



The Sunday Plus

**YOU ARE NOT ALONE. COME SHARE
IN OUR JOURNEY.**

Message from our Minister

Dear friends,

As I write this, the season of spring is making it's slow but steady emergence. The old poem from Song of Solomon speaks beautifully to this moment: "The winter is past; the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth." It is a reminder that God's world is always moving toward renewal, even when the change is slow and subtle.

Spring has always been one of the church's quiet teachers. Without using words, it preaches a familiar gospel: that what looks dead is not the whole story, that underneath frozen soil something is already stirring, that God is more patient and persistent than any winter we know. The resurrection story we tell at Easter is echoed in every seed that splits open, every tree bud that dares to swell, every bird who decides it is safe to sing again.

This season invites us to trust that God is at work in us in the same way. Many of us carry places in our lives that still feel wintry — grief that has not softened, habits that are hard to break, relationships that feel stuck. Spring does not erase those realities, but it does gently insist that they are not the end of the story. New life rarely arrives all at once; it comes in shy, almost-hidden beginnings: a conversation we were finally able to have, a boundary we managed to keep, a small act of courage we did not think we had in us.

This season also invites us to tend those same places in our common life where new life is needed. We see signs of that when communities work to protect the vulnerable, when neighbours advocate for affordable housing, and when we choose kindness and fairness in the face of division. Renewal is personal, but it is also communal and public.

As a community, we can choose to be like good soil for one another in this season. That might look like making space for someone's fragile hope, holding a story without needing to fix it, or noticing and naming the signs of growth we see in each other. It might also look like standing with those whose springs are delayed by hardship — families struggling to make ends meet,

people pushed to the margins, and communities still waiting for justice to bloom. To live faithfully in spring is to trust that God's new creation is both tender and transformative.

My prayer for us this spring is simple: that we would notice where God is already bringing green shoots out of hard ground. May we have the courage to plant new seeds, to care for one another, and to work for the kind of world where life can flourish more fully for all. And may we remember that the One who renews the earth each year is also, quietly and faithfully, renewing us.

With gratitude for each of you on this shared journey of faith.

Rev. Joe Gaspar, Minister

Opportunities for Involvement

We have so much to be thankful for at Parkminster. In addition to inspiring worship services, programs for children and youth, a wonderful music program, a strong sense of community, and a welcoming, affirming congregation, we continually welcome new folks who have chosen to join us. We also have a wide range of ongoing activities which enable each to pursue their interests, contribute to the good work being done, and get to know others.



To ensure that newcomers are aware of the range of opportunities available, a [new pamphlet](#) has been prepared. Copies will be on the Welcome Table, given to new attendees, and placed in the pews and in the Upper Hall.

If any of the following groups or committees are of interest, one just needs to contact the Office Administrator (admin@parkuc.ca) to get connected with one of our group leaders.

Jack & Mary Reynolds

Soup4Kids Lunch

Photos taken by Nancy Dykstra

It has been said "It takes a village"; at Parkminster, it takes a congregation.

On April 19th the Christian Education Committee and the Outreach Committee sponsored a Soup4Kids Lunch. Donations received will support Food4Kids, which helps feed 1,400 hungry kids in 131 schools across Waterloo region.



Close to 80 people attended the lunch - but a lot happened before people were able to enjoy fellowship and food.

- The 2 bun-makers baked delicious home-made buns and brought them to the church.
- 96 cupcakes were baked by 4 bakers and also brought to the church.
- The set-up team of 8+ made sure there were enough tables and chairs.
- Coffee was prepared, juice poured and the beverage table arranged by a team of 2.
- 7 Sunday School children designed placemats and set the tables. Pats of butter were cut and buns placed on the tables.
- 3 soup-makers each made a different soup ahead of time: chicken noodle, carrot ginger and creamy cauliflower. Then the morning of the lunch, 9 youth helped chop ingredients for the lentil soup and stirred it diligently so the soup would not boil over. When it was ready, they served the soups.



As the congregation arrived, they were invited to make donations for the lunch and responded in their typically generous way. When the emcee asked, "Who helped with this lunch?" at least a quarter of the people stood.

The congregation enjoyed each other's company and the lunch and left satisfied and happy, but there was still work to do. The set-up crew (with some additional help) were now the take-down crew and began their work. The clean-up crew of 8 also swung into action. They washed, put away, mopped, wiped counters and left the kitchen sparkling.

"How much did we raise?" people asked as they left. "How much?"

Because after all, that's what it was all about: a congregation coming together to help hungry kids. **And so it was such good news when the treasurer finished his work and reported that the congregation donated \$1,285.70 to Food4Kids.**

It takes a congregation – the young, the old and those in between – who help in many ways and donate time, effort and funds.

Some might consider this a lot of work, but when everybody pitches in, there is comradery, laughter and the satisfaction of an important job well done. Thank you all!



Roberta Hickey

Living into Right Relations

We would like to thank everyone who join Living into Right Relations conversation in February. During worship we shared what words stood out to us in the Land and Territorial Acknowledgement. Here is a collection of those words:

What does the land and territorial acknowledgement mean to us?



Through your feedback we shared a land acknowledgement is more than words—it is a recognition of past and ongoing harm to Indigenous Peoples, paired with respect for the land, a commitment to listen and learn, and a responsibility to repair relationships. It calls us to move beyond intention into meaningful action, justice, and shared accountability, recognizing reconciliation as an ongoing, collective, and deeply spiritual journey.

Following worship, we shared the ways we have already begun walking in right relations – through personal friendships, family connections, work experiences, learning, church involvement, and participation in community events and acts of reconciliation. Many spoke of how these experiences have deepened awareness of Indigenous histories, injustices, and the importance of listening, learning, and showing up in meaningful ways.

We also named the barriers that hold us back: fear of saying the wrong thing, uncertainty about how to begin, limited opportunities for relationship, and the lasting impacts of separation and mistrust. Alongside these challenges, there is a growing recognition that building right relations requires courage, continued learning, and intentional steps toward connection, trust, and shared responsibility.

Looking ahead, we are called to take the next steps together – seeking out opportunities to learn from Indigenous voices, building relationships through presence and participation, and moving from reflection into action. This may include attending local events, supporting

Indigenous-led initiatives, advocating for justice, and creating spaces within our community for ongoing dialogue, accountability, and growth.

How can you get involved:

- Sign up for the Living into Right Relations (contact nancydykstra@gmail.com)
- Watch for slides in worship for opportunities to get involved.
- Check out some of the books recommended by the discussion group:
 - Valley of the Birdtail
 - North Wind Man
 - For the Ashes
 - The Inconvenient Indian
 - Daughters of the Deer
 - Five Little Indians
 - 21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act
 - Walking Through the Fire
- Share your story with us: do you have experience working with Right Relations or learning to share?
- Contact Lisa at lisa@parkuc.ca to discuss ways you could share with the congregation.

Lisa Leffler



Pastoral Care Spreads Cheer

In celebration of Valentine's Day, 20 bags of homemade cookies were delivered by the Pastoral Care Committee to our older and/or fragile Parkminster friends. These lovely visits are our way of including these folks in the life and work of Parkminster Church.

Full Contact Bible Study Listening Circle

Why would anyone go to a Bible study? And on a Sunday night? Didn't we already do church once? What kind of religious nut would go to church AND a Bible study—especially when Sunday nights are such prime time to recharge and curl up with Netflix? And honestly, aren't we kind of post-Bible in the United Church anyway? God is Love, right, so aren't we better off just rolling up our sleeves and getting busy with the loving? Didn't we already learn everything we needed to know in kindergarten—be kind, don't be selfish, consider others' points of view, do good, and tell the truth? Why complicate such practical ethical guidance with the sometimes confusing, bizarre, and violent stories from a foreign culture and era that strain credulity and baffle comprehension? The Bible can sometimes feel a bit embarrassing—like an impolite relative at the family dinner who insists on raising awkward topics and using extreme language and weird analogies nobody understands. Do you really want to spend Sunday nights with this presence, confronted with jargon terms like salvation, redemption, kingdom, heaven,

resurrection, Yahweh, fear of God, repentance, worship, Lord, Saviour—who talks like that, and the miracles...really? Wouldn't our time be better spent leaning AWAY from biblical complexities and into complementary insights from other faith traditions, like Buddhism or earth-centered spirituality, to become more balanced and current? Or wouldn't it be better to just focus on more straight-forward social action and doing good? With all the harm done by historical and contemporary zealots who wield biblical language, maybe less (Bible) would be more?

Despite such reasonable objections, for the past 11 weeks, an average of 7 or 8 of us have been meeting on Sunday nights, from 7:30-9:00 to share thoughts, reactions, and feelings about selected passages from Hebrew and New Testament scriptures. It is hard to convey how meaningful and grounding it has been. It has become a highlight of many of our weeks. The group ran last year for 14 weeks as the Christian Poets Society, as a nod to psychological and metaphorical understandings of scripture beyond literal truth claims. The name changed this year to Full Contact Bible Study Listening Circle to better reflect what happens when we meet. During the week at home each participant reflects on and researches the bible verses, and then when we meet, we share what we experienced and reflect back to each other what we are hearing from each other. The full-contact label is part whimsy, because it is so absurd to imagine full-contact sports together with the stereotype of church ladies at a precious and nerdy Bible study. But the full-contact label accurately conveys the vigour involved on two counts.

First, participants bring a surprising diversity and courageous honesty about reactions to scripture. In other contexts, only passing contact with scripture seems welcome, or only party-line or uncontroversial opinions seem polite to be expressed. Here we explore the entire bible, deep dive into whatever crevices call us, and report on our experiences positive and negative. It is invigorating. Many questions and objections about confusing or troubling parts come up, and it is a relief to air them in such an open and respectful forum. There is also a wealth of biblical knowledge brought to the table by learned participants with theological training and diverse real-life experience. It has been gratifying to discover depth of meaning beyond cliché—fresh magic in old scriptures newly appreciated after a long life. As biblical scholar Marcus Borg puts it, it can sometimes feel like meeting Jesus and reading the Bible again for the first time. With a little effort the foreign jargon clarifies (new online search tools make this simple) and the meanings waft wisdom relevant to perennial concerns at the heart of human experience.

A second way the full-contact label fits relates to full-contact with one-another. Structure and timing of the sharing ensures that everyone gets to speak if they want to, no extra-enthusiastic person dominates, and all perspectives are heard without judgment. A Quaker-based process ensures all perspectives and questions are honoured and witnessed. The intentional listening creates a slow forum for discernment in an atmosphere of solidarity. Sharing honest perspectives about meaningful questions in such an environment of confidentiality and respect brings a warm glow of group intimacy. It allows for contact with each other more fully than usual social configurations allow. Delightfully, this experiential discovery fits well with some of the main scripture themes that emerge—around a vital relationship vision. God is Love, and an elusive and beautiful part of what that love looks like relates to truly seeing one-another,

hearing one-another, abiding with one-another, confessing truths, and forgiving one-another. A delicious atmosphere of vulnerability, humility, intimacy, and good-will tends to float in, that feels like Holy Spirit.

These rewarding “full contact” aspects are why we decided to just keep running this group indefinitely, every Sunday. From one perspective, yes, “Bible Study” does sound kind of nerdy, boring, old fashioned, and as if it would be irrelevant to contemporary concerns and practical priorities. Experientially, however, it is the opposite of this. It has become a restorative niche that reliably gives strength to face the week ahead. It takes some commitment and courage to prepare and show up but is strangely sustaining and conducive to hope in the dark. So simple, but so lovely with just two, or three, or eight of us gathering to grapple, in truth and kindness, in the name of our faith. If you wonder whether you might like to come, [contact me](#) for more details or to talk it over.

Ian McGregor