



The Sunday Plus

Parkminster United Church
Newsletter –
February 2020

YOU ARE NOT ALONE. COME SHARE THE JOURNEY

Notes from the Chair



The warm sun today felt like spring was a near possibility, but as Ted and I prepare to visit our son, Geoff, and his wife, Nathalie, in Yellowknife, we are reminded that there is

some cold weather in store for us. Hopefully the cold weather will be accompanied by the splendour of the northern lights and the warmth of being in the company of our adult children!

In January, I had the pleasure of listening to a lecture by our former Ontario Premier, Kathleen Wynne. She was speaking on faith and public life. It was so interesting listening to her experiences of growing up in the United Church. I could relate to the memories of youth groups like CGIT and memories of the UCW supporting the work of Norman Bethune in China. The United Church has a history of tackling social justice issues and trying to make a difference in the world. Wynne talked about how the church accepted her when she came out at the age of 37 and I was reminded of how the United Church was a safe forum for my brother to come out as a young man.

Wynne went on to say that her faith, grounded in the United Church, was instrumental in the decisions she made in political life. "It was seamless for me. The two were inextricably linked." The spiritual connection she fostered through faith went

along with her to every meeting she attended. On the other hand, Wynne discussed how religion is sometimes used as a partisan hammer. "There were vile things said to me by religious extremists because I was a lesbian. It did make me question how religion is used in our world."

Our morals and values too are shaped by our experiences and the thought-provoking spiritual messages we receive every week at Parkminster. If you missed any of the sermons from the recent Community and Change Series, they are available on the website www.parkuc.ca.

Soon we will be observing Lent. Traditionally, Lent is a time of fasting or giving something up to refocus faith. However, Rev. Erin Todd gave some good advice in the latest issue of Broadview, "***Lent is a great time to see the need in the world and respond in a disciplined way. So rather than depriving yourself, add something spiritual or something that helps your faith to grow.***"

Parkminster strives to recognize the need in our world. While looking through the last What's Up email, I noticed the upcoming Speaker Series which will help educate people on Climate Change. The first Speaker Series talk focused on understanding the reasons behind the rise of the extreme right.

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Notes from the Chair continued

The What's Up email also contained suggestions for other climate exhibits, forums and activities in our area. There was a note from the Plett Meal Centre in Africa thanking us for our donation. There was a note from Lincoln Heights School thanking

us for our financial support for their family program.

During this Lenten period may we, as members of the Parkminster community, continue to grow our faith, identify needs in our world and, like Kathleen Wynne, take

our faith with us out into the world endeavoring to make our world a more compassionate and kinder place.

Kathy Shortt, Chair of Council

Message from our Ministers

We confess that we aren't exactly "winter people." Yes, we know we live in Canada! However, the months of cold, grey days can be weary on our spirits as we long for the warmth and light that spring offers as a glimpse into summer.

But there's something to be said about winter. The way the light dances upon the snow. How stunning bare tree branches look glistening with ice. Being bundled up for winter activities or a walk in the woods followed by the coziness of returning home. For many, winter slows us down a bit – physically and spiritually. So, it is fitting that the season of Lent ushers in during this quieter, slower time.

Lent is a season that invites us to slow down, to reflect, and to reconnect with God. As ministers we too can thrive on being busy and making plans but it is important for us to remember each year the story of Jesus going into the wilderness for prayer and fasting before beginning his public ministry. After being baptized, Jesus knows he is called to be the teacher and leader of his people, but instead of setting out to complete the "To-Do" list right away, he spends some time alone to ready himself for what is to come.

This Lent, through worship, prayer and perhaps some personal spiritual disciplines, we believe God is drawing us as a congregation to the wilderness – away from the busyness of our lives and all things we feel we need to get done. Before we can embark on whatever is to come in the life and work of Parkminster – new programs, new outreach opportunities, new relationships with the community – we are called to withdraw for a while – to get acquainted or reacquainted with one another and with God.

As we move through the Lenten season and into Holy Week, may we be inspired by the Holy One to enliven our faith and our very lives. We invite you to experience the special services that will lead us to Easter as we have opportunities to worship together and with sister churches in Waterloo:

- Wednesday, February 26 – Ash Wednesday at Parkminster – 7 p.m.
- Sunday, March 1 – Lent 1 Communion at Parkminster – 10 a.m.
- Sunday, April 5 – Palm/Passion Sunday at Parkminster – 10 a.m.
- Thursday, April 9 – Maundy Thursday at Emmanuel – 6:30 p.m.
- Friday, April 10 – Good Friday at Westminster – 10:30 a.m.
- Sunday, April 12 – Easter at Parkminster – 10 a.m.

At the Ash Wednesday service and then again at the first Sunday in Lent service you'll have an opportunity to reflect on how you might nurture your spiritual/faith life over the forty days of Lent and then make a Lenten commitment for that period. Beginning Sunday March 1st and then on March 15th, 22nd, 29th and April 5th you are invited to an after-worship discussion to talk about your experiences of trying to live into that commitment. We might also engage in some discussion on that day's scripture and reflection. Come for one of these gatherings or come for all.

We look forward to traveling with you in and out of the "wilderness" over these coming weeks. May God bless this quiet, holy time.

Rev. Heather and Rev. Joe

Pronoun labels soon available



One of the challenges the transgender community faces is being automatically slotted into a male or female gender by other people based on their name and/or how they dress. Some would rather identify as the opposite gender or no gender.

One way to raise awareness around this issue is for cisgender people (that is non-transgender people; those whose

sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex) to identify their preferred pronouns. ***When we get in the habit of asking people about their preferred pronouns rather than assuming them, it gets us into an inclusive habit and we make fewer mistakes with transgender people.***

To support this effort, effective March 1 pronoun labels will be available to put on Parkminster name tags. This is completely optional, but it is a good step we can take as a community to recognize transgender rights.

Kevin Smith

Cooking circle finds home at Parkminster

Excerpt from a letter sent to Inclusive from the AIDS Committee of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo and Area (ACCKWA) Cooking Circle.

Medical advances mean HIV is no longer a death sentence but a manageable, chronic condition. HIV/AIDS unfortunately remains a taboo topic in many communities. Persons infected and affected by HIV/AIDS are often isolated, both physically and emotionally, by a wall of stigma built, in part, by misinformation about the virus and its spread, and misjudgment about the moral integrity of people infected. Stigmatizing attitudes toward HIV-positive people exist within communities based on a range of interrelated assumptions about who gets HIV and why. People identified as HIV-positive are often marked as immoral and a shame to their family and community. Faith-based/spiritual communities are experienced as a critical link in the effort to eliminate the painful stigma experienced by people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

Unfortunately, this is not true for all faith-based/spiritual communities. As people living with HIV, it is an on going struggle for us finding welcoming spaces that would accept us without any judgement. Once you disclose your status, you are either met with those who are in the middle of the spectrum sitting on the fence because they feel ill-equipped to talk about what they believe are morality issues related to sexuality, others at the rejecting end of the spectrum, believing HIV is punishment for 'sinful' behaviour, and a few like Parkminster United Church who are at the welcoming end of the spectrum. ***Parkminster is committed and devoted to the role of fighting the stigma and discrimination, and has the courage to speak out against exclusion, and recognize the dignity of all individuals.***

Connecting with Parkminster and being granted a place to do our monthly Cooking Circle was just like receiving "Manna from Heaven;" It has been a blessing, and the Cooking Circle participants look forward to meeting every month.



ACCKWA's Cooking Circle, provides a time to create friendships, healthy eating habits, as well as, allowing for self development. The shared programs between ACCKWA and

Parkminster Church provide a safe environment to enhance upon individual experiences, allowing for personal growth, said one participant. *"It is a good place; we feel free to come in and socialize. No one will bother you, where we can gather, talk, and enjoy life"*, said another participant. There has never been a place that felt like home like Parkminster.

Thank you Parkminster for loving your neighbour, ACCKWA, as you love yourself, and for welcoming us as you would want to be welcomed. You did not only offer your space for the Cooking Circle group, but other programs such as our Red Scarf Project and the AIDS Vigil. It is because of the generous support of community minded individuals like yourself that we at ACCKWA are able to continue to provide quality programs and services for people living with HIV/AIDS, as well as effective prevention and education efforts to all members of Waterloo Region.

Update from the Resettlement Committee



The Resettlement Committee is a dedicated group of volunteers willing to take on new roles to make sure we are ready for our next family. As we said in our last update, ***we are awaiting the arrival of Siham and her family of seven children, three girls and four boys ranging in age from four to 15 years.***

We want to have their housing ready for them when they arrive sometime in 2020. We are currently searching while also seeking to determine when we can expect them.

Jim Bowman and Nancy Dykstra, Co-Chairs have organized the committee into sub committees to make preparations. As well they are involved in all of the committees.

Housing: David Osborne and Lori McKim-Lang are leading the housing search with many committee members assisting. They are looking at properties available and cost to make sure they are affordable.

Orientation: Cobie Love, Lori McKim-Lang, Sheila Rule, Glenn Harper and Debora van Nijnatten are preparing for the arrival and welcoming of

the family. As well as looking at needed documentation and where/how to obtain it.

Finance: Jean Stacey, Sheila Rule and Jim Bowman are determining the budgeting methods that will be needed and the government support that will be available in addition to Parkminster's support.

Medical: Cobie Love and Don Linkletter are making arrangements for health and dental care. They need to determine where support is available ensure all needed documents are prepared.

Education: Kathy Shortt, Glenn Harper and Nancy Dykstra are coordinating tutors and support as well as determining and obtaining the documentation required to register the children in school.

Communications with Congregation: Jeanne Foster. Questions and requests for updates are always welcome.

In all of these ways committee members assist each other whenever opportunity arises. The variety of talents, interests and abilities the committee brings, as well as their willingness to take on challenges are amazing!

A unique Parkminster outreach initiative

Most at Parkminster know that we made possible the emigration and successful resettlement of the Al Mohamad family of nine, and are now awaiting a second family which Parkminster is sponsoring. However, not all are aware of another very unique refugee initiative which Parkminster has entered into.

In 2018 we were approached by a community group headed by former Parkminster Minister Elizabeth Moffat and another individual who was prepared to fully fund two refugee sponsorships with a donation of \$70,000. It had all begun when Elizabeth was doing English enrichment with three Syrian women to supplement their English Second Language program. Other Syrian women had joined in, friendships developed, and Elizabeth then invited six of her walking group friends to be part of the group, including Parkminster's Outreach Chair Wendy Watson. During their social time together, the Syrians appealed for help to bring to Canada their sons and daughters and family members marooned in the countries to which they had fled from the war. Their prayers were answered.

Parkminster's role was to hold the money in trust, provide a tax receipt to the donor, and disburse the funds as re-settlement costs occurred. The Parkminster Outreach Committee and Council agreed to the arrangement. A partnership agreement was prepared and Parkminster subsequently agreed to two more sponsorships being undertaken by Elizabeth's group, for a total of four.

We next learned that the sponsored families would not qualify for emigration through the Canadian government program because they did not have UN refugee status—the countries they were in declined to provide that 'classification' because it entailed costs for that country. The Canadian government has given our national United Church the right to sponsor refugees without that status. As a result, Elizabeth's group, now referred to as the Kitchener-Waterloo Outreach Group (KWOG), re-submitted and got approval for the sponsorship applications from the United Church of Canada (UCC). Parkminster's involvement was required to get UCC approval, and it also required that Parkminster assume oversight responsibilities for all KWOG re-settlement activities. Once again, Council decided that we should proceed.

So, although no Parkminster funding is involved, and we are not hands-on with resettlement work, we have helped make possible the emigration to Canada of four refugee families. Also, our leadership on this has been a factor in Trinity United, First United and Bridgeport United subsequently agreeing to play the same role, each with two sponsorships—a total of ten families soon able to achieve a new life in Canada. All of these families have relatives and parents here in Canada who came at the time of the Al Mohamads (2016). This means that they have immediate community that will receive them and benefit from all their contacts and experience.

Here is the story of just one of the young women who, with her husband and children, is awaiting emigration (edited and with names removed):

I was attending university in Syria when the war started. Shootings, clashes and random bombings occurred in the residential areas and everywhere. I got married in 2014, to a fellow student and had my first child in 2015. My husband moved to Lebanon to escape mandatory military service and later arranged for me to get there, although my presence there was illegal and invalid. I got pregnant, but couldn't afford to see a doctor or get necessary medicines. We sought help from the UN, but could not get any nutritional or medical services. We decided that my son and I should go back to Syria while my husband stayed in Lebanon. We have suffered a lot from the continuous hydro outages, as well as lack of food and bread and a shortage of water. We drink from unhealthy wells, which has led to the spread of diseases. Bombing and shelling began to occur on a daily basis. Every day for us was full of horror. I tried to get back to Lebanon with my son but was turned back. So, I sneaked in, with the help of some people who do that for a fee. We took a mountain road, long and dangerous, carrying my daughter while we walked for six hours. We are currently living in a refugee camp without a residence permit, so we cannot move from one place to another freely or the Lebanese security forces will arrest us and force us to go back to Syria, where there is no home for us to live anymore. Meanwhile we are seeking to live in Canada, so that we can live in peace, feel safe and where we can secure a dignified life with jobs, so that our children have education and we can immerse in the Canadian society. Based on the information we know about, Canada is a country of freedom, equality and honored living. It is our wish to become Canadians and to make our contribution to this country.

Two by Two Ministry



One of our Pastoral Care initiatives is the two by two ministry wherein folks are visited in their homes by volunteers. It is part of the continuum of care that is the basis of our Pastoral Care program.

There are folks in our congregation who can no longer attend church due to illness, advanced age, poor mobility, or who are just needing a little extra support. We want these people to continue to be part of our Parkminster family.

As a result, we have a dedicated group of people who visit these folks in their homes and/or are in contact with them by phone or email. Usually the personal visits are done by two people. These visitors bring news of the church, news of the outside world and hopefully some comfort, happiness and joy. These visitors will, when needed, share any concerns they might have about a particular person with Rev Joe and Rev Heather.

There are no special skills required other than a willingness to listen, to laugh and to call on a semi-regular basis. Over the next few months we will be looking for some new volunteers. We are hoping that you will respond to our calls to become involved in this very worthwhile work of Parkminster.

The Nicaragua Project

This will be a familiar topic for many, though not all, so I am presenting this with a bit of history and a current update on where I/we are with this endeavour.

In 2011 and 2015, I travelled with Two Countries One World (TCOW) to Nicaragua as one of the leaders and mentors. TCOW was created by Elizabeth Moffat and a history of TCOW which can be found in Parkminster records.

The upshot of my 2011 experience in Nicaragua was that I quickly realized many things, most of all, that in spite of what I thought I knew, I was very ignorant of the realities of the country and its history. I felt I needed to return to Nicaragua, to now only learn, but continue to offer what I could regarding safe housing for the residents in the neighbourhoods of Managua in which we worked during 2011 trip.

In 2012, one of my cousins, my brother-in-law and I volunteered to chase my idealistic vision of raising sufficient funds to build or repair two houses to make this a reality. It was good to be idealistic. The realities were larger than I imagined.



Sufficient funds were raised, work projects identified through a non-governmental agency called Compenaros, accommodations and travel arranged and away we went. When I had presented this notion to the Parkminster

congregation, there was enough support to pay for one house. The remaining funds came from friends, family and personal contributions.

During this trip we established the creation of a more useful and progressive supply of construction tools and safety boxes for storage and introduced the magic of Robertson screws which we brought from Canada. We developed a much greater understanding of the housing needs and techniques of typical house construction in the Barrios. Most importantly, we established friendship and relationships in the community. The call was to return in 2013.

In 2013, we three returned with similar support from church, families and friends. Most significantly, we met with members of other groups that were working on housing projects through Compenaros. Several people were assigned to work us to build two houses, but using techniques that made the houses safer and more durable. We donated more tools, such as reliable battery power drills, new electric saws and multiple hammers, tapes, chisels etc.

Since 2012, return trips to Managua and beyond continued. They have included house construction in different neighbourhoods of Managua, rebuilding of desolate schools at coffee plantations in the mountains of northern Nicaragua and the construction of classrooms for a private, bilingual school in a remote community on Ometepe Island in Lake Nicaragua.

There have been over 120 non-resident volunteers working directly on construction sites established through the Nicaragua Project. This does



not include the countless volunteer hours by locals and an estimated 100 workers from the communities who are paid from funds raised for the projects. As well as TCOW participants in 2015, Barb Monteith was part of one trip and Bud Adams has been on two.

Over this time period, the demand for finances to fund the projects has increased as would be expected. The building quality has improved along with the increase in costs for materials, transportation of goods and volunteers to worksites and feeding the families displaced from their homes during construction and salaries for local labour. This challenge has always been met through the support of the congregation at Parkminster, families and friends. In addition, a remarkable friendship



has developed with members of other groups that were in Nicaragua at the same time and were able to share the costs for larger scale projects, i.e., more houses, community washrooms and kitchens and school repairs.

One member of Riverside United Church in London, John Langford has partnered with me on projects for the past seven years. He has established a similar connection with his congregation for financial and spiritual support. With additional funds raised, we have now created a "quiet" support system for families with extraordinary financial needs. We have engaged the services of a volunteer in Managua, as our contact in the community. Conny Mendez Rojas is a retired caregiver who is deeply connected with many neighbourhoods in Managua. We forward



funds directly to her, which she then uses to purchase medical supplies and services for extreme situations and for assisting families with young children in need of uniforms and school supplies. A small taxi budget is provided so that items can be delivered in person to those in need.

The Nicaragua Project continued

We also offer Conny a small financial gift each year in appreciation for the countless hours of support. In return, Conny maintains a financial journal and photo diary of how all funds are distributed after consultation with John Langford and myself. To date, if we run short of donations, John and I maintain this fund as a gift to the community.

Beginning with the "return" trip in 2012, it is estimated we have fully or partially supported the construction of over 25 houses, two community centre projects and three schools. There are now four families being quietly supported in Managua and funds donated to assist teacher's salaries on Ometepe Island.

Through our regular returns to Nicaragua, there has been the establishment of a broad network of relationships with families, businesses and social services. Having friends and connections outside their communities is rare for many Barrio residents. There is no clear way to measure the depth and value of these relationships, except perhaps by the intensity of the hugs, the social gatherings and meals shared with those from Nicaragua who are now an entrenched part of our lives.

This aides in helping the global community learn more about the extreme challenges of living in an impoverished and currently politically abused country.

The plan is to return in April 2020 to continue. Given some physical issues faced by John Langford and myself, we are unlikely to engage in a construction project this year. It is our intent to work specifically with the families and schools we support and to investigate possible new projects for future years. To that end, I will be making "quiet" requests for financial support for 2020, with a target of \$2,000. Donations can be submitted through the Outreach Committee, which supports the Nicaragua Project. A financial history of the Nicaragua Project is recorded in the Outreach Committee records.

Quiet* -- Financial aid that is provided without identifying the source, or recipients. This is done quietly so that all funds are used as intended with no hidden fees and that recipients are not at risk of being identified as "favoured" within their communities.

John Watson

Honouring retiring & thanking new volunteers

We want to honour retiring council members, committee chairs and members:

Darlene Basse - Pastoral Care/Membership
Cindy Demsey - Chancel
John Dippell - Finance
Dorothy Duxbury - Outreach
Andree Gerard - Pastoral Care/Membership
Kathy Hagedorn Hehl - Council Secretary
Don Linkletter - Council Connections Liaison
Gordon Lomoth - Capital Projects
Rob MacQueen - Inspired to Give, Refugee Re-Settlement
Deb Miethig - Trustee Council Rep
Virginia McQuay - Staff Advocate
David Osborne - Stewardship
Ted Oldfield - Region 8 Rep
Sandra Quehl - A/V Coordinator
Maedith Radlein - Past Chair of Council
Jack Reynolds - Treasurer
Carolyn Rudolph - Worship
Sheril Stinson - Pastoral Care/Membership
Heather Watts - A/V

We want to thank new volunteers and those moving to new roles:

Linda Bird - Worship
Jim Bowman - from Trustee Council Rep to Re-Settlement Co-Chair
Sarah Bruce - from Inclusive to Communications Chair
Colleen Daly - Inclusive
Nancy Dykstra - from Worship Chair to Re-Settlement Co-Chair
Rob Hehl - Capital Projects
Mike Henhoeffler - A/V
Richard Jackson - Council Secretary
Doris Jakobsh - Council Community Liaison
Gregg King - from Year-End Accounting Review to Treasurer
Barb Leask-Wynne - Staff Advocate and Returning Past Chair
Sue MacQueen - Trustee Council Rep
Virginia McQuay - Pastoral Care Chair
John McMullen - A/V
Sandi McMullen - Worship
Kieran Power - A/V
Mary Reynolds - Membership Chair
Sheila Rule - Pastoral Care/Membership and Council Connections Liaison
Kathy Shortt - Capital Projects and Website
Andrea Spracklin - Outreach
Jeff Stacey - Capital Projects
Rob Vanderlinden - from Council Development Liaison to A/V Coordinator

We also want to thank the many others who continue to play valuable roles – Sunday school teachers and youth group leaders; Monday morning play group volunteers; toddler room volunteers; those preparing communion; offering counters; refugee re-settlement volunteers; house group leaders; the many in our music groups; those maintaining the gardens and grounds; food truck volunteers; 2x2 visitors; social and educational activity organizers; Mary's Place and House of Friendship potato blitz volunteers; etc.