

# CONNECTIONS

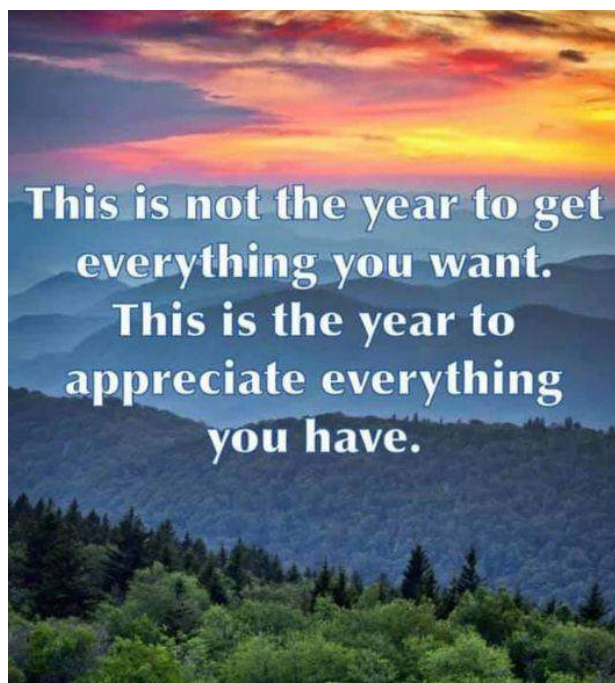
## News and Views of Oxford County United Churches

Vol 2 Issue 12

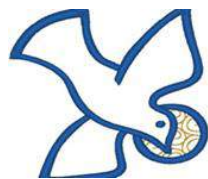
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### STORIES FOR DARK DAYS

This year, we hear the stories of Jesus' birth differently. This year, experiencing darkness in a new way, we look for the light in our Advent studies and preparations. This year, with in-person Christmas Eve services cancelled, **we can join with Sweaburg UC and ring our church bells at 8:00 pm and/or sing carols outside our homes!** This year, we recognize the front-line heroes in the ministries of Operation Sharing and St Paul's Community Kitchen in Tillsonburg as they meet the increased need. This year, we support Camp Tanner and Five Oaks in the uncertainties of planning for next year. This year, we welcome Jeff Smith to St David's UC along with news from former Oxfordites (Bill and Karen Butt, Hyuk Cho). This year, we pray for and sign petitions to address the increased danger for our Refugees in Ethiopia.



### FOOD FOR THE SOUL



#### Christmas in the shadow of Covid-19

It's the season of darkness and light. Take **a drive through the neighbourhood** and you will see **everything from soft lights on humble cedars, as subtle and as unassuming as light through a stable window**, to front yards filled with enough light to outshine the Bethlehem star.

Covid-19 has cast a long shadow over the world. These are dark days. But a vaccine has been announced so there is light in our darkness. **We may hear the stories of Jesus' birth differently this year.** We may pay more attention to both their darkness and light.

**The stories of Jesus' birth come from Luke and Matthew who wrote sometime after the year 85.** In the year 70, Rome laid siege to Jerusalem, destroyed most of the temple and killed over a million people, most of them Jews. Moreover, by this time Jesus' disciples had all been killed and if you were caught saying that Jesus instead of Caesar was Lord, you would suffer the same fate. Those dark days called for new stories of faith. **So, we have these "wonder full" stories telling us that God, and not Caesar was still in charge: light in a darkened world.**

The stories are filled with unexpected twists and turns, with much love, risk and irony. Caesar calls people to register for a new tax. That brings Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem where Jesus is born, fulfilling the prophesy that the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. Angels announce the birth to marginalized shepherds and not High Priests. Jesus is shut out of the Inn as he

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will be shut out not by Jews but by Jewish authorities. King Herod is tricked by three astrologers from Babylon, of all places. The holy family escapes to Egypt because of Herod and in doing so the prophesy of the Messiah coming out of Egypt is fulfilled. **These stories that lift the marginalized and make the powerful mere pawns in God's grand plan would have delighted and encouraged the struggling first century faithful.**

So, we gather this Christmas in the shadow of Covid-19. **These ancient stories become our stories. We no longer take health or life for granted.** I find myself feeling thankful for each new day. On **Christmas Eve, we will remember the front-line workers who are the heroes of our time.** We will think of the **collective grief of people of all nations and the Christmas where so many will be alone, cut off from families.** We may hear the gospel stories with more clarity and have our hearts strangely warmed. We may even recall the words of John's gospel who gives us just **one sentence that describes Christmas: "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it."** And that's the good news!

Peace, and Merry Christmas. GW



The UCW's mission is to love God; foster Christian commitment, faithfulness, and spirituality; and promote

respect and love for all God's creation.

See [here](#) for ongoing information from UCC website.

### PRAYER CYCLES

- **Oxford United Churches Dec. 2020**  
<https://tinyurl.com/Oxford-Prayer-Cycle-for-UCC>
- **Antler River Watershed**  
<https://www.prayercycles.ca/antlerriverwatershed>

**CONNECTIONS website**

[oxfordunitedministries.ca](http://oxfordunitedministries.ca)

## CONNECTIONS

ON [FACEBOOK](#)

LIKE AND FOLLOW US

### COMINGS AND GOINGS AROUND OXFORD...

#### CONGREGATIONS SEEKING MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP:

*Each of the 10 communities of faith in County of Oxford is unique. We hold them in our hearts and prayers as they discern their journey.*

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:

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

**St David's UC** (Woodstock) called the Rev Jeffrey Smith November 9, 2020.

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

## CONDOLENCES

**We keep Rev Karen Low and Rev. Annie Jannaway** in our hearts and prayers as they grieve the passing of Karen's mother, June Low on November 10, 2020. Her obituary is [here](#).

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### CONTINUING TO RUMINATE ON "WE MAKE THE ROAD BY WALKING":

Recently, Franciscan Richard Rohr in his [daily on-line meditations](#) quoted Brian McLaren in his book 'We Make the Road by Walking': "Christianity began as a revolutionary, nonviolent movement promoting **a new kind of aliveness on the margins of society** ... it claimed that everyone, not just an elite few, had God-given gifts to use for the common good. ... **It put people above profit and made the audacious claim that the Earth belonged not to rich tycoons or powerful politicians but to the Creator who loves every sparrow ... every wildflower....** It was a peace movement, a love movement, a joy movement, a justice movement, an integrity movement, an alive movement."

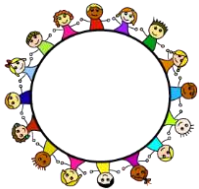
HOW DO YOU LIKE THEM APPLES?

Think about McLaren's quote: let it challenge you to evaluate your life and faith. Allow God's Spirit to shine in and through you this Christmastide.

Olga McKellar

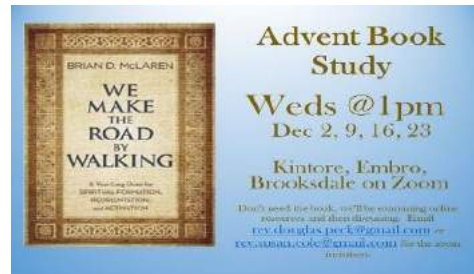
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### PRAYER CHAIN



Contact Prayer Chain Leader  
Olga McKellar for on-going  
prayer concerns.  
[o.mckellar@sympatico.ca](mailto:o.mckellar@sympatico.ca)

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Susan Cole [rev.susan.cole@gmail.com](mailto:rev.susan.cole@gmail.com), and Doug Peck [rev.douglas.peck@gmail.com](mailto:rev.douglas.peck@gmail.com), are leading an on-line Advent Book Study on "We Make the Road By Walking." All are welcome to join. You don't need to download Zoom to take part or have the book. Just email that you are interested and click on the link sent to you.

The following is an outline of the Book Study going forward:

#### **Dec. 9, Chapter Fifteen: Women On The Edge**

Luke 1:5-55  
Isaiah 7:14, 9:2-7  
Romans 12:1-2

#### **Dec. 16, Chapter Sixteen: Keep Herod In Christmas**

Jeremiah 32:31-35  
Micah 5:2-5a  
Matthew 1:18-2:15

#### **Dec. 23, Chapter Seventeen: Surprising People**

Psalms 34:1-18  
Matthew 1:1-17  
Luke 2:8-20

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### CONNECTIONS - ON-the WEB!

Check out [oxfordunitedministries.ca](http://oxfordunitedministries.ca). We appreciate the expertise of Wayne Irwin of Churchweb Support to get this on the web.

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Hotlinks follow:

[Website](#)  
[Facebook Page](#)

### CHANGES due to Covid:

- Cancellation of Christmas Day Event
- Christmas Place used gift cards
- Coats for Kids distributed as needed

### Woodstock: Bullwinkle's Eatery and Hospitality Training Centre

Running temporarily out of College Avenue United Church. Takeout lunches available on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays (from noon to 1 pm).

### 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 – [Facebook page](#)

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.

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**Two ways to donate:** webpage [here](#) or mail Treasurer of Operation Sharing, P.O. Box 20081, Woodstock, Ontario, N4S 8X8.

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**Shop in person** Mondays, Wednesday and Fridays. Protocol: call from the parking lot for them to come and get you.

**To order books** call 519-442-3366

(1-888-668-0871) or email

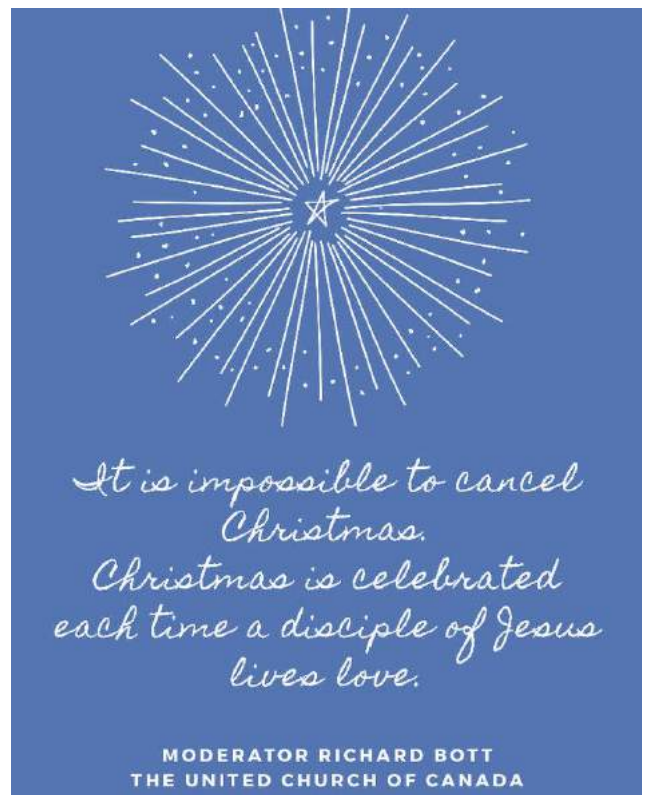
[sales@grandriverbooks.com](mailto:sales@grandriverbooks.com)

**Order books online** [here](#). Mail delivery \$5.00. Read recent newsletter [here](#).



[Facebook page](#)

**15 people attended the CAMP TANNER Annual General Meeting (AGM) on November 27 via GoogleMeet.** As an Incorporated Ministry of the United Church of Canada their Bylaws were revised to be consistent with the church's new governance structure. The Budget for 2021 will be revised in April 2021 when clearer guidelines for residential camps are available from Public Health. **Updates wrt COVID-19 will be posted the second week of each month on their [website](#).** Draft minutes of the AGM will also be posted on their website.



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### **CHRISTMAS EVE,**

### **Sweaburg UC invites us to join them in ringing our Bells (8:00pm)!**

Sweaburg United Church welcomes all to our church for 11am Sunday services.

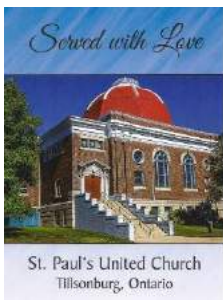
This year, we are disappointed that we are unable to host a Christmas Eve Service due to Covid restrictions. **We encourage donations to Operation Sharing and Sakura House.** Mail to the church at 474425 Dodge Line, Woodstock, N4S 7V6 or drop off at the mailbox across the street.



**On December 24th at 8:00 pm, we will ring our Church Bell and invite everyone to ring a bell or sing a carol outside your homes at this time.**

Wishing all a Merry Christmas. Submitted

by Helen Wharram, Sweaburg UC



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

### **Saturday Community**

**Kitchen meals continue** 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.

*We've reprinted this easier to read prayer of our Moderator.*



### **Prayer to Pray as You Put on Your Mask**

Creator, as I prepare to go into the world, help me to see the sacrament in the wearing of this cloth – let it be “an outward sign of an inward grace” – a tangible and visible way of living love for my neighbours, as I love myself.

Christ, since my lips will be covered, uncover my heart, that people would see my smile in the crinkles around my eyes.

Since my voice may be muffled, help me to speak clearly, not only with my words, but with my actions.

Holy Spirit, as the elastic touches my ears, remind me to listen carefully – and full of care – to all those I meet.

May this simple piece of cloth be shield and banner, and each breath that it holds, be filled with your love.

In your Name and in that love, I pray.

May it be so.

*By the Rev. Richard Bott, Moderator of the United Church of Canada*

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### WELCOME JEFF SMITH



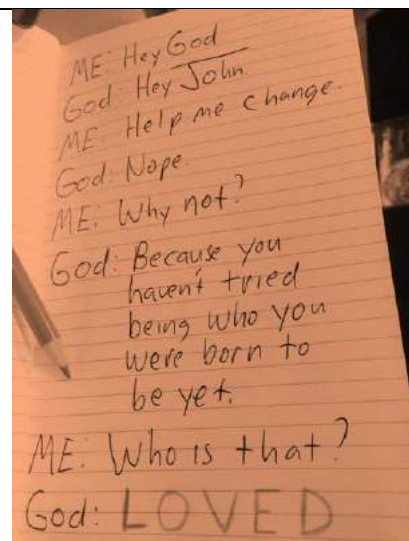
*We are happy to share Jeff's words telling us a bit about himself, his faith journey and his call to come to St David's UC and Oxford.*

Like many families, my family during my early years got away from going to church on a regular basis. **For her birthday one year, my grandmother asked me to go to church with her.** She was the daughter of a Methodist lay preacher and had been a church organist in her earlier years. My grandmother couldn't drive so she went to church with her sister-in-law, my great Aunt Betty, who was a Presbyterian. **So my formative years were spent in the Presbyterian Church. It was from St. Andrew's, St. John's that I felt the call into ministry.** It was from there that I was ordained to the Ministry of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care way back in 1990. **In that community of faith, I discovered the love of God.** I still receive their weekly mailings and I have a special place in my heart for the people there.

During my time in Sarnia and in conversation with the minister at St. Paul's United, Ray Tucker, also a Newfoundlander, I was drawn to return to the United Church. During his time in Newfoundland, Ray had served at **St. James, St. John's, the United Church I was baptized in. The United Church's inclusive nature and welcoming spirit, it's commitment to mission and justice, drew me to apply for admission back in 1996.** After serving the Thedford-Sylvan Pastoral Charge

(Lambton) for 3 years, **I was admitted to the United Church in 1999 at the Meeting of London Conference held that year in Ridgetown.** I have served at Central United Church (Sarnia), Waterford United Church, the Port Dover-Woodhouse Pastoral Charge and just recently at Eden United Church, Mississauga.

During my seminary years, I did a minor in "Rural Ministry." I was surprised after graduation to be placed in Winnipeg, Manitoba, not quite the rural landscape I had readied myself to serve in! Over the years, I have discovered a lot about myself. **My recent time in Mississauga has reminded me that I love the country and that I am a "pastor."** I enjoy being in smaller communities, where community matters and where people are closer to one another. **I look forward to walking with the people of St. David's, Woodstock, to being part of their amazing community.** I give thanks as well for all the wonderful work done there by my predecessor Jane. I look forward to getting to know Oxford County and its' people.



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Our refugee families face **more danger than just the virus this Christmas.** ([Read Gwynne Dyer's December 3, 2020, article in London Free Press.](#)) The families in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, say it is not safe at this time for them to be in the streets.

**Our thoughts and prayers are with them in this Christmas season. *GW***

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

We may feel helpless to change what is happening to our sisters and brothers in Ethiopia but signing a petition to the United Nations **is both a possible and an important action**. Habte Zekarias of London, our co-sponsor of Sarah's family, is a member of the yaakil grassroot movement coordinating committee Canada and he encourages us to sign this petition which has been organized by **Eritrean Yiaki Mass Movement**.

Habte, who has sources on the ground in Ethiopia, writes **'there are about 105,000 Eritrean Refugees in 3 camps where the war is going on.** While the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) has a mandate of protection it has, in fact, **abandoned them with no food and water, hundreds of children are dying, women are getting raped every day and recently 6,000 men have been kidnapped and no one knows where they have been taken.'**

This petition calls the authorities and Humanitarian organizations to intervene and to call the Ethiopian government to **protect Eritrean refugees in its jurisdiction and allow access for food and water delivery to the camps.** The hotlink to the petition is [here](#).

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### FORMER OXFORDITES - FROM THE WEST COAST

Dear friends,

Hope you all are well!

The attached photo is a kayak that I built over the summertime. It was presented in our church as we began a new season in September. At that time, we were expecting turbulent waves such as a second lockdown in the near future. In this situation, our theme for the fall was **"Let's Paddle Together." We paddle together to get through this storm. "We will come through this together."**

Merry Christmas!

Hyuk Cho

West Point Grey United Church  
Vancouver, BC.



The kayak is a West Greenland style with Alaskan yellow cedar frame: length-18.3ft, center beam-21.5in and weight-32lb....

### On the First Day of Christmas

On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me. . .

One pack of N95 masks. On the second day, two bars of soap, . . . three delivered meals, four hand sanitizers, five safety tips, six feet of distance, seven zoom visits, eight Facebook photos, nine Facetime calls, ten virtual hugs, eleven virtual kisses, twelve vaccine promises and a pack of N95 masks. . .GW

**David Allan** (1937-2014) was a candidate for ministry from Central UC and helped set up the structure for St. David's UC, Woodstock. He served at Bloor St UC in Toronto for over 20 years. At the urging of his congregation, his prayers were published. The following is included with the permission of his wife, Marilyn.

### Prayer-

#### For this Tender Time

Let us be thankful for this tender time that tiptoes toward a togethered world and gathers us in impossible hopes  
In deep shadows.

Above tempests of collective strife and personal pain,  
the storm of economic crises and gale force wind  
of merchandised values and occupational pressure,  
there still shines a strong star

Around our daily confusion and lonely hours,  
all about our tears and toils,  
the emptiness of lost causes and lost dreams,  
and mistakes too late for correction,  
there still shines the manger presence.

Let us spread our cloaks wide around the world  
where all journeys are not danced,  
and all endings not uplifted,  
where some pass along ways  
boarded up against memory and hope.

Pass among us again this pregnant season.

Stir spirits again in us to rise like doves  
and angels on extended wings,  
all rose and gold like mornings.  
to leave the empty places,  
to sing and stand on high.

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### **PEDRA PROGRAM - Mozambique**

*From June 1999 to July 2010, **Bill and Karen Butt** were overseas personnel for the UCC in Mozambique. One hears the love and pride in their voices as they share the ongoing success of their work there.*

**The PEDRA program for girls' education, run by the former United Church partner the Christian Council of Mozambique, still is thriving.** Some of the older girls these days sew protective anti-covid masks for distributing to people who can't afford them. They also learn and practise anti-covid hygiene and teach it in their neighbourhoods.



**PEDRA girls teaching hygiene**



**PEDRA girls sewing masks**

The girls in the photos are what are called in Portuguese educadoras, literally 'little teachers', or what we would call teacher helpers, or volunteer junior or auxiliary teachers. They're 15-16 years old, have been in PEDRA for at least 5 years, and help teach the younger girls. Their names are Adelina (the 'I' is pronounced like 'ee' in 'feel'), and Cheila (pronounced 'Shaylah'). Look for more about Adelina and Cheila in CONNECTIONS January and February 2021.

*Submitted by Bill and Karen Butt, Calvary United Church, London.*

### **Sad Jesus from Facebook, Dec 3 2020**

**Once there was a lady who dared God to speak to her.** "Burn the bush like you did for Moses, God, and I will follow you. Collapse the walls like you did for Joshua, God, and I will fight for you. Still the waves like you did on Galilee, God, and I will listen to you!"

**And so the lady sat by a bush, near a wall, close to the sea and waited for God to speak to her.**

And God heard the lady, so God answered her. God sent fire, not for a bush, but for some people who were cold. God brought down a wall, not of brick, but of human stubbornness. **God stilled a storm, not of a sea, but of hateful criticism.** ... And God waited for the lady to respond. And God waited. And God waited.... And waited....

But **because the lady was looking at bushes, not hearts, bricks and not lives, seas and not souls, she decided that God had done nothing.** Finally, she looked to God and asked, "Have you lost your power?"

And God looked at her and gently said., **"No.... Have you lost your hearing?"**



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### 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.**

**We invite you to send us YOUR story or poem.**

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### WANTED: REPORTERS FOR CONNECTIONS

**Local reporters** – those living in Oxford County to share stories, poems, photographs or artwork! We deeply appreciate all our varied story writers/reporters. The rewards are immeasurable!

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

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**"The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it." John 1:5**



***Connect to Spirit, to Self, to Each Other and to Nature.***

*There are programs and possibilities for hosting small events. Take a look at their [webpage](#) or [hospitality@fiveoaks.on.ca](mailto:hospitality@fiveoaks.on.ca)*

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This December check out **Holiday Takeaway Meals** with Chef Michael.

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### **Five Oaks Members Zoom Meeting November 22, 2020**

The purpose of this meeting was to approve changes to the by-laws of the corporation and to engage in a strategic planning process.

The by-law changes were mainly updates needed because of the reorganization of the United Church governance structure.

**Break-out groups discussed future directions: interfaith/intercultural programming; living into right relations with self, with community and with nature; intergenerational learning; post-COVID programming and opportunities for self-directed experiences on the land.**

Seth Warren, our consultant will carefully consider all these recorded sessions and provide advice to the Board of Directors on future programming.

*Submitted by David Schell*

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**CONNECTIONS has a website:**

**[oxfordunitedministries.ca](http://oxfordunitedministries.ca)**

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### Loving, Grieving and Healing

'The magic is in the sharing' someone said as we reflected on the personal grief of a mutual friend. To me, the sharing felt like 'God's Spirit flowing to mend our hearts' after someone or something we love dies. **This month we report on the Forum on Ecological Grief part of For the Love of Creation** which we reported on in [November CONNECTIONS](#) pg10. (The national initiative to address Climate Justice of Canadian faith communities and faith-based organizations.)



**FOR THE LOVE  
OF CREATION**

This more personal report acknowledges that **grieving that is honoured can bring about healing and new life and that a safe place is important when attempting to unblock repressed or ignored grief.** In this forum, we engaged



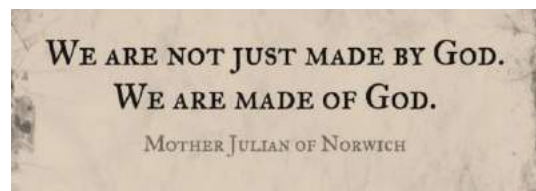
in an exercise using this spiral image of the dandelion (a gift to Joanna Macy from artist Dori Midnight) and which shows the movement from the source of **Gratitude** (the root of the

**dandelion**), through **Honouring our Pain** (the green leaves), **Seeing with New and Ancient Eyes** (the flower), and **Going Forth** (the seeds). (While any spiral image shows movement, reframing the bothersome dandelion is genius!)

Given our short time on the zoom platform, I still found it valuable to move through these stages. First, **grounding my gratitude that feeds my soul** (the

wilderness camp our family has enjoyed for decades); **honouring all our pain which blocks the energy which feeds our souls** (the future for both our grandchildren and those in vulnerable places); **seeing with new and ancient eyes the flower of new life** (the life giving attitude of our grandchildren who help me to see possibilities); and coming to the place where I could sing with faith 'I won't be frightened anymore'. Singing moves our energy! For me, **ecological grief is different than other grief** and I commit to continue this exercise with others regularly.

**Resources:** These sessions were experiential and not recorded. **Robin MacDonald** (of [Heartland](#)), a grief-support practitioner and **Anna Bigland-Pritchard**, a musician used the work of [Joanna Macy](#) – (environmental activist of over 40 years, scholar of Buddhism and [deep ecology](#)). [Work that Reconnects Network](#) is a valuable resource database for articles, meditations, songs, prayers, and more. You can listen to [Jaylene Johnson's album Potter and Clay](#). The leaders recommended this grief work as a **regular monthly spiritual practice and emphasize doing it collectively amongst a trusted group.** Since then, I've modified it to use for an opening worship for a social and ecological justice group. **The intent is self-care and not to establish policy, etc.** Contact the editors if you would like more information. MM



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[ARWRC webpage](#)

[Facebook page](#)

**Rural Connect** has been established to support rural congregations through the use of technology.

Most recent NEWSLETTER [here](#) .

Jane Van Patter, the new President of Antler River Watershed Regional Council, writes in her Advent message "**Pandemic living has challenged us to travel new roads and discover new ways of being church together in a physically distanced kind of way.**"

Congratulations and blessings to Jane, recently retired from St David's UC, as she is installed as President of ARWRC. Exciting and challenging!



### **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](http://www.dundasstunitedchurch.ca)

**Foldens UC** @ 9:30 am

**Hebron UC** - [rsstock@execulink.com](mailto:rsstock@execulink.com)

**Kintore/Brooksdale UC**

<http://www.kintorechurch.com/sunday-morning.html>

**Knox UC, Embro**

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

**Mt Elgin UC**

<https://mtelginunitedchurch.webs.com/>

**Norwich UC:**

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMplrX3w-f6iEa5dgJmvqbw/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,**

January 13, 2021

### **SUBMISSIONS DUE:**

Noon Friday January 8, 2020

**To add or remove names, email**

[oxfconnections@execulink.com](mailto:oxfconnections@execulink.com)

Submissions and feedback welcome.

You may share widely.

**ALL ISSUES ARE NOW AVAILABLE**

[oxfordunitedministries.ca](http://oxfordunitedministries.ca)

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

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