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CHANGING THE STORY -A Path to New Life

Changing the story is a path to new life. Our stories connect us with each other. They are part of us. But something important, mysterious and healing happens when we see ourselves as part of a bigger story - as one part of Creation's story. In this issue, we begin to tackle what it means to be part of the whole of Creation, to recognize Mother Earth as both our home and our neighbour, to live sustainably, to have new life.

- preparing a Remembrance Day service while in Holland.
- continuing interest in reading 'We make the Road by Walking'
- change happens when you change the story
- favoured choir member moves on from Norwich UC
- memories of ministry in Brazil
- report from refugees (OURS)
- volunteer opportunities at Five Oaks
- UCW's October virtual meeting on YouTube
- experience of a volunteer at Bullwinkle's (Operation Sharing)
- a poem 'My Friend'
- For the Love of Creation initiative re Faithful Climate Conversations.
- report of the first virtual meeting of Antler River Regional Council
- see page 10 for worship services in Oxford
- oxfordunitedministries website for CONNECTIONS



FOOD FOR THE SOUL

Seventy-Five Years and Counting...

It was about 10:00 am on the 11th of November a few years ago when our bandmaster said to me. "Could you put together a Remembrance Day service for us. I know it's short notice." "I think I could do that," I said, trying to hide my sudden panic. We were in Holland and I was there as a member of a Dutch heritage band based in London. We were on a 10-day playing holiday in what is a carnival season in southern Holland.

I found the assignment humbling, considering that half of the band members had, as children, endured both the invasion and liberation of the Netherlands.

The advantage, though, of being in a band on November 11 is you have **trumpet players you can ask to play The Last Post and Reveille,** the music surrounding the two minutes of silence.

I could start with that and explain that The Last Post was played at sundown indicating that all guards were in place for the night and the camp was secured. That had become the symbol of the end of life, a remembrance of the lives given, and taken. Reveille which ends the silence was the bugler's morning wakeup call, which has become the sign of a new dawn, a new day when war is no more; a call for the world to wake up.

We had visited a German village the day before to visit a pub and a glass factory. As we crossed the border into Germany I noticed on the right, at the edge of a field, a row of rusting iron beams protruding from the ground at odd angles. I was told that it was the remains of a fence

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to stop or slow down the advance of German tanks. On the left was what had been a customs office, now abandoned. The bus driver did not even slow down. Since the European Union, the national borders were no longer barriers.

When we arrived back at our bed and breakfast which was a converted barn with dining room below and sleeping quarters above where the hay loft had been, I asked our host what it was like during the war. He said that the army moved through. "We were not harmed, but the soldiers took our horses."

Here we were to gather in worship where horses had been stolen, when the world was broken. Now tourists from all over the world are welcomed here to break bread together.

On this Armistice day, because of Covid-19 virus, the services at the cenotaphs may be cancelled, but we have the two minutes to prayerfully give thanks for the service and the sacrifice, to acknowledge the tragedy of war, the work of peace, the need to practice both justice and mercy. While the world has seen too much war since 1945, we have managed in 75 years and counting to avoid another "World War." For that we give thanks. GW

CONNECTIONS has a website:

oxfordunitedministries.ca

CONNECTIONS

ON <u>FACEBOOK</u> LIKE AND FOLLOW US

PRAYER: SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Have you yet purchased your copy of "We Make the Road by Walking," by B.D. McLaren? (Available through Grand River Book Store – see ad below)

It is a **truly engaging book** built to be used by individuals, families, or groups on a daily, weekly or monthly pattern.

I was hooked after the first chapter, especially by the exercises listed at chapter end. Amazing what I learned about my God after I had spent time each day for a week thinking about, learning about weather as one element of creation. We talk about the weather and we grumble about the weather. What can the weather tell us about GOD?

Maybe we can't meet as a Bible Study group during Covid but reading this book could make conversations on the phone deeper and richer! Olga McKellar

PRAYER CHAIN



Contact Prayer Chain Leader Olga McKellar for on-going prayer concerns. o.mckellar@sympatico.ca

GRAND RIVER BOOK STORE

To order books call 519-442-3366 Or email <u>sales@grandriverbooks.com</u>. Mail delivery is \$5.00, <u>https://www.grandriverbooks.ca/</u> They are open and selling books online.

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PRAYER CYCLES

- Oxford United Churches Nov 2020 https://tinyurl.com/Oxford-Prayer-Cycle
- United Church of Canada Antler River Watershed

https://www.prayercycles.ca/antlerriverwatershed

COMINGS AND GOINGS AROUND OXFORD...

IN OUR HEARTS AND PRAYERS

Of the 9 vacant pulpits in Oxford County, most are rural. Each community of faith is unique as they discern their ministerial leadership and/or their future.

CONGREGATIONS SEEKING MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP:

Avondale UC (Tillsonburg) with Otterville UC interviewing candidates; Hickson UC; Norwich UC; Princeton-Etonia Pastoral Charge; Beachville (Sweaburg - West Oxford) Pastoral Charge; Foldens UC; Burgessville UC.

CHANGES IN OXFORD:

Oxford Centre UC, following their many years of faithful witness, has made the difficult but faithful decision to disband.

Innerkip UC –part-time appointment of Karen Willis DLM from November 29, 2020 - June 30, 2021.

St David's UC (Woodstock) has called the Rev Jeffrey Smith from Eden UC (Mississauga) to begin November 9, 2020.

Richwood UC – part-time appointment of Michael Shewburg (of Five Oaks) till end of 2021.

WANTED:

STOREY TELLERS OR POETS

You and I and the fishes and the mammals (etc.) are all part of creation. Rooted in the first chapter of Genesis, God created the earth and all the creatures on it. Sometimes we forget how deeply we are interconnected to the earth both as individuals and as communities.

The earth is our constant neighbour.

The fishes and mammals aren't easy to hear from (internet access is poor). BUT maybe if we try, we could remember our roots, the land and water around us – the rest of creation. **CONNECTIONS will publish stories or poems that could help us care for creation**. Our first poem is 'My Friend' on page 10.

We invite you to send us YOUR story or poem.

WANTED: REPORTERS FOR CONNECTIONS

Local reporters-those living in Oxford County who like to share stories, poems, photographs or artwork! Some of our most important reporters are church secretaries and former Presbytery members!

Roving reporters -those who have left Oxford County or have a heartfelt connection to Oxford.

CONNECTIONS is now ON-LINE

Check out oxfordunitedministries.ca.

We appreciate the expertise of Wayne Irwin of Churchweb Support in putting this together.

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CHANGE HAPPENS WHEN YOU CHANGE THE STORY –

"I'm a man, and I can change, if I have to, I guess." Some of you may recognise this as the "man's prayer" from Red Green's Possum Lodge. Change is not easy. A friend, mentor and colleague of mine, the Rev. Bill Lord likes to say that change happens when you change the story.

Covid-19 has changed the story for us. Wearing masks is just one example. It probably helps that this change was motivated by the two strongest motivators, fear and love.

The Bible's Old Testament is filled with examples of **God offering individuals** and Israel new stories to live. Jesus did the same. The offer was not always accepted, but when it was, new life was the result.

There is an important corollary. The person was always much more than the story they were acting out, be it their choice or what life had dealt them. It is alarming that the group that has the highest suicide rate is retired men. Perhaps for some, a motivating factor was mistaking their vocation for their life. Their value, their "I" is not what they did for a living. Our "I" is so much more. It is that intrinsic God given value that does not change with age or circumstance. To be able to live in that "I" at least some of the time, makes changes easier. GW

MOVING ON

Honourary Choir President

Barb Crittenden has performed for Norwich - her soprano voice soaring for audiences at community concerts and weddings, for seniors at Trillium, and, **for nearly 70**

years, as a valued member of the **Norwich United Choir.** From 1953 with her mom Flo, Barb often community sang in choirs including the Centennial Choir in 1967. At 78 Barb



recorded her favourite songs at the Fusion Youth Centre in Ingersoll. Her beautiful, rounded sounds were still intact.

She sang like an angel with our choir at our final service before Covid-19, when her daughter, Kari spoke as our special guest for Celebrate 200.

Barb has also been a model of kindness and generosity, loving and ready to help children and adults who came into her sphere.

On October 23, Barb heads off to **her new home in Edmonton** and leaves behind a special place in the hearts of so many friends.

Her designation as Choir President has stuck. She's a leader, has a beautiful voice, listens to instructions, welcomes new singers, helps us all sound better when we sit next to her.

God bless you and go with you, Barb. We know we'll keep connected and we wish you all love and good health as you begin a new chapter in Edmonton.

Let the beautiful music continue!

Submitted by Karen McSpadden, Choir leader NUC

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Ministry in Brazil¹⁾

Don Raffan was ordained by The United Church of Canada and served Methodist congregations in Brazil for 33 years. From 2014 to 2018 he and his wife Ina spent summers in their mobile home in Oxford County, just south of Hickson. The Raffans have retired in Brazil but continue to spend summers here in Canada visiting their three grown children. I asked Don when he and Ina were visiting Woodstock in late October to share some of their experiences in ministry. We were classmates at Western. GW

Ordination, May 1962. In December of 1962 I was appointed to Brasil²⁾ and went down on a Moore Mac cargo ship. In January of 1963 I began studying Portuguese and in December 1963, I married Ina Cerqueira Santos and was appointed to our first pastoral charge. I was then bed ridden for 3 months with hepatitis. Until retirement in 1995, we had 7 appointments to pastoral charges, one with 9 congregations/preaching points. I Conference served as Secretary Evangelism and Conference Secretary of Social Action, also President of Presbytery.

Our first Pastoral charge at Ipatinga (1964 - 1967) had 6 preaching points. It was in the Industrial complex of Usiminas. This was during a military dictatorship. We bought a house in a new subdivision with no water, or electricity at night. Our work included building the Central church, now a thriving still growing community and the acquiring of two more church properties that are also thriving communities.

Our last appointment was an expansion into new territory where a big pulp and paper mill (Aracruz Celulose) was built.

Part of our work involved working with the Guarani Indigenous people. They had arrived in this part of Brasil some 20 years earlier after trekking north some

1,500 km. in search of their "Promised Land". They had received Methodist orientation before the trek north, so we felt at home with them. Their elderly (118 years) spiritual leader was Tatantin Woa Retee', now totally blind. One day she placed her hands on my head and blessed me in her language which for me was a most moving experience.

The Methodist Church in Brasil continues to grow with many young families, although growth has slowed. It has become more



conservative with its leadership now coming from and being trained in Brasil. In the process, sadly, it has lost some of its interest in social action.

We look back on our work there with the fondest memories. Submitted by Don Raffan.

1) English spelling 2) Portuguese spelling

When the world feels like an emotional roller coaster, steady yourself with simple rituals. Do the dishes. Fold the laundry.

Water the plants.

Simplicity attracts wisdom.



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OXFORD UNITED REFUGEE SUPPORT COMMITTEE (OURS)

An update of refugee families is hot-linked here - Presentation sent to Congregations October 2020.



The support for these families is deeply appreciated. If you would like to work on the OURS Committee, please contact Carol Ewing, Secretary of **OURS** Committee.

support these families, cheques should be made out to St. David's United Church with **REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP** in the memo line and mailed to:

> St. David's United Church, Treasurer 190 Springbank Ave., North, Woodstock, Ont. N4S 7R1



Connect to Spirit, to Self, to Each other and to Nature.

Check out their programs and possibilities for hosting small events at http://fiveoaks.on.ca, hospitality@fiveoaks.on.ca

Volunteer Work Day

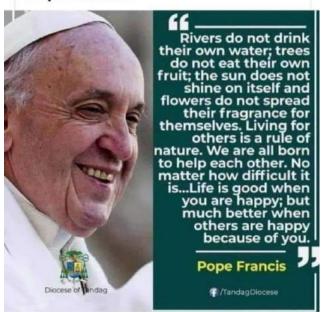
With Brian Hershey and Tom Hunt November 18, 2020

Thursday night and Sunday Night **Dinners** with Chef Michael.

We have a website:

oxfordunitedministries.ca

I absolutely LOVE this quote from Pope Francis!





Dr. **Japhet** Rev. Ndhlovu, UCC Program Co-ordinator for S. Africa and S.E. Asia spoke on the **UCW** Project

"Women for Change Zambia". The recorded version is now available and also on YouTube of first Trithis ever Regional **UCW**

Gathering (October 3, 2020).

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https://www.operationsharing.ca/

This is the hot-link to <u>Helping in</u> <u>Unity</u>, <u>Operation Sharing's Fall</u> <u>2020 Newsletter</u>.

Highlights due to Covid:

- Cancellation of Christmas Day Event
- Provision of gift cards for gifts or food for families rather than purchasing gifts at reduced price at the Christmas Place.

Bonnie Cannell-Eby is the new staff person for Food for Friends program. Brenda Hunter shares a true story about her encounter with black bears in the collection of stories and poems from Writers' Café/Expressive Arts Program.

Bullwinkle's Eatery and Hospitality Training Centre in Woodstock

Running temporarily out of College Avenue United Church. Takeout lunches available on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays (from noon to 1 pm). Read the experience of volunteer, John R Smith, following.

Oxford County:

Food for Friends

Support this program with 25 cents each time you shop at supporting grocery stores in Woodstock and Ingersoll.

The Inn

The Inn homeless shelter, serving all of Oxford County, is at Old St. Paul's Anglican Church in Woodstock. Free of charge for those 16 and up. It operates nightly from 7:30 p.m.

Mail financial donations for Operation Sharing to Treasurer of Operation Sharing, P.O. Box 20081, Woodstock, Ontario, N4S 8X8.

When John Smith volunteered for Bullwinkle's, he was in for a surprise!



It's about 8:40 am on a Tuesday, as I walk into College Ave. Church, the southern entrance. Marilyn Schmiedl is already there. As usual, we've received

generous donations of produce to Bullwinkle's during the weekend that need to be dealt with. Refrigerate them, process them for immediate use or for freezing? So many questions. Do we need to change our menu offerings for the current week, given the specific donations? We planned tomato soup but now need to consider broccoli and change the posting on Operation Sharing's website. Many decisions—a fairly normal beginning to our week.

When we were (pre-pandemic) located at Indwell on Vansittart Ave., with Vanessa Page in charge, **I began my "career" as soup maestro or Suppenmeister.** I loved doing it and was introduced to **several soups I never dreamed of—parsnip, zucchini—**along with more standard ones like broccoli, potato, carrot and tomato. I no longer need a recipe. Lately I've been aiming for a soup pot of around 50-60 cups or more.

As we prepare for serving lunch between noon and 1 pm, the very well-appointed church kitchen hums with activity. Along with Judi Brown, our salad and dessert specialist, we have a couple of wonderfully reliable volunteers who assist with food prep. We would be hard pressed without them, even when Marilyn works her magic with the main course.

The minutes fly by, with or without a coffee break or meeting to plan future menus, and the time to set up is upon us.

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Since everything is takeout now, we fill the styrofoam (alas) containers with main course, salad, dessert and soup and whatever else we have on hand (buns, extra tomatoes). We usually have a box of freebies in the entrance way (vegetables, snacks).

Noon arrives and the doors open. Often there is a lineup outside, in all kinds of weather. Now, of course, one person at Charge is \$1 minimum on a time. Tuesdays and Thursdays; Wednesdays are free. Some of our patrons simply don't have the \$1; they never get turned away. Gradually I get to recognize regulars; Marilyn has known some of them for years and their particular circumstances. Some of the stories are truly heart-breaking. It's also terribly difficult for some during this time of social distancing. They don't get to interact with fellow diners.

Doors close at 1 pm and then cleanup starts. Marilyn carefully sets aside meals for the Inn, located at Old St. Paul's (Anglican) church hall, that provides an overnight bed and sustenance for around 10 plus homeless people (usually men).

Since Oct. 27, I've been the Facilitator for Bullwinkle's. **Aside from the day to day operations, there is an element of training.** We've had at least a couple of young people with various challenges to be trained in food prep and serving (when that day returns).

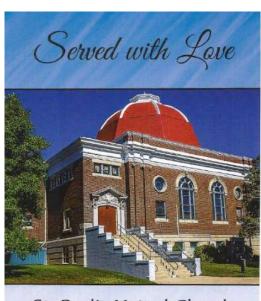
It would be a serious understatement to say that I find this work rewarding. It has shown me a side of life in Woodstock that I never before seriously paid attention to. Our number of patrons varies widely from 15-40 or more on any given day. We often wonder about those who haven't shown up in days or weeks. They become a kind of extended family and

their general welfare is our concern. The need in our city persists. We do what we can, in our small corner, to help those less fortunate than ourselves. John R Smith John, a retired librarian, skilled actor, a marvellous bass is also a high school classmate of Marg's. He is now the Facilitator for Bullwinkle's.

St. Paul's United Church 88 Bidwell Street, Tillsonburg

Saturday Community Kitchen meals starting October 17, 2020 from 11:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. ONLY

Hot meal will be provided. Served in containers to go from the parking lot at the bottom of the ramp to St. Paul's church. No seats and no washrooms available. Two entrances to parking lot off Bidwell Street.



St. Paul's United Church Tillsonburg, Ontario

St. Paul's UC UCW Cookbook has arrived! \$15 Call or email to get yours! 519-688-0016fbell@oxford.net

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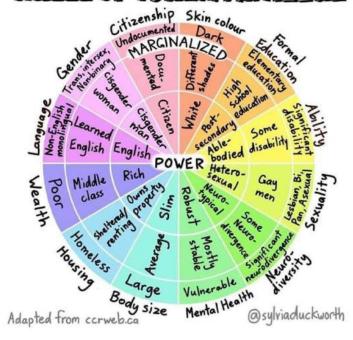
VIRTUAL BAZAAR St. Paul's UC Tillsonburg UCW



There will be a Virtual Frosty Fair Bazaar this year on Saturday, November 21 from 8 am- 3 pm. Items of knitting, sewing, crafts, jams and jellies, bows, Christmas greenery and décor should be left on the front porch at 36 Wood Haven Drive as soon as possible and before Saturday, November 14. Pictures of each item can be seen on Facebook Frosty Fair Bazaar. Instructions for buying and pick-up are on the Facebook site, items may now be viewed on Facebook Frosty Fair Bazaar. More items will be added each day.



MITEEL OF BOMERABRIMILEGE



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My Friend

I have this old friend.

She is wise, she is a healer, she is the most generous person I know.

She tells me that like our LGBTQ people, she has been misunderstood and persecuted.

Like our black brothers and sisters, she has been exploited, stigmatized, and enslaved.

And the miracle is that even though she has known rape and torture,

her beauty has not faded.

She still smiles and tells me she has much to live for.

She keeps on giving - says it's in her nature.

She says she will keep providing, But warns that time is running out. Not for her, she says, but for us.

My friend feels sad when she thinks of this.

Says she will miss us when we are gone. My friend's name is Gaia, Mother Earth. She tells me we could make things right, It's in our power.

So will we?

by Kate Hathaway, former chaplain at University Hospital, London, Anglican priest and friend



For the Love of Creation is an initiative of Canadian faith communities (including United Church of Canada) and faith-based groups (Kairos, Citizens for Public Justice, Faith and the Common Good,) who have come together under a unified banner.

Take off your shoes and feel the earth under your feet, as if the ground on which you are standing really is holy ground.

Let it please you. Let it hurt you a little.

Feel how the world really feels when you do not strap little tanks on your feet to shield you from the way things really are.

~Barbara Brown Taylor, An Altar in the World

Together they seek to mobilize education, reflection, action and advocacy for climate justice. Together, as a people of faith we can make a meaningful contribution in the next decade towards a sustainable future for all life on the planet. Includes theological reflection, ways and means for local and congregational involvement as well as political advocacy.

The number one thing we can do to address climate change is to talk about it. Gather people and host a Faithful Climate Conversation, today and help increase the dialogue for climate action.

For the Love of Creation has provided the **following guides as resources for us to use**: 1. <u>Creation, Climate and You</u>; 2. <u>From Concern to Action</u>; 3. <u>Build a Better Future</u>

In November, For the Love of Creation is hosting an online forum exploring climate change communication, climate policy, ecological grief, creation care and more. Register and join them every Monday night in November at 7:30 pm ET. Videos of previous sessions are available to registrants.

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Antler River Watershed Regional Council Fall Meeting

What an amazing FIRST as the Antler River Watershed Regional Council (ARWRC) had a Fall Meeting **held via Zoom** on October 29 - November 1.
About 160 participated at each session dealing with business which had been scheduled for the May Annual General Meeting which was delayed due to Covid.

Highlights:

- The Workbook has more details about most of the topics covered.
- A Financial Webinar held earlier reviewed the ARW Budget of 2019-2020, and the ARW Budget of 2020 -2021 (approved Oct. 29).
- Mission Grants 2021: \$160,000 has been granted to local Ministries who applied for financial support. Those close to Oxford who received grants: Grand River Resource Centre \$4,000; Five Oaks \$9,750; Camp Tanner \$10,000.
- Participants discussed and passed:
 The Affirm Action Plan for Regional Council to live out its
 Mission/Vision statement entitled
 "Safety, Sanctuary and Unconditional Love." See the ARW webinar Affirm our Communities, Affirming Our Faith.
- Outstanding business from General Council 43 (2018) was approved: The Order of Ministry be open to persons of all gender identities, and The Basis of Union be amended to reflect the change as follows: 10.0 The Order of Ministry shall be open to persons of all gender identities. (It currently reads "shall be open to both men and women").
- Each of the three <u>Commissions</u> -Mission & Discipleship, <u>Covenant</u>, and Human Resources made video presentations which will (hopefully) be

available shortly either on the ARWRC website or YouTube Channel.

Some "Former Oxford" Highlights

- Both candidates for <u>President-Elect</u> of ARWRC were from Oxford: Rev. Karlene Brown-Palmer (St. Paul's UC Tillsonburg) and Rev. Jane Van Patter (newly retired). We wish Jane all the best in her new role as ARWRC President.
- Christina Crawford was recognized as a Commissioned Minister of the UCC in the inspiring <u>Sunday morning</u> <u>Celebration of Ministry service</u>.
 Congratulations, Christina!

Milestones:

Retirees: Rev. Bonnie Pilkey **Years of service**: Rev. Lynne Allin 15 yrs; Rev. Judy Campbell 20 yrs.; Rev. Fred Hagle 35 yrs.; Rev. Ken Jackson 50 yrs. **Communities of Faith** that have disbanded/ceased to worship: Curries UC, Eastwood UC, Oxford Centre UC - with appreciation for their ministry.

- ARWRC supported the proposal for a stamp in 2022 to commemorate <u>Rev.</u>
 <u>Dr. George Leslie Mackay</u> and has sent a letter to the Canada Post Stamp Advisory Committee. Mackay was originally from Embro, Zorra Township. The letter also recognizes the 150 years of Canada's engagement in Asia.
- Proposal re effective communication between Region and Social Justice Network regarding Social Justice issues was referred to Executive due to time.

Rev. Karlene Brown-Palmer provided Theological Reflections at the close of each of the sessions, noting that Faith and Scripture are our guiding mantra. We come from different spaces and places but Together, we are One in Christ. Submitted by Lynne Dunlop

ARWRC also described Highlights of the meeting in November 7 2020 newsletter.

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General Council recall Meeting of October 24, 2020 resolved that the United Church aspire to become an **antiracist church** and created a new position to help with that.

(October's CONNECTIONS has instructions to access the resource material on racism in UCC used for the preparation of this meeting).



ARWRC webpage Facebook page

<u>Rural Connect</u> has been established to support rural congregations through the use of technology.



Worship Services in Oxford

Check the following re details of Covid precautions and/or whether on-line streaming etc. is available.

College Ave UC https://collegeave.ca
Dundas St. UC

www.dundasstunitedchurch.ca

Foldens UC @ 9:30 am

Hebron UC - rsstock@execulink.com

Kintore/Brooksdale UC

http://www.kintorechurch.com/sundaymorning.html

Knox UC, Embro

https://www.facebook.com/knoxunitedinembro/

Mt Elgin UC

https://mtelginunitedchurch.webs.com/

Norwich UC:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMplrX3wf6iEa5dqJmvqbw/featured

Peace UC, Plattsville at 10:am

https://www.peaceunited.ca/

Richwood UC

St. David's UC, Woodstock

https://www.stdavidswoodstock.com

St. Paul's UC, Tillsonburg

http://www.stpaulsunitedchurch.net

Sweaburg UC @ 11:00 am

Trinity United, Ingersoll

https://www.tucingersoll.ca

Westminster UC, Thamesford 10:30 am

https://makingconnexions.com

CONNECTIONS – News and Views of Oxford County United Churches Next Publication: Wednesday,

December 9, 2020

SUBMISSIONS DUE:

Noon Monday December 7, 2020

To add or remove names email

oxfconnections@execulink.com

Submissions and feedback welcome. You may share widely.

ALL ISSUES ARE NOW AVAILABLE

oxfordunitedministries.ca

Past Issues for 2019 also stored:

https://tinyurl.com/Oxford-CONNECTIONS-2019

Past Issues for 2020 also stored:

https://tinyurl.com/Oxford-CONNECTIONS-2020