

CONNECTIONS

News and Views of Oxford County United Churches

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GRATEFUL FOR STORIES

finding us each month. As we enter our 3rd year, thank you for reading these stories of following Jesus, of being his disciples. We enter 2021 in crisis: the COVID-19 pandemic, the unsustainability of our current use of non-renewal resources and the exposed economic and social fractures in our society. Yet, we are re-discovering the unyielding plumbline of being a disciple of Jesus finding innovative ways to live out **'the peace of Christ':**

- breakfast bags for the hungry on a cold winter morning
- God in a feeding trough
- collaborating to preach
- robins in December
- 11-year-old prepping food for The Inn
- petition and prayer for Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia
- book study: church handbook for the climate crisis (starting January 26)
- World Day of Prayer (March 5)
- homelessness survey in Oxford
- resources for Black History Month (February)
- a story about 'An Old Friend'
- valuable resources for rural church buildings and technology.

These stories encourage us. The heroes in our community help keep us safe. We **are** in this together.

Be safe. Be kind. Be strong. We have much to do.

The prophetic tasks of the church are to tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion and practices denial, and to express hope in a society that lives in despair.

Walter Brueggeman

FOOD FOR THE SOUL



The Peace of Christ - a work in progress (part one)

"May the peace and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you" is how St. Paul began his letters to churches in lockdown. I could not think of a better greeting. Also, I want to examine **"the peace of Christ."**

In the season of Christmas we may have heard Isaiah's word that the Messiah would be called the "Prince of Peace" and suggested that **peace was not only personal but political.** "Swords will be made into plough shares and spears into pruning hooks..." and on the road to peace, the valley's will be filled, and the hills lowered.

We have heard Jesus' birth stories in which angels announced "Peace on earth" to poor shepherds in Luke's gospel and a week later heard **the delightful story of Jesus being taken to the temple where he is met by old Simeon and even older Anna who has lived in the temple for 84 years.**

Notice the role reversal, which is part of peace. It is old Simeon, not Anna, who takes Jesus in his arms. He is so touched that he breaks into poetry that includes both Jews and Gentiles. Anna was married for 7 years and even if she was married at age 14, she would have been 105. She must have ached for at least 90 years to feel the warmth of a baby in her arms. But here is **Anna, running on fumes, but with new fire in her belly, rushing to the main part of the temple, interrupting prayers, telling surprised worshippers that Jerusalem will be liberated from Roman rule,** an announcement punishable by death.

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Simeon, with love in his arms, states that his life is complete, and he can now die in peace. Anna, even at arms length from Jesus, now has a new reason to live.



There is peace when one feels overwhelmed by love; when one feels connected to all people and, we would add, "to all creation." But putting your life on the line by telling oppressors that their days are numbered, is also an expression of the peace of Christ.

At the same time that this story was being read in our churches, **women's rights' activist Loujain al-Hathloul was being sentenced by the Saudi government to 6 years in prison for speaking out against their oppression of women.** It is the work of peace. Anna would be proud.

To be continued. . .

Peace. Glen Wright, co-editor

COMINGS AND GOINGS AROUND OXFORD...

CONGREGATIONS SEEKING MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP:

Each community of faith has a unique journey of faith as they live out God's mission. We especially hold those seeking ministerial leadership in our hearts and prayers as they discern their journey.

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



Tri-Regional UCW

ZOOM GATHERING for
UCW of 3 Regional Councils

(Antler River Watershed, Horseshoe Falls
and Western Ontario Waterways)

"A STEP TOWARD DIVERSITY"

Saturday, February 20, 2021

@ 10:00 am

Speaker – Worship –
Opportunity to Connect

Poster, details and link to follow!

SAVE THE DATE!



PRAYER CYCLES

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

PRAYER CHAIN



Please contact Prayer
Chain Leader [Olga McKellar](#)
for on-going prayer
concerns.

CHRISTMAS EVE –in SWEABURG.



A lasting memory for the
dozen hardy souls from the
community who rang their
bells along with the CHURCH
BELL.

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DUNDAS ST UC

What a beautiful morning to help our community! Jerry and Isabelle helped with Dundas St UC Cold Breakfast Program Saturday morning. The church offers breakfast bags on Saturday mornings for January and February to those in our community who could use a hand up. —feeling loved.



[Facebook page](#)

Programs for summer of 2021 are being considered. Former Staff can assist by filling out [this survey](#).

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.

What Happened to Christmas?

The true, unique story of Christianity has always been incarnation; the spiritual and the material nature of reality have always been one.

Incarnation did not begin when Jesus was born; apparently that was the time when humanity was finally ready to recognize it.

Matter and spirit have been one since "the beginning", since the big bang 13.7 billion years ago, more or less, since God manifest God's self in Creation.

WOW!

God is IN a newborn baby IN a feeding trough.

Once that soaks into my heart, mind and soul then I can begin to see – feel – recognize love truly everywhere.



New Year's Resolution for 2021:

Remember, recognize and risk for love everywhere.

Olga McKellar

'We Make the Road By Walking' (Brian McLaren) provides tools for community learning about our faith. These United Church Ministers have innovated a model of sermon collaboration.



Michael Shewberg
Director of Five Oaks & ministers to Richwood United
Jan 10th



Dawn Young Hill
South Cayuga Community Church, Dunnville, ON
Jan 24th



Maya Landell
Islington United, Toronto, ON
Feb 7th



Doug Peck
Chalmers & St. Andrew's United, Kintore & Brooksdale, ON
Jan 17th



Michelle Vos Roberts
Principal of Emmanuel College, Toronto, ON
Jan 31st



Sarah Grady
St. Paul's United, Paris, ON
Feb 14th



You can check out **the following preaching series on the Facebook pages of [Kintore and Brooksdale United](#), [Knox United Embro](#).**

In addition, there is a Book Study Wednesdays at 1:00 pm. To join, email [Doug Peck](#).

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ROBINS IN DECEMBER

In my daily walk down Springbank Ave at 4:00 pm, just as I approach the first Chieftain Apartment, I hear a Robin in full voice. It was a little unusual in November but on December 30th



he is still here. There may be good reasons why he is in Woodstock instead of Miami but I can't think of any, so here are some not so good reasons. If you have others, please write us.

1. He usually spends winters on the lower mainland of BC or in northern Texas. Last year on the way home from Texas he got blown off course. He thinks he is in BC.
2. He has heard that everyone (except politicians) is to stay home. He could probably slip out without Doug Ford knowing but because the border is closed, he may not get back.
3. If he did manage to get back, the 14-day quarantine would cramp his style in finding a mate.
4. He's the canary in the coal mine. His shrill prophetic voice is a warning that climate change is already upon us.

GW

**CONNECTIONS
has a website:**

oxfordunitedministries.ca



Hotlinks are:

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

The Winter 2021 newsletter **Helping in Unity** can be found [here](#) with stories from their expressive arts Writer's café and the organization.

Woodstock: Bullwinkle's Eatery and Hospitality Training Centre

At present at College Avenue United Church. Takeout lunches available on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays (from noon to 1 pm).

Oxford County: Food for Friends

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



A homeless shelter, serving all of Oxford County 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. Check out their [Facebook page](#) for the story of Joshua, their youngest (11 years old) meal prep volunteer.

FUNDRAISER for Inn out of the

COLD. Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY). Walk from The Inn to Walmart and back. Mark Saturday, February 20 on your calendars.



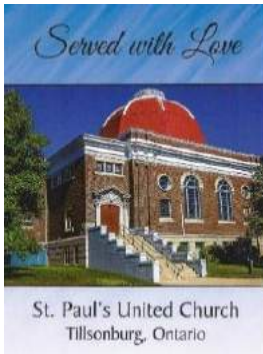
Two ways to donate: webpage [here](#) or mail Treasurer of Operation Sharing, P.O. Box 20081, Woodstock, Ontario, N4S 8X8.

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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.

OXFORD UNITED REFUGEE SUPPORT COMMITTEE (OURS)

Members of this committee continue to pray for and work toward the success of our efforts to co-sponsor seven people: six live as refugees in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and one lives in Khartoum, Sudan.

We continue to be concerned for their safety. If you haven't already done so, please consider signing the [change.org petition](https://www.change.org/p/stop-the-abduction-of-eritrean-refugees-in-ethiopia) – "A call for urgent intervention to stop the abduction of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia." Additional information is available in the [December 2020 issue of CONNECTIONS](#).

Our fundraising efforts continue. We wish to say thank you to all who heeded the call and sent in donations. We now need \$1660.07 to achieve our goal of \$8300.



Cheques should be made out to St David's United Church **with Refugee sponsorship in the memo line**. Send to:
St. David's United Church Treasurer,
190 Springbank Ave N
Woodstock, N4S7R1

As incoming Chairperson of OURS, I would like to take this opportunity to say a big thank you to Carol Ewing who diligently and enthusiastically filled this role soon after our inception in 2016 following the death of our first Chairperson Cheryl Gregory. Carol will be our secretary going forward. She makes a difference in the life of many refugees and we are grateful for her service.

We welcome Dana Wills of Chalmers United, Kintore as our newest member. **Membership is open to anyone who has an interest in the work of refugee sponsorship. Church affiliation is not a requirement.** If interested contact [Carol Ewing](#), or [me](#) for more information.

Our current membership:

Marie Avey, Norwich
Wendy Colcuc, Eastwood
Christen Currie, St. David's, Woodstock
Carol Ewing, St. David's, Woodstock
Karen Gresty, Dundas, Woodstock
Janice Landers
Cheryl Marshall, Westminster, Thamesford
Marj Martin, Trinity, Ingersoll
Dana Wills, Chalmers, Kintore
Glen Wright, St. David's, Woodstock

Submitted by [Marj Martin](#), Chairperson OURS Committee.

GRAND RIVER BOOK STORE



To order books call 519-442-3366 (1-888-668-0871) or email sales@grandriverbooks.com

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

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Six Little Messages

From a friend, Rev. Dr. Sheila Macgregor of Siloam U.C. London.

Once all the villagers decided to pray for rain. On the day of the prayer, all the people gathered, but only one boy came with an umbrella. **That is faith.**

When you throw babies in the air, they laugh because they know you will catch them. **That is trust.**

Every night as we go to bed without any assurance of being alive the next morning, but we still set the alarms to wake up. **That is hope.**

We plan big things for tomorrow in spite of zero knowledge of the future. **That is confidence.**

We see the world suffering, but still, we get married and have children. **That is love.**

On an old man's shirt was written, "I am not 80 years old; I am sweet 16 with 64 years of experience." **That is attitude.**

You can choose to live your life like these six stories.

Remember, good friends are the rare jewels of life, difficult to find and impossible to replace.

NEEDED!

STORY 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.

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.

Walker's Southwestern Landfill Proposal. The Joint Municipal Coordinating Committee (JMCC) is the voice of the municipalities most directly affected by the proposal. They have released their [Draft Peer Review Team Report](#) documenting **significant, important and multiple deficiencies in Walker's proposal.**

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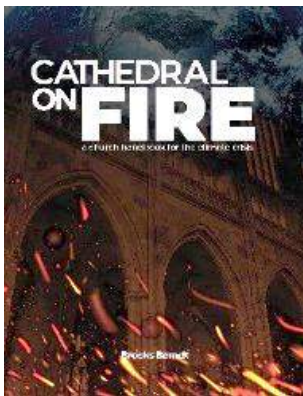
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Five Oaks programs inspire connection to Spirit; to Self; to Each Other; and to Nature, especially to this sacred space.

Take a look at their webpage or hospitality@fiveoaks.on.ca for current programs and possibilities.

STARTING JANUARY 26



BOOK STUDY—
Cathedral on Fire: A Church Handbook for the Climate Crisis, by Rev. Brooks Berndt (United Church of Christ)



Every Tuesday from January 26 to February 16, 10:00-11:30AM (4 sessions), via

Zoom

News of burning forests and rising temperatures raise concern for all of God's creation. **This short book study will help us discover the unique gifts we have to offer in the climate justice struggle.**

Starting with the Genesis story, the book explores:

- the importance of caring for God's creation as our first calling;
- a scriptural basis to pursue justice for both planet and people;

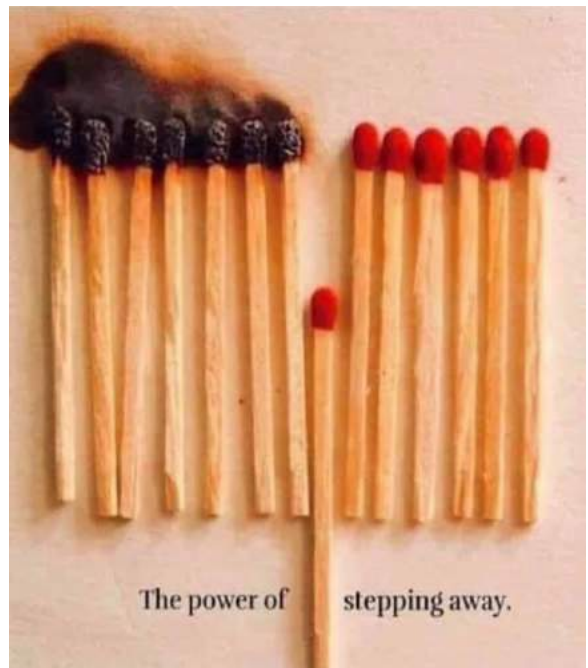
- a moral foundation of the climate crisis as an inequality crisis;
- our power source of love;
- lifting up hope in the history of the environmental justice movement;
- a rich tradition of theology in time of crisis; and
- a recognition of youth as the climate prophets of today.

(Click to read the [first chapter](#))

Facilitated by **Marg Murray** and **Carey Wagner**, retired clergy in the Antler River Social and Ecological Justice Network with backgrounds in environmental planning and the fossil fuel industry.

Register free by emailing Carey (cgwagne@sympatico.ca). **Space is limited to 15 participants, so register early.**

Cathedral on Fire will be available to order soon in print from the [United Church Bookstore](#) (\$11.80 + shipping).



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FOR THE LOVE OF CREATION

For anyone interested in being or becoming a climate justice leader in our church, **join the national conversation**

on Monday, January 18- 4:00-5:40 pm.

Discover the resources available and plan how to support each other in UCC communities of faith, networks, and regions, to take up these resources and build local initiatives for climate action.

[To register, click here:](#) Recording available.

Together, we can do it.

WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

Friday, March 5, 2021

The Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada has prepared several [resources](#) and options for World Day of Prayer 2021. This year, the host country is Vanuatu, a group of islands in the south Pacific east of Australia.



You can watch, as an individual or in groups, a **full-length service video** featuring participants from across Canada. The promo video is [here](#).

If there is interest, we could watch it here in Oxford through Zoom (details to follow in February) and donations can be arranged through your local church. If interested, please be in touch with [Marg Murray](#) to help co-ordinate this for all of Oxford through our February issue of CONNECTIONS.

SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL OF OXFORD [Registry Week](#) [\(homelessness survey\)](#) [Community Debrief](#)

Registry Week ~ RESULTS
SURVEY ACROSS OXFORD COUNTY

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In Oxford County, 93 individuals experiencing homelessness were surveyed

The results found:
55% of those surveyed entered homelessness within the last 9 months



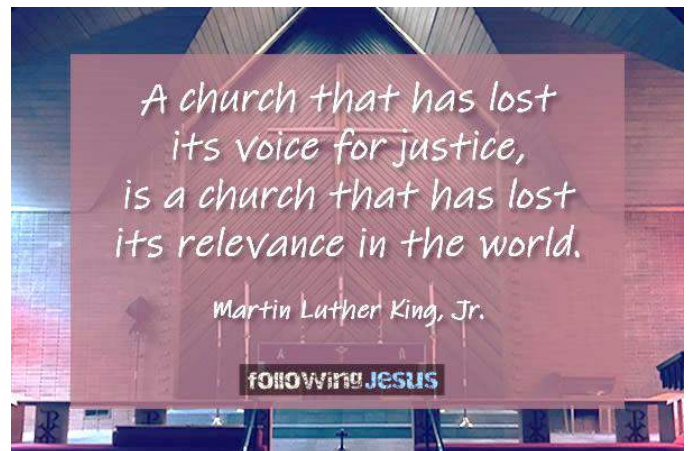
Oxford County



Social Planning Council Oxford
www.spcoxford.ca

#HousingOxford

The community debrief on December 3, 2020 presented the preliminary results from Oxford County's Registry Week (homelessness survey) done in late November 2021.



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FEBRUARY IS BLACK HISTORY MONTH

How Southern Ontario people treated people of colour.

The Chatham Coloured All-Stars



[The All-Star Baseball Champs You've Never Heard Of — North Americana Podcast](#)

The 1934 Chatham Coloured All-Star

Champions. Photo Credit: The Chatham Daily News

The North was our CANAAN Exploring Sandwich Town's Underground Railroad History

The secret system of codes used by freedom seekers and abolitionists in the clandestine network known as the **Underground Railroad**: Detroit was known as "Midnight" and Canada, on the other side of the Detroit River, was known as "Canaan." *The North Was Our Canaan* tells the rich story of Sandwich, Ontario (now part of the city of Windsor) (<https://collections.uwindsor.ca/omeka-s/nwoc/page/video>) and bears witness to those who sought freedom at the risk of capture to build community as well as bricks for their church in 1847.

These uniquely Canadian Resources were recommended by Professor Miriam Wright, of the History Department of the University of Windsor. Miriam is the daughter of Glen and Pat Wright.

An old friend is hurting.

I have an old friend who has been ignored by most of us for years – well not exactly ignored - but for sure not cherished. **She was present at all our celebrations, but in the background.** So mostly people didn't notice her beauty and grace; didn't cherish her unique healing powers. Eventually they were so busy celebrating – birthdays, anniversaries, or a deal they got at the shopping mall, that **they DID NOT notice how quickly she was changing.**

When strangers arrived in what to them was a strange land, she had welcomed them.

She'd opened her arms, provided food when they were hungry both from the land itself, and food from the creatures that lived on the land. She'd provided shelter from the rains and the snow. She'd provided the means to make clothes.

She'd given of herself generously and allowed folk to take her most precious gifts; EVEN the ones that couldn't be replenished. Some shared, taking only what they needed; others took much more in order to make themselves wealthy and then just threw the rest away.

My old friend gave even when it hurt and began to destroy her; even when it hurt and began to destroy others. Still, she continued to give and give and give. And we continued to take and take.

It is her nature to give, to nurture; to be a vital part of creation.

She was around when we placed the last nail in the trans-Canada railway.

SHE IS AROUND AS WE BATTLE COVID

But we took her for granted and didn't cherish her.

My old friend is Mother Earth, and like the LGBTQ2S, the Black Lives matter, and the oppressed children in Palestine, AND the poor who are homeless or about to be homeless because of climate change, she feels abused disrespected and grief.

For too long, we've ignored how she has provided for us. We have 10 years left. Every one of us – regardless of our sexual orientation, the colour of our skin, how we describe God/Mystery/Allah, our income level, our HOMELAND – WE ARE ALL needed. She is our livelihood.

We need all hands-on deck to work together to save her. Working together we can learn to cherish Mother Earth and to love one another.

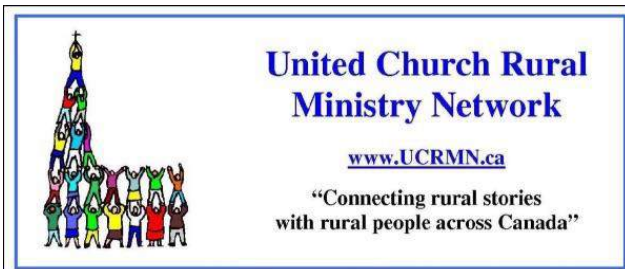
Marg Murray November 2020

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[The United Church Rural Ministry Network](#) has valuable information. Eric Skillings, formerly of Oxford County, has helped develop this.

Faith & Common Good has provided this important article, [the invisible infrastructure behind rural communities](#). Their report, [No Space for Community - The Value of Faith Buildings and the Effect of Their Loss in Ontario](#), highlights the important place faith buildings have in holding rural communities together

[Rural Connect](#) has been established to support rural congregations through the use of technology.



[ARWRC webpage](#)

[Facebook page](#)

Worship Services in Oxford

Because of Covid, streaming services only are available at present. Check the following re specifics:

[College Ave UC](#)

[Dundas St. UC](#)

[Hebron UC](#) - rsstock@execulink.com

[Kintore/Brooksedale UC](#)

[Knox UC, Embro](#)

[Mt Elgin UC](#)

[Norwich UC:](#)

[Peace UC, Plattsville](#) Also on Rogers TV channel 20

[St. David's UC, Woodstock](#)

[St. Paul's UC, Tillsonburg](#)

[Trinity United, Ingersoll](#)

[Westminster UC, Thamesford](#)

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SUBMISSIONS DUE:

Noon Friday February 5, 2021

CO-EDITORS:

Marg Murray and Glen Wright

To add or remove names, email

oxfconnections@execulink.com

Submissions and feedback welcome.

You may share widely.

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Past Issues for 2019 also stored:

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

Past Issues for 2020 also stored:

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