



ADVENT GRAPEVINE 2023

Minister's Meanderings

There is a time for every season under heaven. I think that many of us regret the blurring of the seasons. Important occasions need a time of careful preparation.

The church in its wisdom was very specific in dividing the year up into liturgical times using colours and often banners to remind us that we are about to revisit another significant event in Jesus' life.

We have always had C & E Christians who jump in for the two 'Big' ones, but there is so much more to be observed and appreciated in the Advent and Lenten preparations for Christmas and Easter. And the time in between!

We have the opportunity to prepare for Christmas because we have read the whole story in Matthew and Luke. The church then picked a date of December 25 to give Christians an alternative to celebrate during a pagan festival. The pagans gradually have claimed it back as we mutter away, "You do know that Jesus is the reason for the season." Yeah sure, but look out, Black Friday sales are on!

It's a dog's breakfast these days. I'm old enough to remember not putting up the tree until Christmas Eve, or close to it. A plastic holly wreath went on the front door. That was it. Sunday School kids did the nativity play. Pretty low key at our house. Mostly it was about Christmas dinner. Advent for me and my brother was pouring over the Sears catalogue trying to pick out the ONE thing that Santa might bring us.

Then I discovered that the Christmas story wasn't just in Matthew and Luke. It was in Galatians 4:4-5 too. Then all this other stuff wasn't nearly as important. "In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order that He might redeem those under the law that we might receive the adoption as sons."

God prepared. For centuries. It was the cosmic moment! "In the fullness of time" (NASB), "When the right time finally came." (Good News Bible), "But when the right time came. The time God decided on." (Living Bible).

He dropped a couple of hints in Isaiah 7, Behold a virgin will be with child and you shall call His Name Emmanuel which means 'God with us'. Generations later, the people who knew their prophetic scriptures knew that John the Baptist was the voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way."

As Christians, we believe that the incarnation (God putting on flesh) was the biggest deal in human history giving us adoption into God's family, forgiveness of sin and a hope of heaven. The church says, "Let's give it a season of four weeks of time and attention."

It's all about God fulfilling His Will for our salvation in His own unique Way in His own Time. Wendy and I are looking forward to enjoying this Christmas Season with you.

Blessings, Gordon

Upcoming Services & Events

Dec 3	9:30 am	Advent 1 - Communion Service
	7:00 pm	Combined Choir Carol Sing at Wesley United
Dec 6	2:30 pm	Lessons, Carols & Cookies
Dec 7	1:00 pm	Lookout Ridge Communion Service
Dec 9	2:00 pm	A Cappella Niagara Concert at Fonthill United - featuring Silver Lake Country
Dec 17	9:30 am	Advent 3 Worship Service - Musical Service
Dec 24	7:00 pm	Christmas Eve Service at Fenwick United
	9:00 pm	Candlelight Communion at Fonthill United (There will be no morning service.)
Dec 31	10:00 am	Joint Worship Service at Fenwick United
Jan 7/24	10:00 am	Joint Worship Service at Fonthill United

Toy Drive for Pelham Cares

Each year, Pelham Cares holds a drive to help provide toys for children at Christmas. If you would like to donate towards this drive, there is a drop box in the Fonthill Narthex where you can place your donation; monetary donations only please, no toys. Cheques may be made payable to Fonthill United Church. You can also send an e-transfer to fonthilu@vaxxine.com. The last day for donations will be Sunday December 3.

– Sponsored by the Fonthill Worship Committee

From the UCW

The UCW is back to monthly meetings. We have a couple of new ladies, but we are missing the ones who can't make it right now. On December 6 we are presenting "Lessons, Carols and Cookies" at 2:30 pm. Church members and community churches will be participating; come to sing Christmas carols, and listen to the choir and Bill Outred sing and play seasonal music.

Merry Christmas from the UCW.

Maxine McPhail, UCW President

Pastoral Care

As we approach the joyous season of Advent, our hearts and minds are tuned to those who are struggling with illness, bereavement or other life crisis. Often, we feel we cannot do much to help the situation. However, everyone is strengthened by prayer. Our group has been fortunate to welcome Wendy Crossfield as a pastoral visitor. Wendy has offered to start a prayer circle within our group. If you or anyone you know is experiencing difficulty, please give their names to Wendy, Rev Dr. Gordon Crossfield, or anyone on the pastoral care team. First names only are enough, confidentiality is a key component of pastoral care.

Sheila Laundry, Pastoral Care Committee Chair

From the Outreach Committee

Outreach can mean so many things. It can be reaching out to our own members and bringing them together, it can mean reaching out into the community to bring them together or to give help where it is needed. And it can be broader still to reach out into the world to give support, either financially or physically.

Our newest project, “**The Community Support Awareness Expo**” has been in the works for a year now. We have been working with members of the Pelham Community Church to put this together. It is taking place January 20, 2024 from 1:00 to 4:00 pm at the Fire Hall on Highway 20. What is it? It is a place to find helpful resources available right here in the Niagara Region. We will be serving tea and coffee donated by Tim Hortons and we will, once again, be asking members to donate cookies, etc. for this event.

We have been able to continue with the programs that were set in motion in previous years:

Bandshell and Contact Lists: We have obtained a contact list through our Bandshell contributions and hopefully will see some new faces in the Church.

Nightlight Niagara: We are still supporting Nightlight Niagara with personal hygiene products for new residents.

Petitions: We continue to put out new petitions for you to consider supporting.

The book club: This wonderful, friendly club will start up again in January under the guidance of Joan Wells.

Huntington Society: There were 47 amaryllis sold in our church to give support to this cause.

Harvest Kitchen: On average there are 80 meals prepared each month from November to March and given to people in need. ** Our Committee is only a small part of this. We spearhead projects but it is the members of the Church that make it work. We are so fortunate to have people like Judy Crysler and her grandson Aiden Stock to take over the organizing of the Harvest Dinners. With the donation of cookies, and muffins from the UCW we are able to continue to add to the apple sauce dessert.

This year we were able to support Hospice Niagara and The Huntington Society with a donation of \$1,500.00 each. These programs have had a personal effect on members of our Church Family. We, as a faith community, support those causes that are close to our Church Family. It is our way of showing our love for one another. It is a way for us to show we care about what happens in each other's lives.

Our committee is small in numbers but has achieved so much in the last year. We would welcome new members to help with the projects.

Many thanks to all our members and we wish you a safe and happy Christmas.

Submitted by Janet Hamilton, Chair

Update on the Kalachuk Family

This past April, the Kalachuk family arrived from Ukraine. Serhii and Olga came with their son Illarion and a baby on the way. Soon after they arrived, Theodor was born. The three Pelham United Churches helped them get settled by furnishing an apartment in St Catharines and providing the things every family needs. In June we rejoiced with them as Illarion and Theodor were baptized in Fenwick. We had all hoped they would make a life for themselves in Canada but that turned out to be much more difficult than they anticipated when they came.

Canada is known for its very high cost of living and that is what the Kalachuks experienced. While Serhii was working steadily, his salary did not cover the family's expenses. Sadly, they made the decision to move back to Europe and will be flying out on November 26 to be met by Olga's friend in Spain.

We are very sorry to see them go, but our wish for them is to be welcomed wherever they go, and that the war in Ukraine will end soon. We pray that they will know that wherever they go, God will be with them. The items that the churches donated will be given to the local Ukrainian Congress in St Catharines to support other Ukrainian families who come to Canada.

Strategic Plan Update

The Council completed a Strategic Plan Review in September with the intent to both measure our progress and adjust where required. We looked at whether our activities and actions were aligned with our stated values and key priorities, and determined good progress is being made.

Having said that, we acknowledge the plan is not perfect and progress is not being made in all areas. We have also known that some goals would be easier to achieve than others and some just take longer to see results.

The loss of our minister, Pastor Robert Lawson, in May created some significant challenges but we were blessed with support from three experienced ministers. Rev. Dr. Garry van Bruchem was the first to step in and help us through our transition, Rev. Kim Wright was next to step in and continues to help when needed, and Rev. Dr. Gordon Crossfield committed to be our supply minister until February 2024. We are talking with Gordon about extending the term and are hopeful he will stay with us while we determine our future. With the help and support of all three of these ministers, the work of the church has continued and progress toward our goals has remained our focus. All members of Council and the congregation also pulled together to ensure work towards achieving our mission and vision continues.

Our review determined Council felt confident our values of learning, service, caring, generosity, and community were quite evident in all we do. We felt we needed to focus more on diversity and that inspiration was more difficult to measure.

In terms of our five key priorities, Council felt there was evidence of very good progress. Our weakness is around diversity and confidence. We felt we still struggle having confidence in our ability to take on new initiatives.

Much work has been done toward achieving our financial goals, strengthening our community ties, and maximizing our building potential. There are many ongoing activities focused on these goals. There are two goals however, that we need to focus on more. They are: "To promote and foster a diverse and inclusive church culture" and "Drive progress toward environmental sustainability and social justice." We haven't given up on finding ways to achieve these goals; it will just take us more time. It is a three-year plan, and we cannot do everything all at once.

A major impact on our ability to work the Strategic Plan is discussions currently being held with Fenwick United Church around a potential amalgamation. This represents a major change and requires a great deal of time and effort. Further details are provided in the report from the Amalgamation Committee.

Members of our congregation should be proud of the work being done and in our collective resilience during all the changes and uncertainty. Everyone's contribution is valued and appreciated.

Lyn Taylor, Council Chair

From the Amalgamation Committee

As we told you all at our last meeting, we engaged a consultant to provide a recommendation on which building would be best to amalgamate into as a new congregation. We have received the report and it is currently being reviewed and analyzed.

We are happy to confirm that the committee is working well together and is committed to making a decision in the best interest of all parties.

We are not rushing this as it is a very important step for all of us.

As a committee, we decided that any decisions on recommendations to the congregations will be made by consensus. This could take a bit longer but we felt it is worth any extra time.

Your 2-Church Amalgamation Committee: Lyn Taylor, Sheila Laundry, Jim Bradley, Gail DeKoning, Janet Rutherford, Brian Walker, Ron Simmonds, Julie Looby

From the Board of Trustees

The Trustees have identified a need to update the inventory of the church for insurance purposes. As we prepared to do this, it became clear that storage within the church is both a challenge and a concern. In some cases, it represents potential fire and safety issues. So in October, the Trustees took a proposal to Church Council to update the inventory and at the same time systematically review storage in each area, room and space of the church.

We proposed to work collaboratively with the church committees, organizations and renters who use these areas, spaces and rooms. We proposed to work together to assess the area or room or space and to make decisions about storage such as:

What is being stored here?

What needs to be stored here?

When was the last time items were used?

Will they be used again?

Are there items that could be repurposed, donated, eliminated?

Could needed items be stored elsewhere?

Could this storage space be used differently?

Church Council has given us their support to proceed and a thorough clean-up is underway. As we proceed, some items might be relocated so if there is something you are looking for and can't find, don't hesitate to ask me about it. I will be happy to help.

Diane Rawsthorn, Trustees Chair

Snow Days

The snow is coming and if it comes late on a Saturday night, you may get up on Sunday wondering if there is to be a service at Fonthill United. The decision will be made by the minister, the Council Chair and the Worship Chair. The way to find out whether the service has been cancelled is to check your email. In the case of cancellation, an email will be sent to the congregation. We trust that those who do not have an email address will get a phone call. Notice of cancellation will also be posted on the Fonthill United Church website.

From the Finance Committee

It is hard to believe but here we are at the end of November and signs of Christmas are everywhere. It is a great time of the year as families start to plan for Christmas visits, wonder what gifts they may buy for or receive from others. Based on discussions with my grandson, expectations are high. It is also the time we realize how comfortable we are when we look at the number of homeless people across the country and the increased number using food banks.

In the recent stewardship letter we outlined in some detail the financial position of the church as of October 31. We are hoping the shortfall in the operating fund will come in around \$45,000 or well below the projected shortfall of \$55,000. A copy of the October statement is included in this Grapevine. We have started working on the budget for 2024 and will give an overview early in the New Year. We would ask that if you do review some additional gifts, for tax reasons, at year-end please consider Fonthill United Church. Most important, a sincere Thank You for your continued generosity over 2023.

All members of the Finance Committee extend our best wishes to you and your families for a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Jim Bradley, Chair, Finance and Property Committee

Year-End Contributions – Our books will remain open until Friday, January 5, 2024 to accept contributions for 2023. All cheques for 2023 donations must be dated before December 31, 2023.

NOTE: E-transfer donations must be electronically submitted by December 31, 2023.

OPERATING FUND STATEMENT - October 31, 2023			
		YTD Actual	YTD Budget
RECEIPTS			
	Operating Fund Givings	127,076.14	120,833
	Loose Offering	341.00	625
	Special Receipts	0.00	0
	Church Rentals	21,035.00	20,417
	Fundraising	0.00	5,000
	Interest Earned	5,108.88	5,260
	United Church Women	0.00	0
	Solar Panel Generation	8,385.93	7,850
	Miscellaneous Receipts	1,133.00	325
	United Church Grants	0.00	0
	TOTAL RECEIPTS	163,079.95	160,310
DISBURSEMENTS			
	Salaries & Benefits	118,005.06	127,401
	Contractual Labour	7,397.50	1,667
	Christian Education	165.00	417
	Worship & Membership	4,776.05	4,808
	Other Committees	0.00	187
	Outreach Fund Reserve	3,333.30	3,333
	Building & Property	51,059.48	48,058
	General Council Assessment	6,482.25	6,482
	M&S Fund Contribution	4,166.70	4,167
	Administration	5,567.24	7,163
	TOTAL DISBURSEMENTS	200,952.58	203,683
	SURPLUS / (DEFICIT)	-37,872.63	-43,373