
WESLEY SAINT ANDREWS
UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA
SAINT ANDREWS, NEW BRUNSWICK
COMMUNITY OF FAITH PROFILE

LIVING FAITH STORY

A. SUMMARY

Wesley United Church is located in the seaside resort town of Saint Andrews in New Brunswick. We are a small, single point community of faith that is happy to be in co-operative ministry with Saint James, a neighbouring UCC community of faith, and with whom we share a fulltime minister. The Wesley congregation is well described by our Expression of Values:

“We are a liberal, inclusive community of Christian faith, drawing on the wisdom of sacred texts, stories of our heritage and other spiritual resources. We are a thinking church, open to learning from science, and our relationship with Nature. We are a hospitable church, offering a welcoming space for all, generously sharing material, cultural and spiritual nourishment. We are a compassionate community, embodying Divine love in our care for each other and the wider world.”

We see our mission as “Reaching out to each other and our community, we seek to strengthen our Christian faith and nurture an environment of respect, peace, hope and love”.

The following pages include our Living Faith Story, organized around the “Pastoral Relations: Guidelines for a Community of Faith Profile December 2019” provided by the United Church of Canada. It has been informed through meetings with several outreach groups associated with Wesley, and various church groups, including twice with both the whole congregation and the Official Board. It is sprinkled with quotes from those who attended a Living Faith Story workshop after worship on 02 February, 2020.

“It is a place where I can count on people of similar values, who welcome inclusivity, and social justice, where I don’t have to leave my brain at the door, and where my gifts are honoured.”

B. ADMINISTRATION

The administration of Wesley Saint Andrews is intended to support our mission as expressed in the above statement.

Governance: We are a single point charge, using a Church Board structure in which the responsibilities of Elders and Stewards are combined and called the Official Board. At the annual meeting, the congregation elects Board members with term limits. The Board meets monthly, except for July, August, and December, and handles all matters pertaining to the spiritual and temporal life of the congregation. The following committees report to the Board: Worship, United Church Women, Trustees, Ministry and Personnel, Treasurer and Region Representatives. Board meetings are opened with a reading of “Holy Manners”, and the proceedings are usually accompanied by much laughter and positive conversation. Votes are generally unanimous.

Administrative Support: For 2020, about four hours a week of paid administrative support to the Board and the Minister was approved in the budget. The primary tasks of the paid support are related to the bulletin, the newsletter and the website. That means that significant administrative support will continue to be provided by volunteers.

Communications: Communication to the congregation is achieved with announcements by the Minister and the Board on Sunday morning. A “Co-operator” newsletter is emailed weekly to both congregations (Wesley and St James), as well as to the interested wider community. We are always learning how best to use social media, and currently use Facebook and our website to reach out.

Financial Position: Our financial position is reviewed monthly, and an in-depth summary is shared by the Treasurer with the Board several times a year. Any concerns are dealt with promptly at the Board level. During the past several years we have had an operating deficit which has been covered by drawing on capital generously provided by a bequest. Some of this capital has been re-invested in our church building, renovating the sanctuary, reducing our carbon footprint, and improving accessibility. In 2020, there remains sufficient capital to ensure financial stability for several years. However, we are in need of a concerted stewardship effort to ensure sustainability for the long term.

Buildings: We love our beautiful heritage building, especially since the recent renovations. The congregation considered it poor stewardship to use this beautiful space for only one hour or so each week, and so we continue to offer a hosting ministry to the wider community. The new ramp and wheelchair accessible bathroom are improvements that have long been desired. Removing the pews to create flexible seating with chairs has allowed more varied programming in the sanctuary, such as workshops, drumming circles, and use of the new meditative labyrinth. Improvements to the heating system and insulation have made the building more comfortable in the winter months, while also minimizing the impact on the environment.

“The beauty from the encompassing colour or aura around the stage is not only beautiful but calming. The stained glass windows are brilliant. You feel like arms are wrapped around you. They leave you feeling at peace.”

There is also a manse available in a nearby residential area, and it is currently undergoing renovation and updating. It is a bungalow style home built in 1978. The roof was re-shingled in

2019, and repainting of the interior, a bathroom renovation and a new heating system will be completed in 2020.

Congregational Strength: Our biggest strength is our people. We are compassionate, collaborative, communicative and courageous: The caring of Wesley folks fills this church with warmth. We know each other's joys and concerns, providing opportunities to bring these forward during Sunday worship. Even when there is disagreement in the group, those voices are heard with love and care. At the same time, we do not allow our vision to be stifled by one or two who are unhappy with a decision. This takes a delicate combination of courage and compassion. Board and committee meetings are very collaborative, largely free of power struggles and negativity. This congregation is communicative, not only within the fellowship of members and adherents, but also to the wider community. Town-wide mail-outs, local television and a revamped website are some of the ways we reach out to the town and region. And we are a group that is willing to take risks, to be courageous with our money, our dreams and our time.

C. Community Outreach and Social Justice

Wesley is engaged in the wider community in a variety of ways. We host various groups in our building, and we work to help those beyond our building. For others, we sometimes provide financial assistance. In 2019, some of such groups included

- the annual summer programs of the Saint Andrews Arts Council,
- the St Andrews Open Door (our local food bank),
- a Moms and Tots program connected with the provincial Family Resource Centre,
- Highland dancing classes, fitness classes, yoga, etc.
- support to the residents at Passamaquoddy Lodge, the local nursing home
- support of the breakfast program at the local elementary school – Coins for Kids
- assistance to Transition House, the nearby women's shelter located in St Stephen
- World Vision
- The Mission and Service Fund

This work is the implementation of our mission. It is what we do. Our congregation is unlikely to reject any social justice initiative which complies with our expression of values.

"The giving nature that extends to the wider community is inspiring."

Although several in our congregation are supportive of the Mission and Service Fund, there are definitely opportunities to raise awareness about the work of the wider United Church.

In 2019, Wesley organised and hosted an evening to discuss climate change, focusing not just on opportunities for action, but on the emotional and spiritual needs that arise.

Wesley has an "Affirming Process Committee" and is actively working toward full membership in Affirm United. In 2019 the focus was on revising our Marriage Policy, which was achieved after wide consultation and congregational support.

The wider community is aware that we are the only progressive church in the local area, and they know of our values. Community activists look to Wesley for support in social justice issues. In the past several months, a handful of new people have started to come out on Sunday. Is that because

the renovation of the sanctuary attracted much local attention, because our Minister has reached out to those on the margins of traditional Christianity, because our rainbow flag was noticed, or because our action in the wider community has been appreciated?

D. DENOMINATION AND COMMUNITIES

Other courts: As part of Fundy Saint Lawrence Dawning Waters Region, Wesley enjoys access to all the congregational support available at the regional and General Council courts. We have a regional representative and an alternate, and we have supported the work done by our minister at the regional level. Previously, Wesley people have been very active at presbytery and conference, and several have attended General Council.

Leadership Training: Wesley continues to provide support for a student minister studying through the Atlantic School of Theology.

"Thanks so much for your ongoing support of my journey in hopeful ordination. The love and support from the community Wesley continues to be my foundation, and for affirming and nurturing my call."

Lay Leadership: Wesley is a small congregation, but we are blessed with strong lay leadership. Some have worked with other courts of the United Church. Others have trained to lead local worship services. Several excel at pastoral care, both around the congregation and at the local nursing home. Still others provide leadership in social justice activities, such as working at the St Andrews Open Door (food bank) or welcoming refugees. Although the Wesley congregation is small, its presence is widely felt in the community.

Community Leadership: We are the only voice of progressive Christianity in our small town, and we believe that our communal decisions express our values to the wider community. We express inclusion by flying a rainbow flag and a commitment to the health of the environment by increasing the building's energy efficiency. We wish to ensure that our choices and actions reflect an authentic faith community that is consistent with the theology we express.

Through our varied programming and services, we welcome people at very different places on their spiritual journey, including Quakers, Anglicans, Unitarians, Roman Catholics and spiritual seekers. Many of our people do not live in Saint Andrews, and are willing to drive from their local communities to experience Wesley. Also, most of us are not originally local, and have moved to the area for work or retirement.

Our minister and our lay leaders are well connected with other local community leaders. Similarly, we expect our minister to maintain connections with clergy in the area, both with neighbouring United Church communities as well as those from other denominations (ministerial).

Co-operative Ministry: Wesley is partnered with the neighbouring Saint James community of faith. This relationship was initiated several years ago due to common financial concerns, and we were all thrilled when our minister agreed to the change in pastoral relationship. Wesley oversees the financial side of this partnership with a 75/25 split. The two communities are very distinct; Wesley United offering a small town feel and St James offering a very rural ministry. The two communities operate quite independently, and come together only a couple of times a year. However, there is frequent communication at the Board level, and there is joint

representation on the sole Ministry and Personnel Committee. The partnership has been very successful, and the communities are grateful and respectful of each other, with no contentious issues.

Minister's Role in Leadership: The congregation at Wesley includes several faithful, well-educated leaders, who want a minister who is collaborative rather than authoritarian. We welcome the minister's role as the formal connection to the United Church as required in the Manual. We also welcome the arm's length aspect of the relationship, whereby the Minister can provide a more objective view-point as to who we are and what we're doing. However, on a day to day basis we expect a shared ministry whereby the Minister comes to the Board and/or the congregation with new ideas and initiatives that are aligned with our values and mission.

E. FAITH FORMATION AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Saint Andrews is a small community with an abundance of newly arrived retirees, a shortage of young families, and several choices for worship. As the only progressive Christian church in town, Wesley has an opportunity to minister to those in the community who are curious about their spirituality but nervous about some of the more conservative expressions of our faith.

"My faith is renewed here."

A major goal of the renovation of the sanctuary in 2019 was to make it more comfortable and welcoming to courageous newcomers. This included adding an accessible ramp before the entrance, more glass at the doors, a washroom near the entrance, a kitchenette, and replacing the fixed pews with more comfortable movable seating. The result has been a much more comfortable and flexible space, more suited to hospitality, small groups and fellowship.

In recent years, there have been no children attending church, so there has been no Sunday School.

Our minister takes a lead role in reaching out to all who may be curious about our faith community. This may entail hanging out at the local coffee shop, or attending local social justice events, but mostly being available for quiet, inquisitive conversation.

Mid-Week Groups: It is clear that many in the wider community have an on-going desire to deepen their faith and support each other in the faith/spiritual journey, and there is usually at least one study group running mid-week in the fall and winter months. These are organized by the minister, with help from others and are of varying themes. Interaction and sharing in a welcoming, safe, non-judgemental setting has forged strong connections. People have found opportunities for shared and personal faith-based meditation, contemplation, deep sharing and celebration, and this has resulted in an expanded sense of community. Examples include Solstice celebrations and a study group on women mystics (with Mirabai Starr's book entitled "Wild Mercy"). These groups have encouraged a relationship with some who self-identify as being spiritual rather than religious.

Labyrinth: As part of the recent renovation of the Sanctuary, Wesley installed a labyrinth on the sanctuary floor, and offers it to the community as an opportunity for reflection and meditation. A "Friends of the Labyrinth" Committee oversees its care and operation, and looks for ways to encourage the wider community to explore this tool for spiritual growth. In 2019, it was accessible during tourist season and frequented by locals & others from surrounding

areas from spring through fall. A Quaker group made a donation to the church in return for a few days of reflective opportunity including use of the labyrinth; a Religious Studies class from St. Stephen's University's also made a scheduled visit.

Theological Diversity: Like many churches, we have both those who make spiritual growth a priority and those who emphasize the need for more action in the community. While a breadth of theological positions can be found among our members, there are few who would self-identify as conservative Christians. We live with respect and tolerance of our differences, and although it has sometimes been challenging and costly, we are open to struggling with difficult questions.

Faith Formation: In recent years, Wesley has offered opportunities to develop and share faith in a safe and intimate forum in contemplative formats. There may be opportunities to encourage others in the community to explore faith development.

Leadership: Wesley is blessed with several strong, lay leaders. Many of these are recent retirees who have moved to the community, and are well-educated and energetic. Although most also volunteer at other community organizations, Wesley is a safe place for them to offer their gifts and to receive spiritual and social sustenance.

Among the congregation are a few retired clergy (United, Anglican and Unitarian) and several Licensed Lay Worship leaders.

The congregation operates like a family, with power and control being well shared. There appears to be little "politics", with meetings usually full of laughter and broad support for our various projects. Board members have fun at their meetings.

"People share power easily, welcome others quickly, work with a strong sense of purpose and commitment and interact with joy and compassion."

Nevertheless, in recent years there have been areas of conflict (such as with the marriage policy and the removal of pews), but these have been resolved with compassion and time. In both cases there were delays in moving "forward", but eventually a consensus was achieved with the naysayers graciously accepting of change.

As a result, the role required of the Minister is often to generate new ideas and initiatives, and to facilitate their execution. We look to the minister for a more objective viewpoint, that comes from their education and experience beyond our small town. We also expect the minister to develop a more comprehensive and compassionate understanding of who we are, with opinions nuanced by the knowledge of confidentialities of which the general congregation is unaware. Part of the role of the minister is to remind lay leaders to listen to those voices that are not at the table, such that both a wider consensus might be developed on an issue, and that the confidence and leadership skills of others may be honoured.

F. PASTORAL CARE

There are several aspects of pastoral care being done at Wesley. While, there is no organised pastoral care system, members try to be aware of each other's situations and try to help in times of stress. Of course, sometimes the minister alone knows of the difficult times being faced, and provides pastoral care discretely.

The minister also provides pastoral care to the congregation when it faces challenging decisions, or when there are conflicts within committees, often simply by being present at a meeting and offering a pastoral word. Similarly our minister provides pastoral care to those on the margins of the congregation, when requested, either in homes or at the office. We encourage some regular office hours so that people needing to talk know when the minister will be available.

More visible pastoral care occurs out in the community, including frequent visits and communion services at the local nursing home. The wider community knows that our minister can often be found available for deep one-on-one conversation at our local coffee shop.

Volunteers provide pastoral care on an ongoing basis. Visits to the sick and shut-in, and visits to the nursing home are conducted quietly by a handful of kind people.

G. SELF-CARE

The congregation at Wesley includes many hard working volunteers that are always at risk of burning out. To avoid that, we try to share the load, by bringing new people into the Board and its committees, and by exchanging responsibilities from time to time. There are terms limits on the Board, and these are enforced.

Fellowship is a very important aspect of Wesley. This includes frequent after worship social times at the local coffee-shop, and occasional after-worship coffee times in the sanctuary. All are welcome and there always seems to be food available. The congregation does a lot of cooking.

There is a small, but dedicated UCW unit that continues to work hard to support the congregation and the wider community. A local outreach program initiated several years by the UCW is called "Coins for Kids", and it helps fund a breakfast program at the local elementary school.

"Our church is like a family. We care about one another. We pray together, work together, laugh together, help each other and sometimes we cry together."

There are many opportunities for spiritual renewal throughout the year, and in the past year we enjoyed:

- A celebration of Mary Oliver's work
- A contemplative gathering on Saint Patrick's Day that turned into a Celtic celebration of the start of the labyrinth construction.
- A spring equinox gathering included a walk out on the wharf followed by fellowship in the hall. An autumn equinox gathering was held at Indian Point, led by members of the local indigenous community. Both the summer and winter solstices are also celebrated.
- The wider spiritual community also appreciates an annual celebration of All Saints Day.
- An introduction to soul collage was held in the summer of 2019.

- Throughout the fall and winter (2019/2020) a large study group has focused on Mirabai Starr's book "Wild Mercy, Living the Fierce and Tender Wisdom of the Women Mystics".
- Drumming circles are a popular event at Wesley, being arranged every few months and well attended.

Most of these gatherings were originally led by the minister, but several are now led by some who do not attend Sunday worship. We are aware that there is a growing demand in the community for such expressions, and we believe that we now have a wonderful facility to enable them. For example, the new labyrinth offers opportunities for quiet, structured meditation for both individuals and groups, and we are just learning how best to use this beautiful asset.

"I've made wonderful friendships, learned new ways of thinking, and deepened my faith journey."

H. WORSHIP

Worship is centered on the Sunday morning service, the timing of which varies seasonally due to our co-operative ministry with Saint James Community of Faith. Members and adherents regularly participate in the services; reading, welcoming, sharing joys and concerns, and helping out where needed. The service is led by the minister, and follows a conventional liturgy with a few changes:

- Readings may be from the Bible, from other sacred texts, or perhaps some relevant poetry. Although King James is rarely used, some do cringe at the more modern paraphrases.
- Music is important, and "More Voices" often complements "Voices United", with hymns chosen by the Minister according to the theme of the service. Recently our Music Director retired, but the choir of about eight continues to provide excellent music leadership, often including an anthem. The organ has been retired in favour of a baby grand piano.
- The sermon is about twenty minutes, with the theme chosen and delivered by the minister. The congregation enjoys a sermon that is intelligent and topical. The sermon often includes a thought-provoking point, inviting deeper emotional reflection, or it may challenge us, perhaps causing some needed discomfort. We have not experimented with any opportunities for response or dialogue.
- Prayers can be voiced by the minister alone or by all, and time is often included for silent reflection, perhaps remembering individuals who may be struggling.
- There is always an opportunity to share joys and concern.

"I really appreciate that there are no jarring theologies, messages or language... (rather, there are) healing messages."

With 180 members on the roll and approximately 100 families under pastoral care, on an average Sunday, about thirty persons attend. Most of these are white, active, senior women. While our church family has some diversity, attendance by the young, the middle-aged and men has declined. The sanctuary is full for the Christmas Eve service and special musical services.

Few of our people were born in Saint Andrews, and many have moved to the area on retirement, happy to have found a somewhat rural community, and a welcoming church home. An unusual aspect of our demographic is the number of "summer people" who attend from late spring to early autumn, when they are in residence here. Because of this, and because of our current links to the St

Andrew's Art Council's summer music program, Wesley is more active than are many churches in summer.

Generally, the congregation is liberal, but we are sensitive to concerns of those who hold less progressive views. Introducing alternate forms of worship could be considered, but there would be concern about alienating the more conservative among us. As the most liberal church in town, our open and inclusive community has drawn persons from other denominations and faiths.

"I gather here for both comforting rituals of my lifelong faith journey with the UCC, as well as for spiritual sustenance. My faith is renewed here."

Wesley's worship services use limited technology. Although we recently installed a new sound system, there are still struggles to ensure everyone can hear. The architecture in the sanctuary does not lend itself easily to projected images, although the congregation would probably be open to such an idea.

Stewardship is not a strength of Wesley's. There is not an active Finance or Stewardship Committee. In recent years we may have relied too much on a few generous givers and bequests, and our plate offerings have not kept pace with expenses. We do respond well to specific appeals, particularly if it is for something local. In recent years we have cut back on our traditional fundraising events, perhaps because of flagging energy, or perhaps because of other major projects. Nevertheless the congregation still supports three or four such events each year, particularly those that include fellowship and community bonding. Often the events are in support of the UCW. It has been some time since we have had an organised stewardship program. We do not do a "Minute for Mission", however "Stewardship Seconds", that are provided by the UCC, are included in the bulletin. Our Treasurer provides financial information, and while we often talk about needing money, we rarely talk about increasing offerings.

I. WESLEY AND SAINT ANDREWS

Wesley United Church is located in the town of St. Andrews by-the-Sea in southwestern New Brunswick. The town is on a peninsula at the mouth of the St. Croix River. A cluster of islands shelter the picturesque Passamaquoddy Bay from the Bay of Fundy, creating the best climate east of Victoria!

The congregation formed as part of a separate Methodist circuit in 1830. The first chapel, built in 1831, remained in use until the present church building was dedicated on May 26, 1867. The church building is located in the middle of town, on a residential street only a block from downtown.

The town of St. Stephen, where there are both convenient shopping and border crossings into the United States, is only a twenty-minute drive. The amenities of city life can be found after an hour's drive to Saint John, or after ninety minutes to Fredericton.

The Passamaquoddy area was originally home of the indigenous Passamaquoddy people. When Champlain and des Monts established their settlement in the St. Croix River in 1604, it was the first European settlement north of Florida. However, it wasn't until the end of the American Revolution that British loyalists established the Town of St. Andrews. Eventually, the arrival of the Canadian

Pacific Railroad and the Algonquin Hotel started a vibrant tourism industry that continues to dominate the town's economy.

The residents of St. Andrews are proud of their Loyalist heritage, and the town continues to reflect those values. Although the permanent population remains relatively homogenous, the amenities and lifestyle of St. Andrews attract many retirees, and newcomers from all backgrounds are welcomed.

There are about three thousand permanent residents in the Town and its adjacent rural communities of Chamcook and Bayside. This number doubles with the influx of summer residents, many of whom have been coming to the area for many years.

The tree-lined streets of the town are laid out in a traditional grid pattern. Several historic buildings lend character to the community. Above the town, the castle-like structure of the Algonquin Resort dominates the landscape.

The residents of St. Andrews have ready access to many of the services they need. A nearby RCMP detachment, a local fire department and ambulance service all provide safety and security. Health services include a local dentist and doctor, physiotherapists, and a pharmacy. Horizon Health Network provides full medical services at the Saint John Regional Hospital, and also offers clinics for various specialists at Charlotte County Hospital located in St. Stephen. Other local amenities include insurance and legal services, various churches, a chartered bank and a grocery store. Complementary commercial and professional services can be found in St. Stephen, Saint John and Fredericton.

There is a strong culture of volunteerism in Saint Andrews, particularly among the senior population. This includes several community groups that serve the less fortunate in the area, environmental action groups, and various cultural organizations that provide arts and entertainment to the delight of residents and visitors alike.

St. Andrews is a major tourist destination in Atlantic Canada. Many of our residents provide services to these visitors through a variety of restaurants, motels, and shops. The seaside location also fosters employment related to whale-watching. After tourism, the aquaculture and construction industries are the largest employers in the private sector. The research done at the St Andrews Biological Station, the Huntsman Marine Science Centre and the Atlantic Salmon Federation bring many scientists to the town. This factor, combined with the number of other professionals who retire here, makes St. Andrews a very well educated community.

There are two schools within the town: Vincent Massey Elementary School and Sir James Dunn Academy. Both have fine academic programs and extra-curricular activities. A French Immersion program is offered in St. Stephen, and many St. Andrews students are bussed there daily. The local campus of the New Brunswick Community College offers courses in hospitality, tourism, fisheries, marine trades and technology. Children's daycare is provided at the Passamaquoddy Children's Centre and as well as several private homes. After-school programs and special needs programming are available.

St. Andrews is a charming residential community. The downtown is filled with unique shops and several restaurants, from cafes to fine dining establishments. Salmon tenders and lobster boats work from the town wharf, and the harbour provides safe mooring for both private boats and whale

watching boats. Golfers enjoy the master's class course owned by the Algonquin Resort. There are many opportunities for water sports, such as kayaking and sailing. Many residents enjoy walking around "the Point" for daily exercise and excellent views of the Bay. Other cultural and entertainment options include a library, museums, hiking trails, a large hockey and curling arena, tennis courts, a marine aquarium and a theatre for performing arts. There are many special interest groups, such as a gardening club, Spindrifters (for persons over fifty years of age), bridge clubs, a film society and book clubs. Sunbury Shores is a non-profit community organization that offers a wide variety of art and nature programs for adults and for children. Kingsbrae Gardens and Minister's Island are major summer attractions.

Many children's activities are available. Organized sports for all ages include pickleball, basketball, volleyball, soccer, and tennis. The WC O'Neill Arena is a popular place for speed skating, hockey and curling. Other community organizations, providing recreational and cultural programming, include the Ross Memorial Library, Sunbury Shores, the St Andrews Community Players and the St. Andrews Arts Council. St. Andrews has a Youth Centre, which provides programs for youth. The Scouting movements, yoga classes, highland dance classes and fitness classes are also active locally.

St. Andrews is similar to most rural communities. Employment prospects are limited and many jobs are seasonal. Young people tend to move away for post-secondary education and better jobs. The community is aging and requires increased social and medical services.

For the many people in St. Andrews, the quality of life can be quite high, and we are proud that St. Andrews is ranked as one of the best towns in Canada. However, there are also many area residents who suffer from various social and health issues associated with unemployment and poverty. Despite the notable class structure in the town, community is highly valued. This is a town where there is little anonymity, and where one will always find a helping hand. More about the town can be found at www.townofstandrews.ca.