



The United Church of Canada in Elgin and Portland  
**Our Churches United**

Advent News and Notes

November, 2020



## Reflections from our Council Chairs...

**Clinton Halladay, Elgin United: Musings of a Muddled Mind**

### A COVID CHRISTMAS

I am beginning this short narrative with two reflections inspired by one of my favourite ghost writers: the word "*liminal*" and the thought, "*a journey begins with an upheaval no one understands that upsets the status quo*". No one can dispute the facts that our COVID -19 experience is certainly a liminal or transitional one that we do not fully understand and has also turned the status quo on its head.

Christmas is soon upon us. In our faith we prepare our hearts to honour the birth of Jesus by marking four Sundays of Advent, beginning this year November 29<sup>th</sup>. Our Christmas celebrations in 2020 will be vastly different than most of us have ever experienced. Many church buildings will stand empty and silent this season, and where there are worship services, they will be severely reduced. Family gatherings will certainly not be normal, and many will be marred by illness or the loss of a loved one. Economic and mental stress are other factors that necessitate our transition to new and unfamiliar practices and routines as we go about our daily lives.

Although the catalyst is profoundly different, is not our current situation like that first Christmas some 2,000+ years ago? Did not the birth of Jesus, the son of God, mark a transitional time in the world and begin a journey that no one, or at best very few, truly understood? His birth signalled God's message that the status quo was neither acceptable nor viable, but also the assurance that through His grace, there was a better way. Jesus' birth, adolescence, teaching and crucifixion created an upheaval that instilled the tenets of Christian fellowship and the doctrine of love for all our neighbours throughout the world.

Perhaps, in the throes of our current "crisis", we should not dwell on what we perceive as having been lost and instead embrace the opportunities that lie ahead. As scripture says, "*For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you'*". (Isaiah 41:13) and (Isaiah 43: 5,18,20) "*Have no fear, for I am with you. Cease to dwell on days gone by, for here and now I will do a new thing. I will make a way even through the wilderness, and paths in the barren desert. Arise and follow, people of God!*"

**Wishing you a Merry and Blessed Christmas**

**Hansen Downer, Portland United Church**

As we approach this Christmas season, let's pause and reflect back on 2020 – a year of enormous change all around the world. Who would have thought on February 29<sup>th</sup> that we would soon be facing the deadliest pandemic in the world since the Spanish flu? Who would have guessed that Rev. Takouhi would be leaving us at the end of October after 8 tremendous years at the Elgin - Portland Pastoral Charge? Who would have imagined that we would have 20 people in church wearing masks and socially distancing while watching video recordings of church services? On February 29<sup>th</sup>, we didn't even know what "social distancing" meant. Fortunately, things are looking up for 2021 as new COVID-19 vaccines are close to availability and hopefully by next year at this time we will all be vaccinated and feeling much safer.

During these troubled times, we need to step back and thank God for being with us and helping keep our congregation and community safe and COVID free. We need to thank each other for wearing masks and socially distancing to help limit the spread of the virus in our communities. We are all very fortunate to have our freedom and democracy in such a wonderful country as Canada. More specifically, we should thank God for allowing us to live in such a friendly, safe, and beautiful area of Canada. Let us also pause to reflect on the church and community members that we have lost in the past 12 months. The Portland United Church Council lost our long time Chairman of the Property Committee when Doug Bond passed away this year and we express our deepest sympathies to Doug's family – we can all thank Doug for the tremendous job he did keeping our church in tip top shape over the years.

Let's not forget how fortunate we are to be safe and free as we celebrate the birth of Jesus on December 25 and thank God for sending His only Son. In the midst of all the gift giving, let's remember to thank the Lord for all of our blessings. We have all seen the explosion of COVID-19 cases since Thanksgiving, so please celebrate this holiday season safely.

**Merry Christmas to everyone from the Portland United Church Council**

**By the numbers: Portland United Church**

As we approach Christmas and the New Year a large **Thank-you and God Bless You** is due to the supporters of Portland United Church. Although donations and fundraising for the General Operating Fund are down, expense cuts and government support has helped to offset the shortfall.

Generosity toward the Food Bank and the Benevolent Fund, in particular, has helped focus efforts to support the local Community through this trying time.

The Church commitment to support the broader world needs continues through many avenues including the UCC Mission and Service, El Salvador education and supporting a foster child in need.

Once again **Thank-you** for making what could have been a very tough situation palatable and positioning us to continue on to a more normal time in 2021.

**THE RIDEAU SEWERS**.....include two groups that meet regularly at PUC to sew pillowcases for CHEO and lap quilts for our two local hospitals.

Although we only met once in 2020, the women have been sewing from home, completing **27** lap quilts to date plus many pillowcases.

When necessary (and following all COVID guidelines), quilt kits, backing, batting or fabric for either project can be picked up from the church. 100% of monies donated through PUC go towards replenishing these supplies. Your support is appreciated! ...and if you need more information, contact Jane at 613 272-2524.



### Are you in need of Pastoral Care?

Liz Church has enthusiastically taken on the vital role of Pastoral Care representative for the Elgin-Portland Pastoral Charge. We welcome Liz to the role, and appreciate the wealth of experience she brings with her.

If you are in need of Pastoral Care on a *non-urgent* basis, we ask that you contact Annette in the church office on Wednesdays or Thursdays (613-272-2002 or [office@eppc-ucc.com](mailto:office@eppc-ucc.com)). She will ensure your request is forwarded to Liz.

If your need is **urgent**, please contact Liz directly at: 902-441-5367.



### Join us as we celebrate the Season of Advent and Christmas Eve

**Portland U.C.:** Rev. Kathy Walton will lead Advent Services at 9:15 on Sunday mornings during Advent. All COVID protocols are observed. Please be prepared to wear your masks and social distance. You will be asked for your contact information as you enter the church. Please use the door off the parking lot.

Christmas Eve Services are offered at 4 p.m. and 7 p.m., and we again welcome Rev. Kathy Walton as our spiritual leader. Advanced registrations (on a first-come, first-served basis) will be required for Christmas Eve; please e-mail Hansen Downer at [hansen.downer@gmail.com](mailto:hansen.downer@gmail.com) to reserve your seat.

**Elgin U.C.:** Rev. Kathy Walton will lead Advent Services at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday mornings throughout the Advent Season. All COVID protocols will be observed. Advanced registrations are required for each service; please contact Clint Halladay at [clint.sharon@halladay.ca](mailto:clint.sharon@halladay.ca). *N.B. Christmas Eve services will not be offered in Elgin, however you are welcome reserve a spot in Portland at a service time convenient for you.*



**Please remember our local Food Banks, not only throughout the Build a Mountain of Food initiative during the Advent Season, but through the whole year. We thank you for your support!**



*2020 has not been the year most of us hoped for, with a pandemic taking over our lives and cancelling almost everything. Maybe Christmas will save the year with its abundance of trinkets and lights, feasts and cheerfulness, which can all be enjoyed in the comfort of your own home. ...and, if any Christmas and New Year's events do manage to happen in the 2020 festive season, we are bound to appreciate them even more.*

*We can all agree on one thing – COME ON 2021! As we say goodbye to 2020 and ring in 2021, I pray this finds you happy, healthy, and fulfilled.*

*Annette Clarke*