



The United Church of Canada in Elgin and Portland
Our Churches United
 Advent News and Notes



**Elgin-Portland
 Pastoral Charge**

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Pastoral Charge

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Office Hours:

Wed.: 9 am-1 pm
 Thurs.: 9 am-3 pm

Sunday Services:

Portland – 9:15am
 Elgin – 11:05 am

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Rev. Takouhi's Reflection

Advent is the Season of Anticipation, Kenosis (emptying of the self), and Patience. We anticipate the birth of the One who changes the world and shows the Better Way. We empty ourselves, our egos, our own selfish desires, so that we make room for the Love of God to fill in the emptiness. It is a time of patiently awaiting for the child to arrive. We cannot rush the arrival, as every new life arrives in its own time and when time is fulfilled the most wonderful time of the year, Christmas, takes life. A time of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love becomes a possibility.

What do we do with the Hope that is born in our midst; With the Joy that bursts in our hearts; With the Peace that grounds us; and the Love that salves us? What do we do?

Every year we are reminded of the First Christmas, but somehow we forget the heart of the story. The heart of the First Christmas is Hope in Despair; Light in Darkness; Abundance in Scarcity; Fulfillment of Dreams, God's Dreams for us – for the world.

We are not too far off from searching for the exact same things. Despair, Darkness, Scarcity are still reality in our days; but God's Dream for us is a much bigger certainty that no one can fully understand.

I think we need to go back to Bethlehem and be witnesses of God's Hope being born in Humility. We need to journey back in time and remember the future. The future where the Good News has been tasted, lived, and endured the hardest times. Journeying back to Bethlehem requires Trust in our hearts and Obedience in our will so that we go humbly and greet the Prince of Peace.

Our gifts may not be gold, silver and myrrh but just broken hearts and willing souls – The ONLY gift that is expected, accepted and embraced by God.

Rev. Takouhi's Reflection (continued)

What are your plans for this Advent? Are you ready to empty the self to make room for Emmanuel, God with us? How different is this year going to be?

Join us on this journey of Anticipation and Kenosis; and let us go to Bethlehem together and discover the Hope, the Joy, the Peace and the Love of the First Christmas. Where we recover the lost Dreams of God for the World - may Blessings abound, at Christmas time and ALWAYS!

Words from Joan Delaney...

My, what a lovely summer and autumn we've had! The crops seemed to have flourished with the rain and warmth in balance.

The Elgin-Portland Pastoral Charge has flourished too, under the energetic, capable hands of our minister, Reverend Takouhi. There have been many events to interest our various groups, from Vacation Bible School for our younger ones, to Living the Questions for adults, to youth conferences. Concerts and community lunches brighten our days and evenings. Potluck meals and fundraising dinners foster fellowship with our wider community. Thanks go out to all the volunteers who have given their time and talents to expanding our experiences. More events are looking, and they will be as enjoyable as the previous ones.

Our pastoral charge is an example of a strong faith community, and I am very proud to be a part of it!

Blessings to all as we head into the Advent season.

V.I.B.E

Venturing in Biblical Education Living the Questions

Look for these boxes throughout this newsletter. You will see comments from participants about the V.I.B.E session just completed.

I found the study of "Living the Questions" most interesting, agreed with some parts and disagreed with others. For me, the bottom line is: we were made in God's image in that we should be loving, patient, caring, forgiving and respectful of others, and to live each day knowing that we are loved by our saviour, Jesus Christ.

I am looking forward to our next adventure, "The First Christmas."

Cheryl Stoddard, P.U.C.



Portland "Pealers" – The hand bell choir is thriving under the leadership of Joanne Lambert. We are developing a Christmas/Winter repertoire with hopes of perfecting it in time for our November participation in Westport's "Christmas in Westport" on November 30. This will be a new experience for us: we are playing our bells outside on The Cove's side porch. We hope you come along to see us "shiver and shake!"

We are also looking forward to participating in Portland's Christmas Concert on December 13. We've had a lot of fun and laughs. This is a super group of people, and if you are interested in seeing what is involved in ringing, come on out. We meet Thursdays from 6 to 7:15 p.m. at P.U.C.

V.I.B.E.

The Wednesday morning studies group at Elgin United Church, under the direction of Rev. Takouhi, focused on a chapter-by-chapter study of the book LIVING THE QUESTIONS, THE WISDOM OF PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY, by David M. Felten and Jeff Procter-Murphy.

First, may I say that this was an advanced theology study for people well-acquainted with the writings of the Bible. Through our weekly journey, we became better acquainted with the path of life as a Christian, and how the spirit can influence our daily lives. Each chapter was supported by a video presentation of various religious scholars on the subject being explored. It was most gratifying for me to move from a religion that asked God daily to do us favours to a religion that travelled unafraid with God into the mysterious future. What was so surprising, was the new freedom we felt in our lives as we came to know that we should live in the present and not waste our precious time lamenting the past or worrying about the future. The class concluded with us relishing the beauty of our surroundings, and the life around us, and delving deeper into the mystery of the everlasting.

Janice Brophy, Delta U.C.

South Crosby Public School Breakfast Program

The breakfast program at the local public school in Elgin is alive and well. We are serving between 40 and 50 kids every Tuesday morning. Thanks to all those who are volunteering to help these kids start their day off with a good breakfast of juice, cereal and milk. For those who would like to help, but cannot give their time, I am sure the school would accept donations. For information, contact the Principal, Mrs. Monique Hartley, at 359-5933.



This year's volunteers are: Cathy Ryan, Connie Ginder, Cheryl Stoddard, Jansje Keates, Karen Myers, Bert Petro, Went Sharpe, Anne Overdulse, Clint Halladay, Keith and Diane Haskins, Georgina Campbell, and Sandra Smith. A big THANK YOU to all!

V.I.B.E.

After having spent 21 Wednesdays watching the D.V.D. and reading the book, have I changed? Maybe? Probably? While the program is full of various theologians and Biblical scholars stating their views on various topics of the ministry and message of Jesus, I can definitely state I didn't always agree with them. When I did, of course, I could feel just a bit smug in that "I knew that!" When I didn't, rather than just toss out their ideas, it did open my mind to see how others see things often with their reasoning for their stance. Did it provide the definitive answers to all our questions? No. Living is Learning and Learning is Living. Study, introspection and open, welcoming discussion helps us along the way. If you think you know all the answers, maybe you are not facing the right questions.

Peggy Bond, P.U.C.

MUSINGS OF A MUDDLED MIND Clint Halladay

"What have they done to my church?"

It appears as a revolution, or perhaps more correctly stated an evolution is underway in our grand old, stoic, traditional United Church.

Aside from the Protestant Revolution starting it all, change in the United Church basically began in earnest not with Union in 1925, but much more recently, in the famous, or infamous, 1960's. (See October's "Observer.") Locally, our change journey has been more recent as the sun set on Rev. Harry's formal ministry, then Rev. Don, Rev. Rodney and now Rev. Takouhi, with Rev. David and Rev. Betty pinch-hitting between Calls. But change has not been limited to clergy. Change has included music, governance, a web site and everything in-between, plus furnaces, stained glass windows and even air conditioning at Portland. "My head hurts," you cry, "Enough is enough!"

The intent of all this is simple. Freshen up, modernize and make more relevant our worship experience. However, sometimes the intent and the end result become disengaged in the process; we don't always communicate the "change" or the "reason" very well. The old adage, "loose lips sink ships," is true, but so is the corollary, "secrecy begets anarchy." Communicate, people! And then do it again.

I embrace the fact that the United Church is an open forum of expression, although I must admit the sceptic in me questions the due attention to certain matters, governance being one. I am not convinced the "we of power" are truly interested in, or prepared to address, the tough issues. Yes, there is an enterprise-wide review, gathering thoughts from all congregations wishing to contribute, but what has been expressed, how were the representatives selected, and where did they get their information? To my knowledge, there were no nominations, or elections or surveys.

A recent issue of *The Observer* included several views on the future of the Church. All were interesting, some were refreshing, but most were less than enlightening. They reminded me of many leaders with whom I have been involved who subscribed to the theory, "we're alright, we've been through this before, and we've got time for things to right themselves." HELLO! If things are going poorly, not going well so far, they probably won't unless you make some changes. To quote Bob Knight, arguably the most notable coach in N.C.A.A. Basketball: "The will to win is not enough. What matters is the will to prepare to win." Simply put, gather the facts, do the homework. Preparation should always exceed execution.

Now I am not suggesting we have made a myriad of blunders, no am I inferring I have all the answers or knowledge of some master plan. I am saying that we, as a society, as a church, as individuals, have much coming at us today, tomorrow and down the road:

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Clint's Musings (continued)

pressures of environment, oppression, terrorism, finance, aging, healthy, and you can add your own to the ever-growing list.

The time for naval-gazing is long gone. Let us share strategies, strengths and beliefs to make this a better place for all. It is time we ask God, not to fix things, but to give us the courage to do that which we know in our hearts we should do.

I close, aptly I believe, with an excerpt from Marianne Williamson's famous poem... "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure..."

Other views are welcome.



Once a month our faithful contingent of sewers continues to meet to combine wonderful combinations of fabric designs for pillowcases for CHEO. The wee ones, and the not-so-wee ones, are never far from our minds as we cut, sew, press, sew on labels, fold and ready for delivery our 35 pillowcases. We have estimated the average cost of one pillowcase to be \$10, and therefore an average cost of \$350 per month for our venture. We are fortunate to receive help from some local organizations: the Legion and Lions Club of Westport and the Lions Club of Elgin. We sold 50/50 tickets for the Elgin Lioness Club at their spaghetti dinners, sharing time with two other quilting groups. However, the Lioness Club has discontinued their dinners, so that source of income has disappeared. We have been fortunate this year to receive \$500 from the Retired Teachers Organization of Leeds and Grenville. We are appreciative of the gifts we receive on the offering plate from our congregants. As we are supported by Portland United Church, any monetary gifts directed to Cases of Caring is appreciated.

Our members enjoy shopping for bargains and bringing our finds to each monthly work session, washed, pressed and ready for cutting. We know every source of fabric in the area and some metres come from far and wide as our travelers bring home their finds from far flung areas. The coffee and tea is always on, and someone brings goodies to add to the camaraderie of the third Wednesday of the month. We welcome new members and non-sewers are put to work choosing fabric combinations, pressing, adding labels and preparing for delivery.

We are encouraged in our endeavour by the notes we receive from the hospital, thanking us for our cases and expressing how excited the children are when they choose their pillowcase. We are especially moved when we receive a note from an appreciative parent, and more so when we receive one from a child. After receiving these notes, we return to our task knowing that we, at Portland United Church, are fulfilling our mandate of going out into the world.

Lynne Evans

V.I.B.E.

The Bible Study Series, "Living the Questions," trots out the fundamental questions that almost every Christian has raised in their minds, and brings to bear the thoughts, experience and wisdom of several prominent ministers and theologians in an informal video discussion environment. Each of the questions raised in the 21 sessions is treated with respect and in depth as a journey of exploration and discovery.

"Living the Questions" is about daring to question many of the long-held traditional concepts. It is a journey of critical thinking, coupled with an illuminating study of the scriptures through the lens of the culture and history of the Jewish people and the Disciples of Christ in the context of the Roman Empire in the time of Jesus. The result, in my mind, is a more consistent and less complicated view of the character of God and a better understanding of what He expects of me in practical terms today and the relationship He desires to have with all His children.

The study shows that the teaching of Christ are as relevant today as they were over 2000 years ago, and the role of the church is as important as ever in these times of rapid global change.

Our relationship with God should be the guiding influence in understanding the resolving the conflicts that confront us as individuals, as a community and as a nation in a rapidly evolving world. Our understanding of the person, the life and the role of Christ is fundamental to developing and enjoying the benefits of knowing God (peace, joy, compassion and justice.)

The time spend in study and discussion has been exciting, rewarding and has lasting value. I am looking forward to the next one, "The First Christmas – What the Gospels really teach about Jesus' birth."

Larry Cochran, P.U.C.

Leave a Legacy Month



November is a month of remembrance, reinforced every year on the 11th day of the 11th month. Remembrance Day sets the tone for all other memorials in which we honour the lives of those who have lived, served, loved and died.

Throughout history, women and men from all walks of life have used their strengths, gifts and sense of commitment to reach out in the hope of creating change. Their motivations are as varied as their stories:

- Perhaps to preserve the past
- Or to make the world a better place now
- Or to create a more just world in the future.

Whatever the reason, their gifts of time, talent and treasure have been given out of a strong desire for relationship. And this relationship has been made real in the lives that they have seen changed through their efforts.

Jesus wants us to build a world of strong, healthy relationship: healthy relationships with god, our families, our communities and the world around us.

A legacy gift, either to your congregation, the United Church of Canada or the United Church of Canada Foundation, is one way to build a strong, healthy relationship with future generations.

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Leave a Legacy Month (con't)

By establishing a bequest in your will, purchasing a United Church gift annuity or naming the Church as owner or beneficiary of a life insurance policy, you can partner with future generations.

In this month of November,

- Let us give thanks for those in the past who, unknown to us, have sought to have a relationship with us today; and
- Let us become the shoulders on which the next generation will stand.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Let me help you with creating your legacy gift that will reach out to future generations.



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V.I.B.E.

Reading the Bible often left me feeling unsettled and having many questions. I had taken part in a bible study years ago and was left thinking that I was the only one with these apprehensions, so I kept them quietly to myself, until last spring when Rev. Takouhi challenged us to V.I.B.E.: Venture In Biblical Education .

She offered to facilitate a course based on the book "Living the Questions". The title alone peaked my interest, so I signed up. Sure enough it opened up a whole new way of approaching and better understanding the Bible. Through DVDs we were introduced to many theologians, clergy, activists . They eloquently shared their views on a variety of topics based on the biblical text and brought them to our 21st century understanding. What became apparent was that they too have on-going questions.

Our large group consisted of men and women from several denominations across the region. We were encouraged to speak and question freely .The questions came alive. You could feel the "V.I.B.E"s.

Learning to read theologically rather than literally, was very enlightening. In addition we realised that God far exceeds our ability to comprehend, so there will always be questions. We can live with that.

It seems, many people, especially younger, avoid religion and attending church. They object to the biblical texts which no longer speak to them. In the group we experienced that the non-literal reading of the texts, leaving allowances for some questions to remain, can make the objections just melt away. Amazing, that when presented in an up-to-date way, after 2000 years, the true message of the Bible still profoundly affects us.

I shared the course book, "Living the Questions," with a few people around me and they too were intrigued and felt enlightened. I would be happy to lend it to you!

We continue to meet Wednesday mornings in Elgin and evenings in Portland and are now reading and discussing, "The First Christmas." Care to join us?

Anne Overdulve, E.U.C.



FUND-RAISING – PORTLAND UNITED CHURCH

Portland United Church has been alive with the sounds of music these past few months – some classical, some country, some Celtic.

And now we look forward to our Christmas concert on **Friday, December 13 at 7:00 p.m.** We will ring in the Christmas season with the Portland Pealers (Bell Choir) and enjoy the beautiful voices of Rasa Krokys, Janet McKeage and Dave Irwin, accompanied by Margaret Ross.

And just when you thought you had heard it all, we'll delight you with a January concert of our young musicians: Brian, Claire, Sarunas, Emilea, Chloe and others. Music is, indeed, the feather that touches our hearts.

Carolyn Long

V.I.B.E.

Late this past spring, Rev. Takouhi started talking about a program she wanted to introduce to Bible Study called "Living the Questions". This interested me since a literal Bible Study always stirred up more questions than answers for me. Having been brought up to not question what was written in the Bible, I tended to avoid such situations. This book, Living the Questions, and the accompanying DVD that we used as our study guide allowed us to question and were made comfortable about the fact that there is a lot about God, Jesus, life and death that we will never know for certain and that's OK. It's OK to admit, "I don't know." What we feel sure about is God loves each and every one of us, through good times and bad, no exceptions and the way we can serve Him is by following Jesus' teaching and love every one too. The way to peace is through love. Love your family, your neighbours, your friends, your enemies, those who worship differently, those whose sexual orientation is different, EVERYONE, and everything God has made. Jesus did not minister only to the officers of his Jewish religion, the wealthy, the powerful, he chose the sick, the disabled, the troubled, the untouchables, prostitutes, etc. and he was willing to die for what he knew God expected of him. This was, is his lesson for us.

The Bible is a wonderful resource. There are lots of lessons for us to learn from it but, it is not historically correct and was written by many different people many years after Jesus death. The stories were passed down from one generation to the next by word of mouth often embellished to speak to the customs and beliefs of the time; thus the questions. But that's OK, we can live with the questions while seeking answers as we continue our faith journey. Hebrew Scripture professor, Dr. Harrell Beck said, "The Bible is not the word of God – but the word of God is in the Bible. "

The 22 weeks went by with all of us in the group, and some were from other churches and other faiths eager to discuss the next chapter, our experiences and our questions. Thank you, Rev Takouhi, for giving us this opportunity. We are looking forward to the next session, "The First Christmas."

Sandra Smith, E.U.C.



THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

October 2013

Dear Friends,

A number of organizations have signed sponsorship agreements with the Government of Canada to help support refugees from abroad when they resettle in Canada. These organizations are known as sponsorship agreement holders (SAH). Most SAH are religious, ethnic, community or service organizations.

In 1979, The United Church of Canada signed its first Sponsorship Agreement with the Government of Canada. United Church congregations sponsor refugees under this agreement. These congregations working with the national church are known as constituent groups. Congregations may co-sponsor a refugee with a family, or a community group or an organization under the United Church of Canada's agreement.

For 34 years United Church congregations, supported by the United Church's Refugee Program, have sponsored thousands of refugees. This refugee program supports congregational involvement in sanctuary; statelessness support for temporary foreign workers; family reunification for immigrants and former refugees; and inland claims including asylum seekers and refusals.

When a refugee case is fully documented, the refugee program forwards the case to several congregations in hopes that one or more congregations can raise funds to sponsor the case. On average, it costs a congregation about \$11,800 in cash and in kind to support a refugee from overseas for a full year for shelter, food, clothing, transportation, furniture, household necessities and school costs. (Please see the Appendix B – Financial Guidelines to assist you in estimating the cost involved in sponsoring a refugee / refugee family for 12 months. The guideline also shows several factors that may reduce the amount of financial support that the sponsoring group must provide).

An additional 1,000 spaces that are over and above the original global cap of 1,300 spaces will be made available in 2014 to allow for the sponsorship of Syrian nationals located in Jordan or Lebanon. Please send us your expression of interest for the 1000 additional 2014 spaces by October 31, 2013 to Khwaka Kukubo (kkukubo@united-church.ca) or Melodie Mui (mmui@united-church.ca).

Make a difference in the world – an investment of time, energy and resources gives a refugee and a congregation new reason to live.

Sincerely,

Khwaka Kukubo, Refugee Program Advisor

(416) 231-7680 ext. 4068

The Professional Church Secretaries Association

Yes – there is an association for church secretaries and your church secretary is now a member. The association was formed in 1993 and is solely supported by membership and conference fees and is run by church secretaries. Their description of the church secretary is portrayed in the PCSA logo: “Secretaries are the hub of the wheel which has spokes radiating to all of the church.” Obviously, the degree of this varies from church to church depending on the size and the responsibilities. I certainly notice the difference between working 10 hours a week in a two-point charge compared to 20-25 hours a week for one church.



The association holds one conference a year and, thanks to the M&P Committee and the Official Board, I was able to attend this year’s gathering in Haliburton. Generally a group of secretaries in an area take on the responsibility of organizing the conference for two years in a row and then it moves to another area of Ontario. Topics chosen for workshops often reflect suggestions made at a previous conference and/or reflect present work situation problems or difficulties. This year’s topics included “Copyright and Your Church” (led by Rebekah Chevalier, Senior Editor in the United Church of Canada’s Communication Unit); “Grief in the Workplace” (led by Rev. Michelle Botherton, President of Bay of Quinte Conference); “Managing Stress” (led by a Health Promoter from the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit); and a PowerPoint Workshop/demonstration. However, as important and informative as the workshops were, it was great to net-work with the other 53 secretaries who attended this year, and hear about their situations, problems and solutions and realize again HOW LUCKY I AM. Most of the secretaries were from United Churches but there were a few Anglican and Presbyterian churches represented as well as one Free Methodist.

Registration was from 3-5 p.m. on Sunday, October 20 at the Bonnieview Inn in Haliburton. New members (I think there were 6 or 7 of us) were given a PCSA bag, mug, handbook as well as all the info that everyone received – including a couple of little wrapped chocolate treats. (To let you know how well we were fed, those treats were still in my bag when I left!) Following dinner there was a worship time followed by the AGM and a speaker. On Monday morning and early afternoon we had three workshops with the latter part of the afternoon spent seeing a bit of the area by school bus, a tourist souvenir shop and walking through the Haliburton Sculpture Forest – the rain managed to ease up for that. That evening we were entertained by a local singer/songwriter and sing-a-long (the weather not permitting a planned campfire). Tuesday morning was another workshop and then a “Brain Storming Time”. Announcements were also made regarding next year’s conference location and possible dates – the team organizing the 2014 event had come together during the conference. Lunch and goodbyes followed.

As I was could be near Bobcaygeon on my way to Haliburton, I got up before breakfast on the Sunday and made it to Rev. Rodney’s service at 10:30 a.m. and then was a guest at the Smith-Merkely’s for a quick lunch. Rev. Rodney says hello to all and sends his love. His secretary, Sue, sings in his church choir and was part of the team that organized the conference.

Thank you EPUC for a great two and a half days!

Norma Cummings

Elgin "Sharing and Caring" Team - Update.

Good News; we have a new name. We used to be called Pastoral Care Lay Visitation Program.

Unofficially I would like to take it a step further and think of us as the Buddy System.

Our aim is to have every church member/adherent connected with another. It is twice the fun to *share* good news and tougher times seem easier, when you have someone who *cares* to hear you out.

So: We made a list and paired up volunteers who, from time to time, simply chat, email, send a card, or phone the people on their list. In reality the volunteer visitors often find that they get as much out of the contacts as the visitees, hence my comparison to the buddy system.

As always, confidentiality is a priority.

Also, should we find a need for Rev. Takouhi to visit; we pass on that request.

Have we missed you? Or, would you enjoy occasionally chatting with a church friend?

Please let me include you.

With the winter season just ahead of us, let us make sure everyone has a warm connection!

Anne Overdulse, on behalf of the Elgin Caring and Sharing Committee.

annemiekeoverdulse@gmail.com 613-359-6078

PORTLAND SUNDAY SCHOOL

The Sunday School in Portland has been focusing on giving, both locally and abroad. As the Christmas season approaches, we are looking forward to once again contributing warm winter socks and mittens to the clients of the Food Bank to be included in the Christmas hampers. We will be collecting these items until December 8th, and invite you to bring in your donations (particularly of adult socks and mittens) and lay them with our Sock and Mitten tree at the front of the sanctuary. We will also be distributing Advent Coin Jars, in hopes that you will join with us as we collect our spare change over the Advent season to share with the Dental Issues Group (DIG). Finally, we are looking forward to making some purchases from the "Gifts with Vision" catalogue with the funds you have helped us raise over the past year. Some of the planned purchases include a contribution towards the On-Campus Christian activities at the University of Victoria, funding school supplies for students in Haiti, providing food and vitamin supplements for a child in the Philippines, and purchasing a female goat for an Agricultural School in Zimbabwe. Thank you so much for supporting us in our efforts, and helping to make these gifts possible.

On December 8th, we plan to take part in the worship service and share the Christmas story with you. We hope you will join us for a soup and sandwich luncheon following the service as we celebrate and prepare our hearts for the Christmas season. The Sunday School will supply the soup, and we ask those who are able to bring sandwiches or dessert. Please join us whether or not you are able to bring food - there is always enough to share!

Pauline French and Team

