Practical Message: A Strong Faith of Hope in a New Beginning

Spiritual Message: Our Legacy, Our Gift to the Next Generation, Thanks be to God.

The year is 1776 and the British Colonies on the eastern side of the Continental United States are preparing for war. The Patriots want freedom from England. There was also a war within the society and the family home. Who will you support, will you be a Patriot or a Loyalist?

The Loyalists were minorities, recent European immigrants and religious groups not accepted very well by the Patriots.

These were farmers, laborers, trades people and their families. Free blacks and slaves also came with the Loyalist families. Many Six Nations Iroquois from New York State were also part of the Loyalist community.
These were brave communities of Methodists, Wesleyans and Quakers. As the Loyalists faced increased mob violence, as they lost their civil rights, as they were easily thrown into prison or as their homes and goods confiscated, their hope was the foundation of their beliefs.

Psalm 27:1 provides this comfort and direction:

*The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?* Amen

In October, 1783 the British Forces are caught fighting on a peninsula of land in Virginia. With the land army led by General Washington and the French Fleet in the bay shelling them, the British surrender.

The war was over, and yet the anger and resentment towards the Loyalists intensified. About 100,000 Loyalists left the colonies during and after the war. About 10,000 went back to England. About 30,000 went to the East coast and settled in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI.
In 1784, 60,000 Loyalists from New York, Massachusetts and Connecticut decided to leave and head to the British Colony in Montreal. Travelling up the Hudson River they arrived at Fort Albany. Continuing North, passing Lake Champlain, they finally arrived in Montreal.

Arriving in Montreal in late summer of 1784, they had a decision to make. Where do we go from here?

Some stayed and settled north of Montreal. Hearing that land further east had been surveyed and was free for farmers, some moved to the Prescott to Kingston area.

About 7,500 of those Loyalists settled along the St Lawrence to the Bay of Quinte region.

Map of the British Colony

Lower Canada consisted of Fort York and the Niagara area. Montreal and Quebec City dominated the upper St Lawrence. In between was virtually empty land. We find in these Loyalists "A Strong Faith of Hope in a New Beginning".
Many professed a Methodist or a Wesleyan or a Quaker Christianity. Here was hope firmly rooted in their hearts and their communities.

Many Loyalists became part of provincial militia corps that fought alongside the British. There is a Historic Plaque outside of St Paul's Anglican Church describing Rogers Rangers and their settlement in this area.

Obtaining land grants was the easy part, clearing the land and growing crops was far more difficult. Consider the woodlots in our area, imagine the entire countryside as a densely wooded forest. Only a community working together could clear the land, raise log cabins and plant and harvest the crops.

The first few winters was tough on these Loyalists. Many were not used to the longer and colder winters north of the Great Lakes. Farm animals brought with them stayed inside the drafty log cabins for protection and the warmth their bodies provided. Food was scarce as the first few years crops were lean.

In 1789, Lord Dorchester, the Governor in Chief of the British North America, proclaimed that the Loyalists and their children be granted the title of "United
Empire Loyalists" in recognition of their loyalty to the Crown and their hard work in clearing the land and creating lasting settlements.

In 1791, due to the settled communities, a separate region was created, and was called "Upper Canada". Loyalists were instrumental in establishing educational, religious, social and government institutions on this land.

In all the years that followed, our area became firmly established and wealthy. Log homes were replaced by brick and mortar homes. Farms grew larger and the faith communities were also enriched by their contributions.

Conway became a port where cattle and grain were loaded for the trip to US and Canadian markets on Lake Ontario.

In 1833 John A Macdonald setup his law practice in Picton. The communities from Niagara Falls to Quebec City were to become the center of a dream of Mac Donald, a united country. In 1867 that dream became a reality.
Adolphustown Church History

The Adolphustown United Empire Loyalist Church in Dorland was built in 1860 on land donated by John P. Dorland. This was a frame structure built in the Gothic Style. The fertile land grew crops and built strong faith communities.

On June 10, 1884 a new corner stone was laid for the Adolphustown Methodist UEL Church. This celebrated the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the Loyalists to this area. This is our church today.

As one of the fund raiser, a quilt was created and for 10 cents you could buy a square! Quilts remain a key feature of our faith community, even today!

This church was part of a four point charge back then: Adolphustown, Conway, Sillsville and Hayburn.

Conway Church History

It is believed that the worship services in Conway was held in the home of the Ingersoll family in 1858.

In 1867 Conway belonged to the Wesleyan Methodist Bath Circuit.
In 1882 the Conway Methodist Church, our current location, was constructed. On January 28, 1883 Reverend Marmaduke Pearson, grandfather of Canada's Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson dedicated the church.

On September 13, 1921 the McDowall Presbyterian Church at Sandhurst burnt to the ground and it was decided to merge these two congregations and worship at Conway.

Obviously Conway as a "United Church" long before we merged in 1925 to form "The United Church of Canada".

Our Merger

On April 24, 1996, based on consensus of all, Adolphustown and Conway formed one congregation. This is why our worship bulletin starts with these words:

“We are one faith community, celebrating God’s Presence in two churches.”
What was their legacy left for us?

We recognize the legacy of our ancestors. These were practical people who worked hard to build a vibrant farming community and two beautiful churches that reflected their spiritual faith.

As Loyalists, they were an Affirming Community, including Iroquois, free black slaves and all the other European Loyalist nationalities. Three strong faith communities built this area, the Methodists, the Wesleyans and the Quakers.

As a faith community, they worshipped together sharing the Sacraments and joyous afternoon and evening meals together.

Our furnishings in both churches including all the paintings and hanging quilts reflect their devotion on supporting and enriching the worship service.
Today

We are enriched today, as we celebrate our Joint Anniversary Service, by their legacy, thanks be to God.

Their legacy lives also within you. We continue the traditions of their legacy each Sunday that we come together. We share the worship service, the Sacraments. We are an Affirming Church, we are warm and inviting faith community. We are an Educational Site as well. We reach out to support the local communities needs also.

We have a responsibility to pass on this legacy to the next generation of believers at Adolphustown Conway. This is our task, our God given gift.
Let us Pray

We have a physical body, as Paul tells us, created by God, so that we may build our family home and our faith community.

We have been gifted by God this legacy, which we find acting as a spiritual and vibrant part of each of our two churches and the families who share this holy space.

Their choices of how to believe are echoed by our actions in our current faith community.

This is the legacy we have inherited, thanks be to God.

Amen.