca/ga2026.

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

When I was a young adult, my father had a diving accident that left him a quadriplegic. Caring for him when I was home from university, and experiencing our church family supporting us, helped me realize how God gives strength when the path is painful and difficult, and what being a servant looks like.

Watching my children grow in the amazing church family of Bethel/Burns Memorial, the questions they asked, their sense of belonging, and the way they grew spiritually increased my awareness of the Spirit's presence in all the ages and stages of life. It also reinforced my belief that we always have valuable gifts to share.

Trips to India and Afghanistan with PWS&D taught me about the great need in the world and the responsive power of the church, partnering with people on the ground, empowering lives and communities. I realized the particular vulnerability of women in

the world, and at the same time their strength to act as agents of change and hope.

Beginning ministry at St. Columba, I learned the power of welcome and hospitality in my own life, and the Holy Spirit's presence, who nudges and sometimes pushes us during major change and unclear steps on the journey. This has made me sensitive to the need to integrate newcomers in deep and lasting ways, supporting by the amazing grace of God who welcomes us all.

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

Teaching young people through confirmation at Bethel, including many that I had baptized, was very meaningful for me, and reminded me of the church's strength in journeying alongside people, often throughout their lives.

Leading worship at long-term care homes, accompanied by the choir, has been a memorable part of my ministry. I learned to share the basic message of my sermon, and the importance of music, which often reaches people more



The Rev. Lara Scholey.

than words.

Working with the United Church in N.S., and leading community worship where neighbours meet, taught me about sharing God's love beyond our buildings, structures and denominations, and the strength of working together.

Community meals that were hosted at St. Columba were meaningful, as volunteers reached out, demonstrated their faith in Jesus, and enabled families to enjoy healthy, low-stress, low-cost meals. In this way, I have learned about welcoming people of all ages, nationalities and walks of life.

Chowder Down in Vernon

*By Teresa Charlton,
Knox Presbyterian Church
in Vernon, B.C.*

A team of elders at Knox Presbyterian Church in Vernon, B.C., is currently taking part in the Certificate in Missional Leadership program offered by St. Andrew's Hall in Vancouver. One of

the homework challenges was to reframe traditional worship for one Sunday and replace it with a community focused initiative involving food. Dovetailing with the local city winter carnival, Knox hosted an event called "Chowder Down."

Keeping with the carnival theme of "Canada Goes for

Gold," three homemade chowders, representing different parts of Canada, were made by the cooks of Knox. When the doors opened, guests were treated to three sample-sized bowls of chowder, along with fresh sourdough bread made by members of a sister church who worship in the Knox sanctuary on Sun-

day afternoons. After sampling the chowders, voting cards allowed participants to choose their gold, silver and bronze winners. Of course, the Cape Breton Seafood Chowder won over the crowd of more than 225 guests who were served that Sunday morning.

Proceeds of the event were

directed to the North Okanagan Starfish Backpack Program, a non-profit focused on food security for children on weekends, when school programs are not available. Funds totalling \$1,500 were raised for the program, and plans are already underway to enter another event in next year's carnival.



The chowder is ready at Knox, Vernon.



Voting cards for favourite chowder.

WMS Eastern Ontario Joint Meeting



Presbyterial and synodical officers.



The Rev. Shahrzad and the Rev. Samer Kandalaft installing the WMS officers.

By the Rev. Marianne Emig Carr, First Presbyterian Church in Brockville and St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Caintown, Ont.

The Women's Missionary Soci-

ety (WMS) Brockville Presbyterian and the Synodical of Quebec & Eastern Ontario gathered for a first-ever joint annual meeting at St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Kemptville, Ont., on April 13.

The joint meeting, entitled "Love in Action," was attended both in person and virtually by over 25 members of WMS groups from Lanark and Renfrew, Montreal, Brockville and Ottawa, as well as at-large presbyterial members. The meeting opened with worship led by Peggy Malcolm, synodical president, and Janet Jones, presbyterial president.

The attendees spent most of the morning watching a recording of the Rev. Dr. Dorcas Gordon's powerful presentation at the January 2026 "Come Together" online meeting, which focused on the dire situation of Palestin-

ians in Gaza and the West Bank, together with a summary of how today's tragic events are based on past history and theology (colonialism, Zionism and Christian nationalism).

Dr. Gordon urged Presbyterians to do what they can to support partners in Gaza through PWS&D and International Ministries (visit presbyterian.ca/gifts-of-change to donate to projects in Palestine) and to pressure the Canadian government to act to help end the suffering and oppression currently being inflicted by the Netanyahu government.

After a delicious lunch and a lively sing-along, the attendees heard from the Rev. Shahrzad Dezhbod Kandalaft about her trip to Nepal this past January to learn more about the work that PWS&D does with partners in Nepal to re-

duce poverty, improve education and support women. Shahrzad related that, especially in rural areas, it is the women who do the bulk of the housework, child rearing and subsistence farming. Many men go to larger cities, especially in India, in search of jobs to support their families. Maria Carmona, PWS&D's Asia programs coordinator, also attended and helped answer questions.

During the afternoon business session, attendees reviewed written reports from the various executive portfolios, updates about presbyterial and synodical finances, and reports of the work, study and mission that is being done by the various constituent groups.

Joan Hardman and Joan Farlinger of the Knox Morrisburg group led the "in memoriam" service, remembering members who

are no longer with us.

The Presbyterian Synodical Executive for 2026 was installed by the Rev. Samer Kandalaft and the Rev. Shahrzad Kandalaft. Peggy Malcolm and Janet Jones expressed their thanks to those who helped to organize the annual meeting, and to everyone who continues to do the work of WMS. Planning will begin soon for a joint Fall Rally event. The meeting closed with prayer and lots of enthusiasm for the work of the WMS.



An Experiment in Regional Ministry



Memorial Presbyterian Church in Rocky Mountain House, Alta., recognizing the PCC's 150th anniversary.

By the Rev. Dr. Mark Chiang, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Edmonton, Alta.

Multiple congregations without a minister, spread across a large geographic area in Alberta, are strong and resilient, yet unable to afford even half-time ministry. This is the situation for the Presbytery of the Northwest, stretching from Red Deer, Alta., to Dawson Creek, B.C., and it's likely the situation in your presbytery, too. How do we support these churches? When so many can't afford ministers, how does the presbytery find pulpit supply

or interim moderators?

These questions inspired the Presbytery of the Northwest to explore a regional model experiment that we've called the Sharing Ministry. In this model, a local member of a congregation leads worship, using the PCC worship planners, and a regional minister, appointed as a presbytery position, provides videos of the sermon and other parts of worship. The regional minister then travels on rotation, like an itinerant preacher, visiting each church about once a month.

When we started this experiment three years ago, there was understandably a lot of skepticism about video sermons. Some congregation members worried that it wouldn't feel authentic and would take away from the sacredness of worship. However, to our own surprise, the videos worked well. The body of Christ was still gathered to worship, and the sermons were just as effective online as in person. And now, having a more secure leadership, much anxiety for these churches was lifted, encouraging a feeling

of joy and playfulness in worship. Evaluations of this ministry have been glowing, and some of our churches are either growing or have stabilized their attendance. The first stage of our three-year experiment has concluded, and congregations are eager to continue in the Sharing Ministry.

One of the factors that made this successful is that each congregation saw the regional minister lead worship in person at least once a month, establishing a pastoral relationship that's foundational to a good sermon. For that reason, we suspect it's best to limit the number of participating churches to four or five.

A second factor that played a major role is that the regional minister was a presbytery position. Like a general presbyter, the presbytery became responsible for the oversight and financial support of the minister. This allowed more flexibility for the congregations, who could join, leave or modify the Sharing Ministry to fit their needs; and it provided a platform for the regional minister to be a greater support to



The Sharing Ministry with the Rev. Dr. Mark Chiang and the choir on Christmas Eve.

the whole presbytery. The Presbytery of the Northwest financially backed this ministry, using funds set aside for New Ministry Development, and each participating congregation contributes what they can (pulpit supply and interim-moderator fees are used as a ballpark figure). The regional minister reports to presbytery through a committee consisting of one representative from each participating congregation and three members of presbytery.

Our first phase of "experimenting" has been excellent. To prove that this could be a model that benefits other presbyteries, we're

now entering the second stage of development: searching for our next regional minister. We've been set up well and are excited to demonstrate a new way of doing ministry!



The Sharing Ministry at Westmount Presbyterian Church in Edmonton, Alta.

The Testimony Café



The Rev. Lauren Kirkey and the Rev. Jacqueline Cleland.

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

Knox Presbyterian Church in Sooke, B.C., was thrilled to be able to welcome, support and host the Rev. Lauren Kirkey on the first weekend after Easter for Sunday worship and a Testimony Café. This partnership arose from a shared interest in digital hospitality and evangelism—a vision that has been quietly taking root at Knox through the recent launch of our congregational podcast, *Knox on the Vine*. We extend thanks to God, South Arm United Church in Richmond and our beautiful Knox members for this opportunity.

The Rev. Lauren Kirkey is a visionary leader within the United Church of Canada, currently serving at South Arm United Church. Beyond the pulpit, she is a prolific digital storyteller and the creator of the *Holy Transformed* platform. Lauren believes that we have a gift of a story to share and inspire others. This falls into the call in 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV) that reminds us: “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

Some of the key topics for this were a focus on radical storytelling. It arises from the belief that a person’s life is a “living stone” in the Body of Christ. This was explored on the *Knox on the Vine* podcast and was the first recording for *Holy Transformed*. *Holy Transformed* serves as a global archive for these kinds of stories, proving that God’s grace is found in our real, unfiltered experiences.

We also focused on a “Holy Transformed” ethos, which meant we explored narrative transport—the art of immersing a listener in a story so they can feel the transformative power of God’s love in real-time. This residency allowed us to move from *hearing* stories to *living* them—a transition Knox has been intentionally working toward.

On April 11, we were delighted to open our doors and invite the community in for fellowship and support. During our listening, we were inspired by the sharing from over a dozen people. We were so blessed that we became a tapestry of faith, weaving strings from Presbyterian elders, church adherents, and people from a variety of other denominations, cultures and backgrounds. As people shared personal stories of experiencing God in their lives, tears flowed.

In a day and age where we can feel that Christianity is isolated, separated and diminishing, this gathering proved just how active, inclusive and ecumenical our faith truly is. We invite you into the hope we felt hearing personally how God is active in our community and beyond. These shared stories are the living stones that built the church that is Christ’s cornerstone.

The connection and revelations did not end on Saturday. On the first Sunday after Easter, Knox Presbyterian Church welcomed the Rev. Lauren Kirkey back to the pulpit to lead a service that wove the Saturday testimonies into our communal worship. Her scriptural focus was on radical inclusion. It was a time to consider a question many of us wrestle with: “In a world where people may choose to be siloed and act out of fear, how can we choose to be the love of God in the world?” We all made individual hearts and connected them to demonstrate in a tangible way how God’s love is bigger than all of us.

The scripture verses intention-

ally showed a depth and breadth of Biblical understanding. The Old Testament: Isaiah 56:1–5 was from the NRSV Anglicized, and the New Testament: Acts 8:26–40 was from reading from the inclusive Bible. The theme was the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch—a powerful foundation for a church where “everyone who is thirsty” is welcome at the water. All of this was celebrated in song as we sang a United Church classic “Draw the Circle Wide.” It all culminated into a powerful sermon.

Keeping space for others to connect and know they are welcomed by God was not only ecumenical but expansive and intersectional. Lauren specifically requested the inclusion of the “2S” (Two-Spirit) designation within the 2SLGBTQ+ acronym for the welcome. This intentionally honours not only gender-diverse people but recognizes gender-diverse Indigenous people, such as the people of T’Sou-ke Nation whose lands we are blessed to worship on and who have been stewards of this land since time immemorial.

This entire weekend was a welcome ecumenical collaboration between the Rev. Lauren Kirkey and the Rev. Jacqueline Cleland, where they brought together Spirit, technology and testimony, proving that when we share our stories, we find the cornerstone of Christ already singing at work among us.



The Rev. Lauren Kirkey preaching at Knox Presbyterian Church in Sooke, B.C.



Sharing stories during the Testimony Café.



The cross with homemade palm leaves in the sanctuary at Knox Presbyterian Church in Sooke, B.C.

Making and Baking the Easter Journey

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

At Knox Presbyterian Church in Sooke, B.C., this year for Easter we focused a lot on communal engagement and participation on the journey to the cross. This was both a spiritual and physical journey as we had a huge cross mounted in the sanctuary. We started the Holy Week on Palm Sunday, where we made our own palm leaves to place the prayers we wished for Jesus to see on his journey.

On Good Friday, we felt the goodness of sitting and holding emotions of sadness, betrayal and loss. It was a somber Good Friday service with no postlude, no benediction, no offering. We read the gospel of Matthew in sections with prayers interspersed. Members of the community were invited to participate in the readings to show how we are all part of the story. Many

then joined the ecumenical outreach of walking the cross down Sooke Road.

On Sunday, it was a vibrant worship where people shouted “Hallelujah!” and it was called the most enthusiastic worship they had participated in at the church. We had a mini testimony time as we shared where we have seen God at work in our lives. There was a lot of positive sharing that left us all smiling. We baked “resurrection rolls” in the toaster oven I brought from home to have an additional option for communion. We added a purple silk stole to the cross to represent the royalty of Christ now risen and ruling at the right hand of God in Heaven.

Through these simple acts of making and baking, our congregation did not just observe the Easter story; we lived it together. We thank God for this opportunity and look forward to leaning into what it means to be Easter people.

A Space for Every Story in Picton



By the Rev. Lynne Donovan,
St. Andrew's Presbyterian
Church in Picton, Ont.

"Are you still a church?"

This is the question we are asked frequently by people who walk through the doors of "The Andrew" in Picton, Ont., as they step inside and experience the space that sparkles with natural light.

For nearly 20 years, the congregation at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church wrestled with the question, "What time is it?" articulated by Canadian theologian Douglas John Hall as the most important theological question.

The last two decades have required strong leadership during a

challenging time of renewal. It was not a quick fix or an easy fix. It included some false starts and some bold mistakes. It involved years of curiosity and creativity and courage. After 20 years of working in partnership with the community, beginning in 2008 with the launch of the Ten Thousand Villages store, we learned how to let go, we learned what mattered, and the community learned to trust our intentions.

We listened carefully to neighbours, noticed cultural shifts and paid attention to where the spirit was already at work beyond familiar church forms. It became a spiritual discipline to discern what was ending, what we needed to abandon and what was asking to be born.

During the pandemic, we renovated our sanctuary to reflect a broader, more expansive vision. In 2023, we hired a Community & Venue Coordinator with the support of a grant from the PCC.

The building we now refer to as "The Andrew" officially launched

in March 2025. It's a "a space for every story." It is not simply a rental venue, nor a conventional church, but a post-colonial, post-Christendom hybrid space animated by faith, friendships and innovation. This bold decision paid off: in 2025, income from community participation covered the salary for the Community & Venue staff person.

The mission is grounded in community. The Andrew's main-floor sanctuary is used daily for a variety of sacred practices: cultural programming, community meetings and shared meals, serving over 50 community groups and initiatives to date. The lower hall continues to house Reaching

for Rainbows, established by the congregation in 2012 to support vulnerable girls in the area. In both spaces, the theology becomes visible: everyone belongs.

Many have found among us a safe space to gather, to worship, to practice love of neighbour and to develop the relationships and resiliency to manage the challenges of this season. It is our broad theological vision now reflected in our building that has resulted in the growth of the congregation since the pandemic.

In a fragile and divided world, we do not focus on "church growth." The Andrew has taken root as a sign and symbol of a safe community space. It has been a chal-



lenging journey as we slowly but surely let go of what many believe is essential to being a church: a theology of "us and them," pews, furniture, heirlooms and traditional architecture. But we have emerged as a new creation. God has indeed done "a new thing."

Visit theandrew.ca to learn more or contact the Rev. Lynne Donovan at lynne@theandrew.ca to view an online webinar introducing this model and its evolution.



St. Andrew's Picton received funding through the PCC's **New and Renewing Ministry Fund** to help transform the church into a vibrant community hub for worship, community events and creative expression. The New and Renewing Ministry Fund exists to support ministry leaders and congregations as they discern God's vision and embrace new opportunities to live out Christ's mission in the world. Learn more about the many PCC funds at presbyterian.ca/funds.

Celebrating 175 Years in Kemptville



By Heather Stewart, Clerk of
Session, St. Paul's Presbyterian
Church in Kemptville, Ont.

St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Kemptville, Ont., is celebrating our 175th anniversary in a big way this year.

Since 1851, the beautiful stone edifice has stood strong for the families of Kemptville and surrounding rural areas. Many celebrations are now planned for all

to take part, commemorate and have fun, and two events have already taken place.

The first of four main events was the "Lord of Glory" Easter Cantata on Palm Sunday during the church service, led by the choir's 11 members and two narrators. This wonderful performance of six choir anthems with narration depicting the story of Easter was not to be missed. All who attended were touched by the experience. After a hushed delivery, words of praise and gratitude were shared. To view the event, visit the St. Paul's Presbyterian Church Kemptville YouTube channel.

On April 12, a congregational Hungarian cabbage roll mission luncheon took place. Many other activities are planned, such as a special anniversary celebration, a choral festival, a Christmas Cantata, and much more.

Several families have been in-

ited to return to share the events of this special year with us. Thirty-one ministers have graced us with their spiritual ministry over the years, including the Rev. Samer Kandalaft, who has been with us for the past 19 years. Our history endures.

To share some words of our (late) past moderator, the Rev. Dr. William Klempa: "When St. Paul's church was opened and dedicated in June 1851, it consisted of little more than bare walls, a floor, windows, a roof and boards placed upon blocks to serve as pews and, of course, there was a make-do pulpit and communion table... Yet a church is not so much a building as a Christian community of capable leaders and faithful people."

In its 175 years of witness and service, St. Paul's has greatly focused on missionary work spearheaded by the Women's Missionary Society and the Mis-



sion Committee. It has also been strong in delivering Christian education and currently has an active youth group and enthusiastic choir. It is not merely a congregation of members, but a family together in spiritual support, as many activities and events are shared throughout the year.

Anniversaries are occasions for looking back and looking forward. The St. Paul's congregation looks back in gratitude to God and to the vision and courage, the com-

mitment and sacrifice of ministers, elders and people who have served it. It also looks forward in faith and with hope and love, building upon the past and beginning a new chapter in its story.

St. Paul's is proud to have its own history souvenir books of 100, 140 and 150 anniversary years, plus the 160th anniversary booklet, "A Moment in Time," found in our church library. You can view other memories online at stpaulskemptville.ca.



The man behind Stouffville's Student Music Scholarship Concert was honoured during the 31st edition of the event at Stouffville District Secondary School (SDSS) on April 1. Jim Thomas, 97, founded the concert during the 1990s. On behalf of St. James Presbyterian Church in Stouffville, Ont., he invited local schools to send bands or choirs to perform. The idea took hold. All funds collected at the door and from sponsors are divided between the schools taking part annually. The grand total from over 31 concerts is now more than \$150,000. Nine schools, the maximum number for the concert, took part in front of a standing-room-only crowd in the SDSS auditorium this year. Volunteers from the St. James congregation organized this year's event and performed a number of tasks on the night of the concert. As well, concert goers brought donations of non-perishable food for the St. James Little Free Pantry.



Summer is coming, as Erindale Presbyterian Church in Mississauga, Ont., recently found out. Cairn Family of Camps, a Christian Camp in the Muskokas, has been a summer experience for many of the congregation's youngsters. Camp staff, Claire, Livia, Ben, Chantelle and Michelle, introduced "a day in the life of camp" by demonstrating camp activities of prayer, storytelling, hospitality service, and retreat (the roots of the church) and action songs (the Fruit of the Spirit). It was a lively service and all left excited and ready for fun!

The Mission and Outreach Committee and Kirk Session of Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont., were pleased and honoured to welcome the Moderator of the PCC, the Rev. Jeffrey Murray, on March 25. His talk on his pilgrimage to Palestine and Israel was enlightening and genuine and well received by attendees from the community, the Presbytery of Oak Ridges and the congregation. A Q&A session followed during fellowship time. Jeff is pictured here during worship and with members of the Mission and Outreach Committee.



Mark Gordon is pictured here with Félix Moloua, Prime Minister of the Central African Republic. Mark was recently appointed Head of Country in the Central African Republic by the World Food Programme (WFP), a United Nations Agency. For the past 20-plus years, Mark has worked for the World Food Programme in several countries, mainly in East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and the WFP headquarters in Rome. Before beginning his work with WFP, Mark spent three years in mission service in Mozambique with The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Mark is the son of the Rev. Dr. Dorcas Gordon and the Rev. Noel Gordon.

This Easter, North Bramalea Presbyterian Church in Brampton, Ont., hosted the Easter presentation "When Jesus Walked Among Us." The performance consisted of members of the congregation reading scripture and story and singing music. The event was well attended and included a time of refreshments.



North Bramalea Presbyterian Church in Brampton, Ont., celebrated Black History Month in style with faith, fellowship, food and fun, thanks to community members of African descent who hosted a delicious meal.



On Sunday, March 1, Knox Presbyterian Church in Midland, Ont., welcomed their new minister, the Rev. Nicholas Metivier. Nick comes to Midland from Shannon, Que. His hometown is Riverview, N.B., and he is a graduate of Knox College. "Pastor Nick" is married to another Presbyterian minister, the Rev. Charmila Ireland, and they have two young children. Nick's Induction Service was conducted by the moderator of the Barrie Presbytery, the Rev. Tom Mason. The message was brought by the Rev. Sarah Stockford of the Mansfield and Alliston Presbyterian Churches. The induction was attended by many Presbyterian ministers from the presbytery and included a welcome reception as part of the festivities. The congregation of Knox Midland extends appreciation to the interim moderator, the Rev. Joanne Lee, who has provided thoughtful and caring leadership. Pictured above is (left to right) the Rev. Tom Mason, the Rev. Jim Sitler and the Rev. Nick Metivier.



What a flipping fantastic night! Thank you to everyone who came out to the Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper at First Presbyterian Church in Brockville, Ont. And a huge thank you to all the volunteers who mixed, cooked, set up, served and cleaned up. The event couldn't have happened without you. All proceeds of the Pancake Supper go, as always, to the congregation's table ministries, which nourish so many in the community in body and spirit. Shrove Tuesday is always a sweet way to begin the Season of Lent—gathered in fellowship, laughter and plenty of maple syrup.



The York Regional Police Choir held a benefit concert at Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont., on Sunday, April 12. From this well-attended concert, proceeds were divided between the Richmond Hill Food Bank and the church's capital projects fund. The Police Choir is pictured having fun by inviting members of the audience to sit in the front row and sing with them as choir members.



The congregation of First Presbyterian Church in Brockville, Ont., were blessed by the church school children, who shared their beautiful presentation of "The Lenten Alphabet" during worship. Through their creativity and spirit, they helped bring the journey of Lent to life and lead all who attended into the joy of Easter. Thank you to the church school leaders and the children and youth who made this special moment possible!



In February, Erindale Presbyterian Church in Mississauga, Ont., celebrated diversity in many ways. A special event for the congregation was when Mississauga Panache Pan Steelband rocked the sanctuary with a great beat and rhythm to invigorate the soul! Their opening piece created a mood of sheer joy. This moment was accentuated when some of the kids were invited to play a steel drum, before the band moved into a rousing piece during the offering. Forming a conga line in the church, as the congregation headed out to the fellowship hour, topped off the service of high spirits felt by all! Diversity can be celebrated in so many ways, and Erindale loves to explore them all!





Trafalgar Presbyterian Church in Oakville, Ont., hosted an International Foods of the World night on Nov. 1, 2025. This involved the sharing of cultural foods and stories followed by a dessert auction and team trivia match. The congregation was blown away by the delicious food, the charming stories and legends, the amazing ethnic apparel, the dessert auction, the world trivia, and the lovely time of fellowship and sharing! They are already talking about doing it again this year.



As a follow-up to their enjoyable (and celebratory) Christmas Sweater Sunday that was shared in the Spring 2026 edition of the *Presbyterian Connection*, members and adherents of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Coldwater, Ont., donned their finest Easter apparel—including bonnets, hats, fascinators, ties and brightly coloured shirts—as they celebrated the joy of the resurrection on Easter Sunday morning! The service concluded with a meaningful celebration of Holy Communion, led by the congregation's two commissioned sacramental elders, Aubrey Hawton and Janet Johnstone. It wouldn't be a St. Andrew's service if there weren't exquisite treats and wonderful conversation after the benediction.



Doreen Acres is the church organist at Osgoode Presbyterian Church in Vernon, Ont. Doreen is 92 years old! She began as a church musician at age 10, and she's been the church musician at Vernon for the past 50 years. Doreen is well loved by her church family and is a joy to work with!



On March 6, St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Bramalea, Ont., hosted the World Day of Prayer (WDP) worship service. The service was prepared by the WDP Committee of Nigeria and presented by representatives from multiple denominations under the direction of Ann Baptist and Bev Dunn. Spoken testimonies and visual props embodying the rich tapestry and interconnected burdens of Nigerian heritage, intertwined with prayer and music, emphasized the theme of "I will give you rest: come."



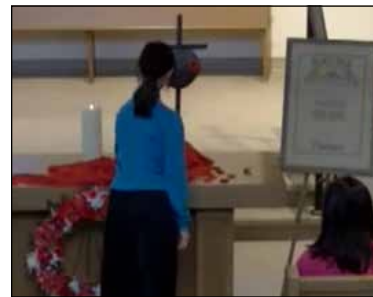
This spring, the congregation of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Cobden, Ont., recognized the anniversary of Bob Blair's 30 years as church custodian. Bob was celebrated with cake! Pictured here is Bob (right) with the Rev. Milton Fraser.



Trafalgar Presbyterian Church (TPC) in Oakville, Ont., contributed to a very successful "Giving Tree" initiative through The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Gifts of Change program. The quarterbacks for this mission were Doreen and Neil, pictured here. Thanks to their enthusiasm and the generosity of congregants, TPC donated over \$3,000 to the various programs supported by the Gifts of Change call to action.



While striving to "Live Jesus' Love Every Day," Burlington East Community Church in Burlington, Ont., is living out its mission priority of connecting with, and supporting, the community. The congregation recently hosted two community-focused events: a free Pancake Dinner on February 17, and a beginner line dancing class. Both were warmly received, drawing strong attendance and positive feedback from participants.



On Nov. 16, 2025, the Rev. Carolyn McAvoy lead the congregation at Trafalgar Presbyterian Church (TPC) in Oakville, Ont., in a special Remembrance Day service to honour all those who served and sacrificed for our great country. A long-time member and Session elder from Knox 16, now at TPC, Gord Petrie, eloquently read two poems: "For the Fallen" and "Flanders Fields." Another member Ry Smith played "The Reveille" immediately after. Gord then proceeded to read the rolls of all those congregants from Knox 16 and TPC who served in historic wars, starting with 1812. He identified those who fought and never returned home. After two minutes of silence and a little more music, all attendees were encouraged to lay a poppy on the symbolic grave adorning the communion table. What a moving time of worship.



St. Andrew's (Port Credit) Presbyterian Church in Mississauga, Ont., took part in the World Day of Prayer on March 6, with a service that featured the country of Nigeria. Pictured here (left to right) are participants Vicki, Catrina, Angela, Phyllis, the Rev. Jim Woolley, Denise, Judy and Robin. The event was held at Trinity-St. Paul Port Credit Anglican Church. It was a great service with songs and prayers, a table set with Nigerian items, and participants learned about the hardships faced by Nigerian women. A special song written for the 2026 service was "Come Unto Me" and the service featured Bible verse Matthew 11:28-30.



The congregation at Knox Presbyterian Church in Morrisburg, Ont., served over 225 people at their annual fish fry, thanks to many helping hands!



St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Lethbridge, Alta., hosted the World Day of Prayer 2026, which featured the country of Nigeria, and invited other churches and the public to attend. The service was shared by video, organized by the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada with some women from the congregation reading the three featured women's stories. Afterward, everyone enjoyed refreshments, snacks and fellowship. Pictured here are Shona Potts, elder Kim Bohner, Isabelle Shoemaker and elder Karen Robbins from St. Andrew's.



Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., recognized the World Day of Prayer on March 6 with a special service that focused on Nigeria.



On March 24, members of Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., celebrated "Pi(e) Day" by baking delicious pies with the Great Armour Heights Baking Club.



The Women's Missionary Society (WMS) at Knox Presbyterian Church in Morrisburg, Ont., celebrated Elinor and Fleur's 90th birthdays! The two women continue to be actively involved in the mission work at the church.



Christine Burden-Arseneault is a registered nurse and parish nurse at Iona Presbyterian Church in Dartmouth, N.S. For the past 11 years, she has operated a foot care clinic in the church basement, two days a month. There is a great need for this service with the community, with 10 to 15 people visiting a day. Pictured here is Stephanie Hudson giving foot care to Debbie Bourque with Christine Burden-Arseneault looking on.



St. Paul's Presbyterian Church in Kemptville, Ont., continues to celebrate the 175th anniversary of its ministry for Kemptville and the larger North Grenville Municipality. Authentic Hungarian cabbage rolls with salads, fruit and sweets were served to all in the filled church hall on April 12. Young and old-er alike enjoyed this delicious luncheon created with great care by Edit Palencsar in partnership with the Women's Missionary Society and the Mission Committee. Well done, everyone!



A jazz quartet transformed 12 much-loved hymns for a lively concert at West Vancouver Presbyterian Church in Vancouver, B.C., on a Saturday afternoon in April. The Brentwood quartet works out of Brentwood Presbyterian Church, where the Rev. Brian Fraser coordinates a jazz program involving a number of bands who perform weekly on Wednesday evenings. Brian obtained a grant from the Westminster Presbytery to pay these musicians for performances at Presbyterian churches in the Vancouver area. West Vancouver Presbyterian church was among those who recently "employed" them to perform a sing-along program of favourite hymns chosen by the West Vancouver congregation. The concert was a successful fundraiser that will help pay the tuition for a young man from Cameroon who is studying at the British Columbia Institute of Technology. Ken and his sister, Angel, are members of the congregation and operate the camera and sound system to stream services online. What a wonderful way to raise funds and spirits!





This is the Denominational Rep Advisory Council for the Association of Partners in Christian Education (APCE) at the 2026 Annual Event in Pittsburgh, PA. The group met before the event to discern, dream and discuss what is important to reformed churches in the current context. The Annual Event is a time of community, learning, worship and play with Christian educators from across Canada and the United States. The 2027 Annual Event is taking place in Portland, OR, from January 27 to 30. Details can be found at apcenet.org/annual-event-2027. Pictured (front row, left to right) are the Rev. Liz Testa, RCA; Jess Foy, PCC; Miatta Wilson, PC (USA); (back row) Thom Cunningham, APCE Executive Director; Christy Clore, Moravian.



Something truly special is happening in the Caring Kitchen for First Presbyterian Church in Penetanguishene, Ont. Every Monday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., a free lunch is provided to people in the community. All are welcome. A huge shoutout goes to the incredible volunteers who pour their time, energy and hearts into preparing meals that nourish more than just the body. Gratitude goes to the hands that serve, the hearts that give and the smiles that make this space so welcoming.



In the middle of a busy season, the St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church Atlantic Missionary Society (AMS) Auxiliary in St. John's, N.L., hosted an Advent worship and lunch with the AMS group at sister church St. David's Presbyterian. It was lovely afternoon with time to relax and enjoy each other's friendship. Much laughter and hugs were shared by all.



New members Stephanie Reid, Bonnie Lackey, Trevor Drummond and Murray McCurdy stand with Christian Brydges after joining the Community Presbyterian Church in Almonte, Ont., on March 22.



Members of Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., gathered on March 28 to make palm crosses and decorate Easter cookies.



On Sunday, March 22, Armour Heights Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., celebrated "Nowruz," also known as Iranian New Year, with a special hybrid gathering.



The congregations of Lochwinnoch and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Churches in Renfrew and Cobden, Ont., welcomed the Moderator of the 150th General Assembly, the Rev. Jeffrey Murray on World Communion Sunday. Pictured here (left to right) is Burt Virgin, Kim Flynn, the Rev. Milton Fraser, the Rev. Jeffrey Murray, Roberta Robertson and Drew Vereyken.



What a joy to celebrate a century of life and love! Following worship on April 19, the congregation at First Presbyterian Church in Brockville, Ont., gathered with Isabel Cameron and members of her family to mark her 100th birthday—a beautiful milestone filled with gratitude, laughter and joy. The congregation gives thanks for Isabel’s life, her faith and the many ways she has blessed the community. Isabel is pictured here with the Rev. Marianne Emig Carr, and with her family, Maureen, Andrew and Bruce Cameron. Andrew attends First Presbyterian Church, along with his mother. Bruce and Maureen live in Calgary and attend Grace Presbyterian Church. Happy 100th birthday, Isabel!



The Presbyterian World Service & Development committee and staff gathered at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Dartmouth, N.S., in October 2025. They’re pictured here with the congregation’s new minister, the Rev. Krishna Durbha.



Pictured here is Christian Brydges, who provides pulpit supply at Community Presbyterian Church in Almonte, Ont., with interim moderator the Rev. Milton Fraser and the Rev. Dr. Ian Fraser (centre), along with church leaders Trevor Drummond, JoAnn Kerry, Marsha Guthrie and Susan McCuan-Harron undertaking the New Beginnings program within the PCC.



On February 1, North Bramalea Presbyterian Church in Brampton, Ont., inducted four new elders to the congregation and held a special Service of Recognition for four elders retiring.



North Bramalea Presbyterian Church in Brampton, Ont., once again welcomed members of the Toronto District of the Sovereign Great Priory of Canada for their Annual Divine Service. The year 2026 marks the third year the fraternity held their event at the church. A gathering after the service featured a delicious lunch provided by the fraternity.



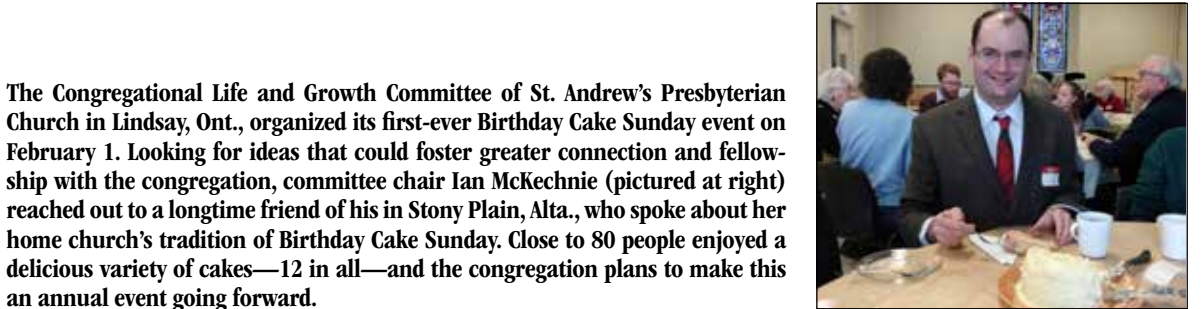
On Sunday, Feb. 22, the congregation of Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church in Richmond Hill, Ont., celebrated the Rev. Robert Hayashi’s 60th milestone birthday (the actual day is Wednesday, February 25) with a slide show during announcements and during fellowship with a cake. Robert is pictured here with his family: (left to right) Lindsay (the girlfriend of son Christopher), his son Christopher, his wife Susan and son David.



Richmond Hill Presbyterian Church (RHPC) in Richmond Hill, Ont., was pleased to receive by profession of faith and welcome new members Keith Saunders, Marjorie Saunders, Dawn Scott, Nabeel Makar, Lisa Makar and May Khumalo on Sunday, Feb. 8. They’re pictured here with the Rev. Robert Hayashi. RHPC elders are on the top row.



St. Andrew's Islington Presbyterian Church in Toronto, Ont., received a New and Renewing Ministry Fund from the PCC for their work to provide meaningful connection, wellness education and practical life skills for seniors in the community. The New and Renewing Ministry Fund supports ministry leaders and congregations as they strive to discern God's vision and explore new opportunities to live out Christ's mission. Pictured above, Constable Ricciardi from Toronto Police Services presented a Fraud Prevention seminar. Also pictured are carolers from Beamish Kids Academy who came to sing, and (above right) the laughter and merriment at a Christmas turkey dinner. As well, the fund allowed the congregation to hire Veronika, a fourth-year student from the Ontario College of Art and Design, to encourage creativity as she taught the group to paint with watercolours.



The Congregational Life and Growth Committee of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Lindsay, Ont., organized its first-ever Birthday Cake Sunday event on February 1. Looking for ideas that could foster greater connection and fellowship with the congregation, committee chair Ian McKechnie (pictured at right) reached out to a longtime friend of his in Stony Plain, Alta., who spoke about her home church's tradition of Birthday Cake Sunday. Close to 80 people enjoyed a delicious variety of cakes—12 in all—and the congregation plans to make this an annual event going forward.

Vancouver School of Theology Recognitions



In January, the Board of Governors of Vancouver School of Theology announced that **the Rev. Amanda Currie** was selected as a recipient of VST's Honourary Doctor of Divinity. The honorary doctorate is awarded to individuals who exemplify the values of VST and have made significant contributions through the integration of theology and practice of ministry.

Her sermons and educational resources have been shared widely across the PCC.

From 2019 to 2021, Amanda served as the only two-year Moderator of the 145th General Assembly of the PCC, guiding the denomination through the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. She also provided leadership beyond the denomination as vice-president and president of the Canadian Council of Churches. In recognition of her leadership and service, she was named a Knox College Alumna of Achievement in 2025.

Amanda's wider church leadership includes sustained engagement with Indigenous communities and the church's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action.

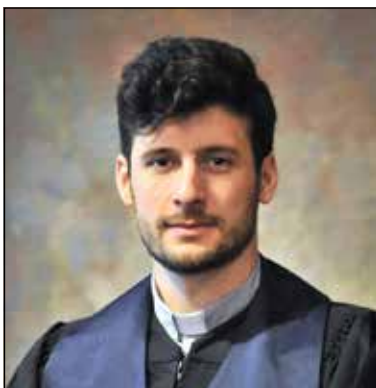
She was invited by the Governor General of Canada to join the official Canadian delegation to attend the funeral mass of Pope Francis, representing Canadian Christians on the global stage. She also represented The Presbyterian Church in Canada while serving on the Program Committee of the World Council of Churches Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in 2022, contributing to the shaping of its global leadership.

Amanda received the degree at VST's May 2026 convocation ceremony.

In February, the Vancouver School of Theology announced **the Rev. Roberto DeSandoli** as the 2026 recipient of the TEG (Thoughtful, Engaged, and Generous) Award, which recognizes leading practi-

tioners in Christian ministry during their early years of career service.

The Rev. DeSandoli has served St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Saskatoon, Sask., since 2018. During his ministry, the congregation has grown in active membership and strengthened its calling to serve its downtown neighbourhood through worship, pastoral care and outreach. He has developed partnerships with local churches, service organizations and faith communities, and led initiatives bringing civic leaders, agencies and the public together to support the well-being of the city. He has also contributed leadership at the presbytery, synod and General Assembly levels of the national church and participated in change-leadership initiatives within the denomination.



Fishing on the Other Side



By the Rev. Dr. Richard Topping, president, Vancouver School of Theology and Professor of Studies in the Reformed Tradition at St. Andrew's Hall in Vancouver, B.C.

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias, and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net

to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So, they cast it, and now they cannot haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment, for he had taken it off, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off (John 21:1–8).

The PCC's Change Leadership Team is guided specifically by John 20–21. These chapters demonstrate that Jesus Christ keeps showing up, inviting his disciples to faithful practice for this new time.

Jesus shows up: he is faithful
As the story is told in John chapter 20, it is the third time Jesus

shows up among his followers after the resurrection. First, Jesus comes to his followers behind locked doors, where they are hunkered down for fear. He breathes the Spirit of life into them, brings peace and gives them a mission. Great news!

And then, without delay, they fail miserably at mission. Thomas, one of the twelve, will not budge away from skepticism and toward faith even though they offer a breathless witness: "we have seen the Lord." Only when Jesus is present to the disciples' testimony about him does Thomas believe.

Christian witness relies on Jesus showing up. When Jesus—the word made flesh—joins our testimony, our witness finds its power. It matters that Jesus shows up. The story ends with Thomas's confession: "my Lord and my God." We are at the pinnacle of John's gospel. This is

why it was written down: "That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and believing, you may have life in his name" (20:31). But that is not the end of the story. The disciples try to slide back into the world that has passed away.

Jesus shows up: no going back to business as usual

Seven of the disciples go back to fishing. The disciples, including Thomas, try to go back to a before-Christ world when it is now The Year of our Lord #1. It feels so anticlimactic, like an unfortunate addendum to John's gospel. A good ending matters. Why not just leave it at Thomas's wonderful confession? That is an inspirational ending.

We get a dose of realism in this fishing story. I remember preaching at Easter—trumpets blaring, the choir in full force and a church bursting at the seams. At the door, a person greeted me with a sigh: "That was nice. Now it is back to the 'real world.'" They meant back to "fishing"—back the trap of business as usual.

The trouble is: in the light of Easter, there is no going back. The world shifted. Seven expert fishers are transformed into witnesses. As *Living Faith* puts it, "all Christians share in the ministry of the Risen Christ." Jesus keeps showing up to awaken his people from our slumbers. Karl

Barth wrote: "[Christians] are, in fact, those who constantly stand in need of reawakening and who depend upon the fact that they are continually reawakened... There is thus required a new and direct act of God if there is to be the awakening in which a [person] becomes a disciple, a Christian" (*Church Dogmatics*, IV.2, pp. 555–556).

Jesus shows up: life moves toward us

In the story told in John, the disciples tried to go back to how it used to be. They fished all night. "But that night they caught nothing." Trying to live in the world like Easter has not happened is unfulfilling for those who know better. It is tempting to go back to do what we have done, to pick up where we left off, to go on autopilot. We can be living without being alive. We can practice unreflectively what used to matter in another world, at another time, and even get nostalgic about how good fishing used to be.

"And Jesus showed himself again [for the third time] to the disciples..." Jesus will not leave well-enough alone. After a night of failure, Jesus shows up again, Easter dawns once more. He asks the disciples a question that sounds like more of a statement. "Children, you have no fish, have you?" He knows, but it is as though he wants them to say they have come to the end of their own best efforts. We can no longer do well what we used to do. We cannot go back to how the world once was.

The disciples do not know it is Jesus. Think of the embarrassment of practiced fisher people calling out to the beach about a hundred yards away, "No," without an explanation. Just "No." What used to work fails in the new situation. Jesus can work with that kind of stark honesty. Repentance is a good starting point for the new.

Jesus shows up: he invites newness

Jesus says, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and there you will find some [fish]." This stranger on the beach gives fishing instructions. That is weird, unexpected, a tad impertinent. Most people would get defensive—unsolicited advice can feel

In November of 2023, the Assembly Council created the Working Group on Narratives of Hope and Possibility to recommend pathways that position the PCC in an attitude of openness and possibility regarding its future. In June 2025, based on the recommendations of the Working Group and the Assembly Council, the General Assembly approved the appointment of a Special Commission, the **Change Leadership Team**, to encourage the apostolic witness of the church.

The members of the Change Leadership Team (Special Commission) are Yvonne Bearbull (Kenora), Colin Conrad (Halifax), Roberto DeSandoli (Saskatoon), Maeve Forde (Waterloo), In Kee Kim (Etobicoke), Peter Kinch (Toronto), Heather Malnick (Bracebridge), Debora Rolls (Peterborough), Cindy Stephenson (Calgary), Richard Topping (Vancouver) and Renee Yardley (Montreal).

like judgement. To have the very activity you are best at questioned hits hard.

But the disciples, exhausted by a whole night of failure, recognize a long-standing method does not work anymore, and so they listen. Their guard comes down.

Desperation makes us open to the new things the gospel is doing. Frustration generates openness to what we do not usually do. People learn in situations like this. The disciples listen to this stranger's voice. What have they got to lose? They cast on the other side. Incognito Jesus invites his followers to a new experience of flourishing in his service. When the disciples no longer know what to do, listening to Jesus Christ matters. They wait on a voice not their own, they pause to hear direction that does not come out of their own bag of tricks and tips. Author Andrew Root writes, "Waiting is essential... Waiting is our disposition when we anticipate the event of God's in-breaking...to wait [attentively] is to be catechized [taught and formed], to enter a school that forms us to see the action of a living God" (*Churches and the Crisis of Decline*, pp. 142–143).

The Protestant Reformers spoke of the gospel of Jesus Christ as a message that comes from outside of ourselves—to give life and direct us. That is what happens here and anywhere there is grace enough for a Holy Spirit-

inspired pause to hear and heed Jesus' voice. Earlier in the gospel of John, Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Christ's church recognizes his voice speaking through scripture in the power of the Spirit. And hearing scripture helps the church discern Christ's voice coming to us from the world around us with important insights. "For with you is the foundation of life; in your light, we see light" (Psalm 36:9) and "in him was life, and his life was the light of all people" (John 1:4). A radical word of grace from the world and its multiple cultures is expected from a God who is active in the world. (See *Reformed Public Theology: A Global Vision for the Life of the World*, edited by Matthew Kaeming, for a series of essays from the global reformed church for the ways in which a Christ-centred reading provides means of appreciative gratitude and hesitation.)

It is no small honour that God, for our sake, has so magnificently adorned the world in order that we may not only be spectators of this beautiful theatre but also enjoy the multiplied abundance and variety of good things which are presented in it (Calvin, Commentary on the Psalms, on Psalm 104:31).

Jesus shows up: we share in his ministry

How amazing in our story that the disciples simply do not have the

capacity to receive what Jesus wants to give them. They share in what Jesus can do. It is more than they can manage. They participate in his ministry. He gives them what they cannot get on their own with all their wisdom. It takes time to adjust to a resurrection world. That is why in all the gospels there is so much disorientation and weirdness when Jesus shows up—this living and dying and living again Saviour just keeps coming back to his fickle disciples to bless them and give them work to do.

Readers of this passage may interpret the bounty of fish differently—it is about mission, numbers of nations, a metaphor for "success" God gives. John emphasizes nets bursting with fish. He accents the abundance that the risen Christ gives. It makes me think of Luke and Acts, where numbers are a sign of the Holy Spirit's activity. "The Lord added daily to their number those who were being saved." Normal, or at least Easter normal, generates life—quantity and quality. Jesus shows up and people, hordes of them, experience the abundant, eternal, overflowing life God wants to give the world through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit.

Jesus shows up and activates everyone in the boat. The whole crew shares a mission no one could manage alone. The other gospels record the utter surprise and joy of Jesus' disciples when

he sends them out to heal, deliver and announce the rule of God, and it works (Luke 10:17). They participate in what he does with joy born of awe and wonder. "The universal mission of the church carried out by those who can do nothing without Jesus (John 15:5) ... will be fruitful as long as they abide in him and obey his commands" (Sandra Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel*, p. 204).

Jesus shows up: we confess him

The disciple whom Jesus loved says to Peter, "It is the Lord!" The stranger is recognized by his life-giving pattern. Peter jumps in the water—his confession is baptismal. All the disciples know that it is the Lord. For the third time, he comes to them when they were not looking for him. For the third time he comes to do for them what they cannot do on their own.

He comes to energize, calm, commission, accompany and demonstrate that he is to be trusted, to bring delight in his service. It is his presence to the disciples' work and witness that makes them effective. And he comes to us in our time. He calls out to us from unfamiliar and unexpected directions. Our exhaustion has us paused, open and listening to advice we could never give ourselves. His voice is calling out to us. We hear an invitation to fish

on the other side:

through Holy Scripture, through other denominations, through churches of the Global South, through the Indigenous churches, through the wise practices of innovators, through the daring of those who persist, through congregations that are already fishing on the other side.

We have lots to learn about resources and relevance and God! Newness is on offer for those who have ears to hear and the humility to listen. Fishing on the other side calls out to us.

This strange and wonderful paragraph from Albert Schweitzer conveys something powerful about the Jesus who shows up and instructs us to fish on the other side: "He comes to us as One Unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those who knew him not. He speaks to us the same words, 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks which He must fulfill in our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in his fellowship, and as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who he is" (*Quest for the Historical Jesus*, p. 403).



Coming Together in a Time of War



The Rev. Greg Smith speaking to the audience.

By Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta.

In March, as the first days of the U.S. attack on Iran unfolded, Calgary's Iranian community gathered to remember the victims of political repression in Iran—at a Presbyterian church.

"Voices of Remembrance: An Iranian Community Memorial Gathering" was led by the Iranian Family Outreach & Wellness program of Calgary's The Immigrant Education Society (TIES) in partnership with Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church (VAPC) and the Calgary Foundation.

The afternoon memorial was well attended. Provincial MLAs Dr. Luanne Metz, Parmeet Singh Boparai, and MPs Pat Kelly, Greg McLean and Dalwinder Gill attended the event, along with former Calgary mayor and Alberta's Official Opposition Leader, Naheed Nenshi.

The event developed out of VAPC's community partnerships with groups representing recent immigrants. "VAPC has always been a place of welcome for those who are new to Calgary and to Canada," said the Rev. Greg Smith.

At the core of VAPC's community partnerships is an ideal of community wellness and a recognition that specific communities have specific needs. "There was a

need for the Iranian community to have a place to gather and share with each other with the support of professionals in community mental health and wellness. The recent waves of repression and violence that began with the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in Iran, and continued with the mass protests earlier this year, had a huge effect on those who may be geographically removed from the immediate events, but who have family members back home and connections to Iran. This community needed the support of the wider community and that's what we wanted to offer. To let them know that, even in some small way, they were not alone in this."

The Family Outreach & Wellness program began meeting weekly at VAPC, and a special memorial event for the victims of the repression was planned for March 7. Things took a dramatic turn with the U.S.-Israel attack on Iran a week before the memorial was planned to take place. "We found ourselves dealing with a higher profile event and with a huge mix of emotions within the Iranian community who had come together to organize the memorial," said the Rev. Greg Smith.

Azita Afsharnejat, who immigrated from Iran 19 years ago and now works as the manager of TIES Mental Health & Family

Wellbeing program, echoed the emotions felt by the community: "It's overwhelming. This is very devastating for everyone. The internet (in Iran) is cut. The people cannot even connect with their family members to see who is alive, who is not."

Some in the Iranian community wanted to focus the event on regime change. Greg was firm that the original intention for the afternoon—as a memorial to the victims of repression—needed to be maintained. In the end, a few members of the Iranian community decided not to participate, but the organizers and the vast majority of the community continued and turned out in large numbers.

On the day of the memorial, the Rev. Greg Smith opened with welcoming remarks that helped to set the tone for what was to come. "We are here to remember

the victims of repression in Iran. We are remembering them for the courageous human spirit that was in each and every one of them. We're remembering that spirit because we can recognize that spirit in ourselves as well... And when we recognize that human spirit in each and every one of us, regardless of what our cultural background is...that is something powerful. That is something that will topple even the most ruthless regime. So, we are here today to hold their memory sacred, however you might wish to consider that word sacred. We are here to hold their memories and to hold space. You need to know you are welcome here and welcome to join us in doing that."

That atmosphere of remembrance, shared grief and a longing for justice prevailed throughout the afternoon. Songs of mourn-

ing were offered by Iranian musicians on traditional instruments as well as a deeply moving video tribute to victims. An emotional, personal remembrance was given by Sahar Sohrabzade and her daughter, who received news that their brother and uncle had been killed in January. The desire to remember, heal and stand together in support of one another was reflected by many of the speakers.

"I see people from every possible background here who just needed to be a community, breathe the same air as their neighbours and feel a sense of hope. That's why I'm here," said NDP Opposition Leader Naheed Nenshi.

VAPC's witness to a broader understanding of faith, spirit and community was evident at the event. As Greg observed, "As a community of faith, we believe that faith transcends religion. Faith is about our shared humanity, our hopes, our sorrows and our joys. Being a part of this event is about coming together to be a bigger community and letting people know that they are not alone in their pain and their grief."

Those who attended the memorial experienced something special: a coming together in community solidarity in the face of brutality, violence, uncertainty and war. The memorial event was appreciated by all those who attended and received positive media coverage from CBC Radio and TV, the *Calgary Herald* and the UK-based Iran International News.



Public figures and attendees. PHOTO CREDITS: THE IMMIGRANT EDUCATION SOCIETY (TIES)

A Different Voice on Yes-TV



The Rev. Greg Smith (second from left) and the panel on "The Mix," a talk show on Yes-TV. PHOTO CREDIT: MELISSA DELEFF

By Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta.

For the second year, the Rev. Greg Smith of Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta., is a panelist on Yes-TV's "The Mix," an interfaith talk show giving faith perspectives on current affairs. The show is broadcast across Canada on the Yes-TV network and was recently picked up by the Miracle Channel.

Greg is a panelist, along with participants from various faith communities. He's a progressive voice on a network that is generally considered to be religiously conservative. Greg recognizes that the topics and questions themselves are often presented in a way that already frames the discussion in a more conservative context. "That can sometimes be frustrating," he said.

Greg is also aware of his unique place on the panel. "The other Christian panelists represent conservative Catholic and conserva-

tive Protestant perspectives. I'm very aware that, intentionally or not, I am the solitary liberal Christian voice on the show." He sees that as part of his role.

In a world where Christianity is increasingly defined by exclusivist and literalist voices and by the narratives of Christian nationalism, Greg believes it is important that people know that there are different understandings of what it means to be a Christian. "There are Christian perspectives that are very different, in fact sometimes very opposed, to ideas and viewpoints that are routinely represented in our public discourse as definitively Christian."

Many tune in to Yes-TV to watch its family programming, or familiar shows and personalities, but there are always those who find themselves watching because they are searching for answers. Those viewers, the ones who want to understand what Christianity is all about, are able to hear a different kind of Christian voice.

A WMS Service with a Difference

By Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta.

In April, Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church (VAPC) in Calgary, Alta., enjoyed a Women's Missionary Society (WMS) worship service with a difference.

Lisbeth Duncan and her WMS team of Sandi Churchill and Marjorie Macqueen have a long-standing commitment to the WMS and faithfully continue to put together an annual service for Mission Awareness Sunday. Lisbeth is a gifted worship leader

and with the help of her very capable team, the service is always thoughtful and inspired.

This year, the team was planning for a service focusing on Cuba, with a template written by the Rev. Dr. Dorcas Gordon, Principal Emerita of Knox College, and a sermon-monologue written by the Rev. Dora Arce Valentin, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Cuba and minister of First Church, Havana.

"When Lisbeth approached me about the service, I thought it was very timely. She asked me

if a member of our ministry team might be interested in delivering the monologue," said the Rev. Greg Smith, VAPC's lead minister.

Ana Victoria Piñero is VAPC's Faith Education Coordinator. An animator and artist, Ana Victoria immigrated from Venezuela in 2018. She thought it was an exciting opportunity to step out from behind the screen and try her hand at acting.

With the encouragement of Greg and Lisbeth, Ana Victoria approached Vicky Velasco, founder and artistic director of

Gato Negro Spanish Theatre in Calgary. Together, Vicky and Ana Victoria took the short amount of time available to them and developed the monologue into a *lectura dramatizada*—a dramatic reading. Lisbeth and Greg provided context and theological background.

At worship on April 19, Ana Victoria and Vicky led VAPC's *Wondertime* for the children and youth, providing an improvised Spanish lesson for the entire congregation on the theme of friendship and peace. Ana Victoria left

with the Sunday school group but returned very shortly, in character, as a Cuban woman representing the Syrophenician woman of Matthew 15.

Both the congregation and online viewers appreciated this WMS service with a difference and the memorable message from Cuba, delivered in a Calgary Latina voice, encouraging them to practice "effective love"—recognizing each person's dignity through solidarity and lifting up the voices of those who are often silenced.



Photos from the WMS service at Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church in Calgary, Alta. PHOTO CREDIT: PHIL GAISER

Safe Church Policy



“Safe Church” is the name of a section on the PCC’s website that leads to information about the national church’s safety policies. The three policies are Leading with Care, the Policy and Procedures for Addressing Harassment in the Church, and the Policy for Dealing with Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is committed to fostering safe church environments free from harm and harassment, where individuals, especially children and vulnerable adults, are protected. Creating safe churches involves both preventing and responding to harm through policies, training, police record checks, transparency, clear reporting procedures for misconduct and pathways to justice, redress and healing when harm occurs.

It is the policy of the PCC that all people who participate in the denomination’s programs, ministries and/or use the denomination’s facilities, will be cared for with Christian compassion and will be safe. It is also the PCC’s policy that sexual abuse, sexual harassment and harassment of any kind by church leaders, staff or volunteers will not be tolerated. All complaints will be taken seriously and handled in accordance with the denomination’s policy.

The Safe Church section of the PCC website provides details about how to make a complaint and who to contact if you need advice about the safety policies. The following are some commonly asked questions and answers about the Safe Church policies.

Can a third party make a complaint on behalf of someone else?

A third party may initiate a complaint under the two harassment policies. However, investigations may yield limited evidence if the person who experienced the alleged harassment is unwilling to be interviewed or to provide a complaint. The investigating committee proceeds with inter-

viewing the person against whom the complaint is made.

In some cases, a hesitant complainant may request assistance from a supportive third party to contact the appropriate body responsible for investigating complaints or national office staff to ask questions or seek advice about the denomination’s harassment policies. This may allow the complainant to feel sufficiently comfortable to submit their complaint. No person should be pressured into making a complaint. A complainant under the Policy for Dealing with Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment is not liable to censure for a refusal to testify to their complaint in a church court.

What can I do to prevent harassment?

Preventing harassment is a responsibility for everyone who participates in the life of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Setting clear expectations about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour is one way that leaders can foster safer environments within the church. This can be done by

1. informing people who are part of your congregation or ministry that the church’s policy is that harassment will not be tolerated and will be addressed.
2. ensuring that church bodies and other leaders in the congregation review the denomination’s safety policies regularly, and annually in the case of the Policy and Procedures for Addressing Harassment in the Church.

Sermons and Christian education activities will naturally present opportunities to discuss

Christ’s example for how people are meant to care for one another and protect the vulnerable. When leaders notice disrespectful or harmful behaviour taking place, it is best to intervene early to reduce the likelihood of the behaviour escalating.

What can someone who is making a complaint expect to experience during the investigation?

The investigating committee will ensure that complainants receive guidance about navigating the procedures of the church’s courts. If the complainant wishes, the committee will also designate a qualified person to provide pastoral support to the complainant throughout the investigation.

Investigations typically include the following steps:

- The person making the complaint is interviewed. A complaint is prepared and signed by the complainant.
- The person complained against is interviewed and has an opportunity to respond to the specific allegations in the complaint.
- The person making the complaint is interviewed again and is presented with the response from the person complained against.
- If there are witnesses, they are interviewed separately.
- The committee also collects and reviews all relevant documents.

The committee will inform all parties of the decisions made by the church body about the complaint and any corrective action that will be taken based on the findings of the investigation.

What rights do people have

during the investigation process if a complaint has been made against them?

The person complained against is always presumed innocent at the beginning of an investigation and until proven otherwise. If the presbytery or session cannot conclude from the evidence on a balance of probabilities that the actions did occur as alleged, then it must decide that the complaint cannot be substantiated. Any complaint must be substantiated before discipline can occur.

Depending on the nature of the complaint, if the person complained against is a minister or church employee, they may be placed on a leave of absence with pay until the investigation has concluded. Any leave of absence given during an investigation does not imply the guilt or innocence of the person under investigation.

What can people who have been complained against expect to experience during the investigation?

The investigating committee will ensure that people who have been complained against receive guidance about navigating the procedures of the church’s courts. If the person complained against wishes, the committee will designate a qualified person to provide them with pastoral support throughout the investigation.

Investigations typically include the following steps:

- The person making a complaint is interviewed. A complaint is prepared and signed by the complainant.
- The person complained against is interviewed and has an opportunity to respond to the specific allega-

tions in the complaint. The written response is signed by the respondent.

- The person making a complaint is interviewed again and is presented with the response to the complaint. The committee hears the complainant’s response.
- If there are witnesses, they are interviewed separately. The committee also collects and reviews all relevant documents.

The committee will inform all parties of the decisions made by the church body about the complaint and any corrective action that will be taken based on the findings of the investigation.

For more information or to learn answers to other commonly asked questions, and to read the Safe Church policies, visit presbyterian.ca/safe-church.



Enduring Place of Worship in Nottawasaga



The Rev. Nan St. Louis and the Rev. Dr. Neal Mathers at the pulpit of the outdoor chapel.

By Kathy Lemon and Ferne Smith, Emmanuel Presbyterian Church in Nottawa, Ont.

In 1852, the Campbell family donated land on a prominent hill in the beautiful Pretty River Valley of Nottawasaga Township, now Township of Clearview, to build the first West Nottawasaga Presbyterian Church, a manse and “burying ground” to serve the spiritual needs of Scottish settlers.

The first church, likely a log structure, was built in 1853. It burned down in 1865 and was replaced with a Gothic-style brick church building with a spire that could be seen for miles around. Then, in 1946, a lightning strike resulted in this church building being lost to fire as well.

A third church building was erected on the site in 1948. This church was a place of regular worship until 1989 when the congregations of the three-point Duntroon pastoral charge came

together and built a new church, Emmanuel Presbyterian Church, to serve the worship needs of the amalgamated congregation. The West Church building surrounded by the cemetery was retained by the congregation and yearly anniversary services were held each September until 2019. Due to safety concerns, the building was demolished and removed in 2022. But even as the church building was being removed, plans were underway to create a memorial to recognize the long history of churches on the site.

Under the leadership of Rae and Lorna Hockley, a volunteer committee consisting of members of Emmanuel Presbyterian Church and the Pretty River Valley community was formed in 2023 and began to generate ideas for a suitable memorial. As the group discussed ideas, they realized they needed some expert help to create a sturdy and lasting memorial. Jim Campbell of Rockside Campbell Design Inc, from Duntroon, was asked to help and became an enthusiastic member of the committee. His expertise and creativity guided the committee and—with the help of many community members donating time, equipment, expertise, materials and cash—a wonderful, meaningful and peaceful place for quiet reflection has been created on the site of the former church buildings: an outdoor chapel.

Ten trees outline the outdoor chapel site, the space between the trees representing the windows of the former church buildings. Stone benches sheltered by



The community gathered to dedicate the West Nottawasaga Presbyterian Church outdoor chapel.

the trees serve as the pews for the outdoor chapel and, when seated in the pews, a pulpit detailing the history of this special space is in full view. Standing at the pulpit, a large stone reminds visitors of the many ministers who served the congregations that worshipped here. As you sit in the outdoor chapel, the beautiful Pretty River Valley stretches out before you and the Niagara Escarpment adds a dramatic backdrop. Gravestones mark the history of the brave settlers who came to this land and the generations that have followed them.

The West Church Memorial Outdoor Chapel was dedicated on Sunday Sept. 7, 2025, in a community service conducted by the Rev. Dr. Neal Mathers and the Rev. Nan St. Louis, both former ministers of the West Church. The special service was well attended by community members and those with deep ties to the community who travelled from a distance to attend. Attendees were welcomed by the Beinn Gorm Highlanders pipe band, a tribute to the Scottish pioneers who first worshipped here.

Neal titled the dedication “Stones That Speak.” He challenged the many in attendance to imagine the people who came before us: the Indigenous people travelling through the Pretty River Valley, perhaps setting up a camp on this spot; the first pioneers forced out of the Scottish Highlands coming into the valley to forge a new life; their descendants continuing to worship in this place.

Neal noted that “the outdoor chapel is built to remember that those who worshipped here were ‘living stones,’ chosen by God, as we are, in a particular time and place, together building their

lives on the foundation of a common faith in Jesus Christ... It is a tangible reminder to us to look for where God has shown up in our lives, so that as we count our blessings, we can share our own stories, and the stories of those who worshipped here, so that others may be inspired and encouraged.”

The outdoor chapel and the cemetery are now under the care of the Township of Clearview, providing a public space where all are invited to share in the history of the West Nottawasaga Presbyterian Church. The outdoor chapel is located at #7993 33/34 Sideroad, Nottawa, Clearview Township, Ont.

Principal Change at The Presbyterian College, Montreal

The Board of Governors of The Presbyterian College in Montreal, Que., announced that the Rev. Dr. Roland De Vries will not seek reappointment as principal of the college at the conclusion of his term in December 2026. Principal De Vries was appointed to the role by the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada in 2021, having previously served in the role of Director of Pastoral Studies at the college (2015–2021). A search for the next principal of The Presbyterian College is now underway.

In his decision not to seek reappointment, Principal De Vries shared that he intends to return to congregational ministry following the conclusion of his service at the college. “I look forward to returning to the work of preaching, teaching, missional leadership, and pastoral care within a congregation, which I see as my primary calling.”



The Rev. Dr. Roland De Vries.

The Board and staff at The Presbyterian College expressed sincere gratitude for Roland’s ministry over nearly 11 years. He served faithfully, with deep care for students and for the ministry and programs of the college. There will be a future opportunity for the college community to acknowledge his service and to express gratitude.



The Beinn Gorm Highlanders Pipe Band welcomed attendees to the dedication service.

PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

Thirsting for Righteousness



The *Prophetic Pathways* hemispheric encounter in Bogotá, Colombia, brought together ACT Alliance members from Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Canada and the United States.

By Guy Smagghe, PWS&D Director

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Matthew 5:6, 9).

Our online meeting with Cuban partners was difficult. It was emotional. Tears were shed as they shared with us how they struggle to distribute the small amount of humanitarian aid that is coming to their country. The blockade on fuel to Cuba is creating unbelievable hardship.

The Cuban Council of Churches had been working with a donor for four years to get a vehicle that would help them distribute desperately needed food and medicine to the most vulnerable of their population. The vehicle finally arrived. All the paperwork was done to clear customs. And now the vehicle is unusable. They

have to move it to a parking lot as fuel is just not available.

Fuel is not available because the United States decided it wouldn't be. The U.S. President promised to punish any country that sends fuel to Cuba. After decapitating the Venezuelan government and taking over the oil industry there, they stopped the life-giving fuel shipments from Venezuela to Cuba. How can the Cuban Council of Churches distribute essential goods to those most in need if they can't move it from the containers to their people?

"Some estimate that half a million lives are at stake in Cuba. The situation is complicated at many levels, but our people are essentially experiencing a genocide. Because of lack of fuel, there are major power outages too, and hospitals are doing caesarean section surgeries with the lights of cell phones...that is all they have," said one partner from the Christian Centre for Reflection

and Dialogue.

"What we need now is an electric vehicle. This will help us tremendously. We want to ask for food, for medicine, for fuel, but we now have to prioritize an electric vehicle," said the Cuban Council of Churches leader.

We were gathered as Canadian churches—Presbyterians, Anglicans, the United Church and Mennonites—listening to the pleas of the Cuban people, trying to find a way to help. Due to sanctions, many banks don't want to send funds to Cuba. We seek creative ways. Our partner informed us that we may be able to make a payment to a company established in Canada and the electric vehicle could be provided in Cuba. This offers a way forward.

We pondered as well how we can help with food assistance through the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. As Canadian churches, that is what we do. We listen and we act in solidarity with local partners.

Our Cuban partner from the Council of Churches was also with us in January, as we held a first hemispheric gathering in Bogotá, Colombia, bringing together representatives from churches across 12 countries in Latin America and North America, all members of the ACT Alliance. Our main purpose was to seek ways to strengthen our relationships, to build bridges of solidarity, and we did.

Our Latin American counterparts came prepared with the proposal to create a solidarity fund that would be managed by them in support of initiatives to address the migrant and climate crises in the region. Member churches and agencies from North America agreed to explore what resources may be possible for that fund. The hope was to make US\$250,000 available.

After a couple of months, we had a call to bring information to the table. Members from Canada

and the U.S. gathered and added all the possible contributions together. We reached a total of US\$220,000. It was just short of what was requested, but close enough to be able to get started with this new joint initiative—locally led from Latin America—as an expression of our hemispheric solidarity.

Even in these difficult times, when many organizations face cuts and hardship, we are able to come up with something new and inspiring to work on collectively. While many details remain, and there will be more potential projects than available funding, we all look forward to bringing about change in our own ways—against the currents of fundamentalisms, nationalisms, imperialism.

As we continually gather to assist those affected by deliberate and criminal abuse of populations, we remember that this is our calling: to thirst for righteousness, and to be peacemakers.

PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

The State of Sponsorship in Canada

All Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), including The Presbyterian Church in Canada, are facing historically low sponsorship allocation numbers due to deep cuts to the number of individuals the government permits SAHs to sponsor annually under the Global SAH Cap. Since 2024, the number of spaces under the global SAH cap has fallen from 13,500 to 5,000.

In 2025, the Government of Canada allocated 58 sponsorship spaces to the PCC, a 29% reduction from 2024. The quota allocated to the PCC for private sponsorship in 2026 is 25 spaces and represents a further 54% decrease.

This is especially concerning at a time when the number of refugees globally has never been higher and the demands for sponsorship far outpace the number of spaces allocated.

Due to the limited number of spaces available for private



A family sponsored by Unionville Presbyterian Church, in Markham, Ont., who arrived in September 2025.

sponsorship, PWS&D encourages congregations and groups interested in refugee sponsorship to consider the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program. Under this program, sponsorship groups are responsible for 50%

of sponsorship costs, while the government funds the remaining 50%. PWS&D also has resources available to assist congregations who might face financial barriers in undertaking a BVOR sponsorship. If your congregation is

interested in pursuing a BVOR sponsorship, contact PWS&D at sponsorship@presbyterian.ca.

The PCC has been part of advocacy efforts to double the 2026 Global Cap to prevent the collapse of sponsorship infrastructure,

with little success to date. If you are interested in advocating for a fair and just immigration system, check out the Canadian Council for Refugees campaign: ccrweb.ca/en/join-our-call-canada-welcoming-we-are.

Our Journey with Refugee Sponsorship

By Brenda Marriot, a member of the Refugee Sponsorship Committee at Knox Presbyterian Church in Waterdown, Ont.

No doubt, many refugee sponsorship teams across Canada are celebrating the same special 10th anniversary as six churches within the Presbytery of Hamilton, Ont.—Erskine, St. Paul’s Hamilton, Chedoke, St. Cuthbert’s, Brant Hills and Knox Waterdown.

When we greeted the first Syrian family we sponsored at Pearson airport in June 2016, we could have never imagined that we would be back in 2026 to welcome a fifth family. Sandu, who is originally from Eritrea, and her three children arrived in January—deep in the heart of a Ca-

nadian winter and quickly became acquainted with snow upon snow upon more snow!

Our team’s journey has been nothing short of breathtaking, replete with many highs and lows, and everything in between. Despite the challenges, there has been a pervasive sense of wonder in our journey alongside the families whose care has been entrusted to us. Every volunteer has contributed their special gifts to caring for and supporting the families in whatever way they have been called, whether that be budgeting finances, prayer, reading with children, sharing a cup of coffee, or by helping families navigate the school system, to name but a few.

We joke about the book of



A refugee family, sponsored by six churches within the Presbytery of Hamilton, arrives at Pearson airport in January 2026.

many, many chapters that we are going to write, documenting the winding trail that has led us

to where we are now. One volunteer was present for the birth of a baby and another shepherded

a family through the process of their child’s organ transplant. We have helped facilitate family reunifications, cheered at citizenship ceremonies, and comforted when families have mourned the death of loved ones. It is joyful when we come together for our annual picnic and reconnect with all of our dear friends.

Our volunteers would say that their lives have been enriched through their engagement with the newcomer families who have given us far more than we have given them. Refugee sponsorship has helped us to see people rather than differences. It has helped us to be reminded of the importance of respecting one another and making connections. Our backgrounds, cultural and religious beliefs may be different, but we all become one in our shared humanity.

Ten years on, our team members are all a little older, and perhaps a little wiser. We know that there are still many rivers to cross, mountains to climb and many blessings to reap as we plunge into all that lies ahead of us and “walk the walk” with the gift of our newly arrived family.

PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT



Georgina Musah, mother of three, received livelihoods training through the CBR program in Garu and is now a self-employed farmer.



John Anieb received support through the CBR program in Garu to go to school and is now attending teacher training.

Improving the Lives of People with Disabilities in Ghana

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

Northern Ghana, particularly the districts where the Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) program in Garu works, is currently fraught with challenges of poverty, climate change, diseases and disability issues.

In recent times, these issues have been compounded by the global Covid-19 pandemic, which left disastrous consequences in the lives of the over 40,000 people with disabilities estimated to be living in these areas. The aftermath of Covid-19 is particularly worrying as people with disabilities and their families/communities have lost their sources of livelihoods amidst the high cost of living and prevailing social barriers.

The CBR program, in part-

nership with PWS&D, has been working to ensure access to health care for people with disabilities and to promote improved health outcomes in communities. In 2025, the program conducted awareness training on sexual and reproductive health issues and disability prevention, provided nutrition training to pregnant and lactating women, and screened children for early detection and disability prevention.

Facilitating access to specialized health care related to orthopaedic and physiotherapy services, eye care, audiology, mental health care, and assistive devices and functional aids has been carried out by the program. In 2025, over 4,000 persons with disabilities received access to corrective and reconstructive surgeries, medication and counselling services, and assistive devices to enhance functionality

and manage disability.

An essential component of the CBR program is to facilitate access to inclusive education for school-age children with disabilities. Over 1,500 children with disabilities were able to access formal education in mainstream and special schools to improve literacy in 2025.

John Anieb shared how participating in the program has changed his life. "When the CBR team first met me, I was not mobile and was stigmatized and neglected by my family and community. [They] were sensitized by the CBR team to avoid stigma, accept my condition and support me through life.

"The [CBR team] took me to a specialized hospital where callipers were fitted on my legs. They provided me with a pair of crutches, a tricycle to enhance mobility and got me enrolled in

primary school. I have successfully climbed the academic ladder, and my dream is to be a teacher and a disability rights activist. I deeply appreciate PWS&D and the CBR program team for changing my life," he shared.

The program also provides livelihood support services for people with disabilities and their families and communities—a total of 3,205 people were supported in 2025. Farmers with disabilities were trained in how to improve crop yields and improve crop resilience amidst the cascading effects of climate change.

Additionally, program participants were provided with access to start-up capital, financial literacy trainings, and credits to engage in agro-processing and vocational trades to enhance income generating opportunities.

The Garu Community Based

Rehabilitation project contributes to improved food and income security, improved access to health care and health outcomes, reduction in negative social attitudes particularly regarding stigma, and promotes overall well-being and improved quality of life for people with disabilities.

Georgina Musah, a program participant shared, "I received improved seed from the CBR program and training in crop production to engage in farming. I am so glad my crops are doing well in the midst of the long spells of drought. Prior to this, I received a tricycle from the CBR program to enhance mobility and trainings to engage in petty trades to boost my sources of livelihoods. I have enough food and money from my livelihood activities to fend for myself and my children and to support my husband."

PRESBYTERIAN WORLD SERVICE & DEVELOPMENT

Bringing Hope and Health to Mothers and Babies



Training provided to mothers by CNEWC help prevent maternal and infant deaths.

By *Geralda Prince (Nurse) and Andre Jean Pierre (Director), Center for Nutrition & Education for Women and Children, Haiti*

In rural Haiti, where generations have relied on long-standing traditions and limited access to formal health care, the arrival of a maternal health project supported by the Center for Nutrition & Education for Women and Children (CNEWC) and PWS&D is changing outcomes—and lives in Cap-Haitien. Working in close partnership with Haitian health workers, community leaders and families, the project focuses on reducing infant mortality, combating child

malnutrition, preventing maternal deaths, and promoting modern, evidence-based care during pregnancy and childbirth.

Community-centred partnership

A cornerstone of this initiative is genuine partnership. Rather than imposing outside solutions, the program collaborates with local clinics, trained community health promoters, midwives and church groups to build trust and capacity. Haitian staff lead community education sessions, antenatal clinics and home visits, while CNEWC provides training resources, supplies and technical support. This

cooperative model ensures interventions are culturally appropriate and sustainable because they are driven and owned locally.

Preventing maternal and infant deaths

Many maternal deaths in Haiti are preventable with timely detection of complications such as pre-eclampsia, hemorrhage and infection. The project trains midwives and community health workers in active management of the third stage of labour, hygienic delivery techniques, emergency recognition and referral pathways. Birth preparedness planning—encouraging families to save for



Vivane Jules and her 18-month-old daughter illustrate how nutrition training work to combat childhood malnutrition.

therapeutic feeding programs for malnourished children. We hold classes to teach families how to make the most of local foods to prepare nutrient-rich meals for young children.

Vivane Jules, 28, remains actively involved in the training sessions offered by the project, even after giving birth to her daughter in November 2024. Already pregnant when she initially joined the project, Vivane expressed her gratitude for the support she received and noted that she gained a great deal of health knowledge. She and her daughter are doing well. A true success story, as, despite living in high risk and difficult conditions, her daughter has shown no signs of malnourishment after 18 months of following the training.

Moving from taboo to science-based care

An important, and sensitive, element of the work is not only trying to reduce infant malnutrition in an impoverished area but also addressing deep-rooted beliefs and practices that can put mothers and babies at risk. The project engages trusted local leaders, traditional birth attendants and church groups in respectful dialogue—acknowledging cultural practices while sharing scientific information about pregnancy risks and safe practices. Testimonies from mothers who experienced improved outcomes help shift community norms.

Over time, more families are choosing to give birth at health facilities or in the presence of trained attendants, adopting prenatal supplements and embracing vaccinations—changes born of trust, education and visible results.

transport, identify a skilled birth attendant and arrange for emergency transport—is emphasized. For infants, the program supports immediate newborn care, breastfeeding and vaccination promotion, and infection prevention measures that together reduce newborn mortality.

Combating child malnutrition

Tackling malnutrition begins in pregnancy and continues through the first 1,000 days of life. The initiative provides nutrition counselling for pregnant and lactating women, distributes micro-nutrient supplements where needed, and supports supplemental and



Unceasing Prayer

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

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



BOOK REVIEW

Respecting Congregations

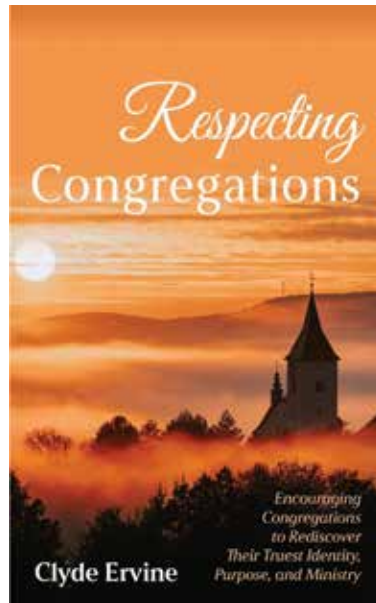
By the Rev. Dr. Robert Dean,
Associate Professor of Theology
and Ethics, Providence University
College & Theological Seminary

Respecting Congregations
Written by Clyde Ervine
Wipf and Stock, 2025

The comedian Rodney Dangerfield made a career of claiming, “I don’t get no respect!” Long-time Presbyterian minister and theological educator (The Presbyterian College and Knox College) Clyde Ervine fears that the local congregation often finds itself in a similar predicament to Dangerfield. In other words, the ministry of local congregations is disrespected. Rather than simply lament this state of affairs, Ervine aspires to offer something more constructive—a theological intervention.

Respecting Congregations is Ervine’s attempt to recall the church in the face of the challenges of the 21st century to its biblically informed identity, mission, and ministry in Christ. He acknowledges that the rapidly changing landscape of post-Christendom Canada has been tough on churches and that many congregations find themselves gripped by deep anxiety about their future. However, Ervine is grasped by a liberating confidence because he recognizes that the church is not ours to save, rather, that is Jesus’ business.

Instead of being driven by frantic efforts to rehabilitate declining ministries and desperate attempts to innovate, Ervine calls congregational leaders to the cultivation of respect. What Ervine has in mind by respect is nothing less than a form of theological and



spiritual discernment that closely attends to what God is doing and what God wills a congregation to be.

Ervine demonstrates to his readers the great respect that the New Testament has for the local congregation. The local congregation is where the action happens because it is where the Holy Spirit is drawing people into God’s family as they share with one another in the body of the crucified and risen Lord Jesus. Again and again, Ervine observes,

the apostle Paul calls the fledgling Christian communities of the Mediterranean world back to their true identity “in Christ.”

As churches struggled to adjust to the seismic cultural changes that began in the ’60s, the second half of the 20th century witnessed the rise of various “congregational fixing” strategies. The various growth strategies tended to have a pragmatic orientation with a focus on productivity and efficiency. As a result, they contributed to the neglect of congregations’ theological identities in Christ. Even The Presbyterian Church in Canada was swept up in this enthusiasm for church growth techniques and methods, boldly announcing a plan to double its membership in the 1980s.

These growth strategies and techniques have contributed to a church culture where today many congregations seem to see their purpose as simply keeping their doors open for another week. Not only is such a vision uninspiring and, hence, unlikely to appeal to the hearts of new members, it is profoundly unfaithful. The church does not exist for itself,

Ervine reminds us, but for God. The church exists because God is on mission. The Father has sent the Son and Spirit into the world to establish congregations as outposts of the kingdom of God, where God’s love and justice is known and practiced. The life of such a missional community will be marked by gathering and sending. Gathering is not intended to meet the diverse and insatiable desires of religiously discriminating consumers but is intended to form God’s people into a people of praise, who are in turn capable of discerning and bearing witness to the presence of Christ in the world.

Ervine has offered a stark but salutary challenge to mainline churches like our own. The challenges of navigating post-Christendom are significant, but if we can reclaim and cultivate the type of theological imagination that Ervine calls for, we might just discover that God has provided us with all that we need to be found faithful and perhaps even to flourish. Congregational leaders and laypeople alike would benefit from engaging with this book.

REFLECTIONS

A Confession

By Brian Neilson,
St. Andrew’s Presbyterian
Church in Sackville, N.B.

Hi. My name is Brian, and I am an assessor elder for two departing congregations: St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Moncton and Bethel Presbyterian in Riverview, N.B. An assessor elder is an elder appointed by a presbytery to temporarily assist a Session in fulfilling its responsibilities.

It’s been a few months since I last read the PCC’s Voluntary Withdrawal of Congregations document regarding the procedures around voluntary withdrawal from The Presbyterian Church in Canada as a result of Remits B & C on

the definition of marriage and ordination of LGBTQI people. I have no doubt that both congregations will eventually reach their own version of the promised land (however that may look and feel once they arrive). When they do get there, though, they won’t arrive empty-handed, as they will be taking a little piece of my heart with them.

Admittedly, the members of the congregation and I still have the same differences that brought us together in the first place. Just the same, I have a genuine affection for the congregations. The regular Session meetings I attended over the last couple of years as the presbytery’s representative have been a wonderful treat. I have



Brian Neilson at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Moncton, N.B.

come to better understand the other side of a debate that I likely would not have bothered with otherwise. I have come to share in prayer, share my life journey in the church, and even share jokes with

other elders, building relationships even in the midst of breaking up.

In my time as the assessor elder for these two departing fellowships, I have seen a clerk of Session resign. I have cycled through interim moderators as a variety of factors led to them being replaced one after another, and have even been berated by more than one of the faithful for the perceived lack of faith of both the General Assembly and the Presbytery of New Brunswick.

Still, I return month after month to serve the church in my role and offer my gifts, such as they are. And as the months accumulated, I have come to better appreciate the breadth of these ministries and how they are defined by more than just one issue.

I am neither an apologist nor an advocate for the place where these

believers have proudly planted their flag. I am simply trying to be a witness to the love and reconciliation we each have been called to embody, considering the empty tomb; a presence striving to represent the interests of The Presbyterian Church in Canada to the best of my abilities for the sake of all those who find comfort, nourishment and a place to call home under its banner and within its places of worship.

Another chapter of our collective story of hope and possibility was affirmed with the approval of remits B & C, even as it meant that some would have to turn the page on the PCC. Being present for the turning of that page has had its challenges, but it has offered me glimpses of the Holy Spirit at work in the world and the coming of the kingdom.

 **2025 ANNUAL PENSION STATEMENTS: THE PCC PENSION PLAN HUB**

Questions? Contact pension@presbyterian.ca

The Pension and Benefits department is excited to announce that the **PCC Pension Plan Hub** is now active! This is a secure online portal where you can access your Annual Pension Statement as well as other general pension information, such as the PCC Pension Plan booklet.

If you are a current or deferred vested member of the PCC Pension Plan, please check you email inbox for registration information.



REFLECTIONS

Doctrine of the Trinity in a Sin-Filled World

By Dr. Robert Revington

The British author Dorothy L. Sayers once wrote that, regrettably, if you asked many Christians to explain why the doctrine of the Trinity mattered, they wouldn't do a good job. She joked that they might describe the doctrine as "the Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the whole thing incomprehensible." This is a tongue-in-cheek reference to an ancient Christian creed called the Athanasian Creed. But while that creed tells us that the mysteries of God are beyond human comprehension, her point was that for many people, today, the doctrine of the Trinity feels "incomprehensible." She added that for many, the doctrine seemed like "something put in by theologians to make it more difficult—nothing to do with daily life or ethics." Of course, this is not true. At its core, the doctrine of the Trinity gives us a way of articulating one of the most profound

theological truths imaginable. Swiss theologian Karl Barth deserves credit for reasserting this doctrine's importance in the 20th century. Sometimes, though, I have found that many lay Christians have never been taught why the Trinity matters.

So, why is it important that God is one, but also a Trinity—Father, Son and Spirit? I am not saying anything new in the history of Christian theology here, but the short answer is that the doctrine of the Trinity is a way of articulating the idea that God is love. We can find the idea that God is love in the book of 1 John.

Throughout Christian history, many theologians have tried to use metaphors for the Trinity. At various times, they have compared the three parts of the Trinity to three torches, which are all one substance, or they say it's like how one human mind has three components—memory, understanding and will.

But, again, there's one way to

understand the Trinity that is particularly important, going back more than 1,500 years. The three parts of the Trinity—Father, Son and Spirit—correspond to one who loves, the beloved and the love that flows between them. The Father is the one who loves, the Son is the beloved and the love between them is the Spirit. Compare that to how, at Jesus' baptism, we read that the voice from Heaven declared, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17; cf. Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22).

An English theologian once wrote that "a lonely and isolated Creator, dwelling aloof, might arouse awe and reverence" but could seem "remote to evoke the affections of men." Another theologian, J. R. Illingworth, expressed it well when he said that if God is love, "when we speak of love, we mean the affection of one person for another"—like the Trinity. In other words, the Trinity points to the existence of mutual,



Mosaic from Saint George Church in Madaba, Jordan.

reciprocal love. And love must be relational. It's not just "a lonely and isolated Creator," but in the Trinity, we are taught that love is the eternal principle behind the universe—before all time.

I once had a professor who was a former Anglican minister. He was teaching a class on early Christian theology (also known as "Patristics") and talking about the doctrine of the Trinity one day, when he told us a story from his own life. One day, a woman came to visit him. This woman shared some awful things that had been done to her by members of her own family. He found her story hard to take in, and yet he wanted to offer words of consolation.

And it was in that moment the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity became especially relevant to him. It brought home to him in a new way that only the Trinity could be the answer in such a sin-filled world.

When we say that we believe in the Trinity, we're saying that before Creation, before all time, over all human frailty, eternal love was the source of all that came into being: one who loves, the beloved and the love between them. "This is my Son, the Beloved." The lover, the loved and the love that flows between them for eternity; this is the source behind all truth in the universe...love that also ended up on the cross.

JUST WONDERING...

I keep hearing about something called NAR and a "Seven Mountain Mandate." What is it and is it something I should know about?

Answered by Allyson Carr,
Justice Ministries

Thank you for reaching out! NAR, which is an abbreviation for the New Apostolic Reformation, is a Christian nationalist movement with roots in the Charismatic, Pentecostal and broader Reformed tradition, as the name implies. It is not linked to any particular denomination and sometimes describes itself as "post-denominational." Since it is a movement or series of "networks," it has no formal membership. Rather, NAR describes a set of beliefs and practices intended to shape one's faith and life.

The New Apostolic Reformation is guided by what it calls the "Seven Mountain Mandate" (sometimes also called the "seven mountains of cultural influence" or

simply referred to as "7M"). This mandate names seven areas or spheres of society—family, entertainment, education, the media, religion, business and government—that it teaches are the foundations shaping any society. The mandate believes that "demonic" forces are seeking, and in some cases have taken control of, these mountains and that Christians must take the control back in order to reinstate God's kingdom and make way for Christ's return. Leaders within the movement are typically identified as "Apostles" who are understood to have a particular set of spiritual gifts, granting them extraordinary power and favour with God. They are called to exercise those gifts by issuing new revelatory prophetic words in pursuit of the mandate—but these prophecies are shared as

the authoritative mind and will of God, with little accountability, and are not necessarily subjected to scriptural testing.

A core tenet of the 7M mandate and the New Apostolic Reformation is that Christianity should have total dominion over the earth. To achieve that dominion, NAR emphasizes spiritual warfare as a necessary part of evangelism and encourages using tools like "spiritual mapping" to "identify" what it claims are territory-based demonic influences over cities or regions, the better to "overthrow" these regional demons and their social influence. Problematically, the movement typically characterizes anything it considers "perverse" or anything that questions its authority as being under demonic control.

This triple combination of teach-

ing that Christians must "take back" the pillars of society from demons, that people with certain gifts have the ability and the authority to speak the mind and will of God through new revealed prophecies, and that anyone opposing or questioning the movement is under the influence of the devil results in a form of Christian nationalism that is dangerously comfortable demonizing those who disagree with it and with making "spiritual warfare" all too physical. The movement is particularly strong, presently, in the United States, where it is having a significant impact on American politics and the current administration's policies and practices—including in justifications of the administration's war on Iran.

While NAR has some of its roots in the Reformed tradition, its ele-

vation of apostolic authority without clear accountability structures has been criticized as leaving wide room for spiritual abuse. There has also been significant criticism that its emphasis on manifesting spiritual gifts like prophecy as "proof" of faith leaves out key parts of mature Christian discipleship; that some of its teachings are unbiblical; and that its focus on spiritual warfare is too easily manipulated into demonizing anyone who doesn't fit within what it defines as "Christian." In weighing movements like NAR, it is important to discern how their tenets and practices do—or do not—reflect the life and ministry of Christ as revealed in the gospels, and with the arc of scripture. In the case of NAR, there is significant evidence that its teachings do not line up well with the Biblical witness.

JUST WONDERING...



Our congregation observes communion usually on a monthly basis, often, but not always, on the first Sunday. The fact that communion is to be observed on the following Sunday, however, is never among the weekly announcements. I have always believed that a congregation is to be informed in advance, particularly in a denomination that once set much emphasis on Preparatory Services. Is there some kind of directive somewhere concerning notifying the congregation of an upcoming sacrament?

*Answered by the
Rev. Ian Ross-McDonald*

The Session of each congregation is responsible for determining when and how Holy Communion will be celebrated. There is no specific direction about how often Holy Communion should be celebrated or how much notice or the kind of notice that should be given

by the Session in advance of any celebrations. And each congregation will have its own customs, expectations and history of traditions in this regard.

In the early church, it was common in most places for the Lord's Supper to be celebrated weekly or as often as the church gathered for community worship. Over time, customs emerged so

that in many places, lay people received Holy Communion rarely until the Protestant Reformation when the customs of the early church were generally favoured and more frequent celebrations began to develop in emerging Protestant traditions. In branches of the Reformed Tradition, it became customary for there to be a period of self-examination

in advance of any celebration of communion. And in some places, people were interviewed to determine whether they were eligible or worthy to receive the sacrament. This practice has largely disappeared, except for the vestigial use of Communion Cards in some congregations.

It is a positive practice for the Session to review its sac-

ramental practices annually to determine how often and in what manner Holy Communion will be celebrated in the congregation. And then it is wise for the Session to publish a schedule and other information about communion for the congregation's benefit.

*Have a question? Send it to
connection@presbyterian.ca.*

PULPIT VACANCIES

Find all pulpit vacancies online at presbyterian.ca/vacancies

Atlantic Provinces

Alliston, PE – WellSpring
(full-time minister)

Dartmouth, NS – Iona
(part-time minister)

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

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

Quebec & Eastern Ontario

Almonte, ON – Community
(full-time minister)

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

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

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

Montreal, QC – Montreal West
(full-time minister)

Richmond and Kars, ON – St. Andrew's and St. Andrew's
(full-time minister)

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

Central, Northeastern Ontario & Bermuda

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

Belleville, ON – St. Columba
(part-time contract interim minister)

Cambridge, ON – Central
(full-time minister)

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

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

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

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

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

Markham, ON – Celebration
(full-time minister)

Milton, ON – Nassagaweya
(full-time minister)

Mississauga, ON – Glenbrook
(full-time minister)

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

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

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

Toronto, ON – Cornerstone
(full-time minister)

Toronto, ON – Mimico
(full-time minister)

Vaughan, ON – Vaughan Community (full-time contract, pastor of young adult ministry and mission)

Southwestern Ontario

Chatham, ON – First
(full-time minister)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Strathroy, ON – Caradoc
(part-time minister)

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

Manitoba & Northwestern Ontario

Kapuskasing, ON – Community
(part-time minister or stated supply)

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

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

Alberta & the Northwest

Edmonton, AB – First
(full-time minister)

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

Presbytery of the Northwest – Regional Minister (full-time)

Sylvan Lake, AB – Memorial
(full-time minister)

British Columbia

Burnaby, BC – Trinity
(full-time minister)

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

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

Maple Ridge, BC – Haney
(full-time minister)

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

White Rock, BC – St. John's
(full-time minister)

DEATH NOTICES

*Read full obituaries online
at presbyterian.ca*

The Rev. George Yando
Deceased April 22, 2026
Prince Albert, Sask.

The Rev. Dr. Leo Hughes
Deceased April 11, 2026
Arnprior, Ont.

The Rev. J. Desmond Howard
Deceased April 1, 2026
Kinmount, Ont.

The Rev. Byron "Barney" Grace
Deceased March 17, 2026
Beaverton, Ont.

The Rev. László M. Péter
Deceased March 3, 2026
Hungary

The Rev. Dr. Ian S. Wishart
Deceased February 25, 2026
St. John's, N.L.

The Rev. Florence Palmer
Deceased February 7, 2026
Kenora, Ont.

**Rhoda (nee Fesenko)
Melinyshyn**
Deceased February 5, 2026
Thornhill, Ont.

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