



ROOTED IN FAITH GROWING IN LEADERSHIP

A Collection of Stories from the
Bermuda Nova Scotia Region

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Better Together

We Are Better Together.
Dwindling congregations.
Large buildings. High Maintenance.
Strong in spirit. Faithful to community.
A sense of hope that will not die.
Grieving the loss of what was,
yet looking ahead to a new future
That is nothing like the past.
We are better together.
Nurturing relationships between old friends
Making connections with friends yet to be.
Rooted in faith, growing in leadership
God calls us to renew ourselves and our life's purpose
a story yet untold, one where everyone belongs.
Disrupting the narrative of decline and despair,
we adapt, we risk, and choose to
join forces together with our friends
creating a new faith community
whose vision is still unfolding
to serve God's people.
Right here. Right now.
God is on the move.
We are a people of hope. The future is bright.
We are better together.

- Angela MacLean

Introduction:

Welcome to this collection of stories gathered for our regional meeting, centred around the theme "Rooted in Faith, Growing in Leadership." In preparation for our gathering, I reached out to members across our region, asking them to share personal experiences that reflect this theme. The response was remarkable, with over 20 heartfelt stories pouring in from different corners of our region. These stories are inspiring testimonies that showcase the abundant love of God being shared throughout our communities.

I was deeply moved and inspired by these submissions, and I felt compelled to share them so that everyone could feel the spirit of growth and connection within our region. Although only a few were needed for the worship service, I believed that each story deserved recognition. I have compiled them here for you to read, be inspired by, and share within your own communities.

These stories illustrate the incredible leadership potential emerging across our region, rooted in unwavering faith. I hope you find them as enriching and empowering as I did. Let's celebrate the growth and spirit of leadership flourishing among us.

-Mary Taylor



Youth Group's Journey of Service

A youth group from Sydney, led by a dedicated student, gets involved with a nearby food bank, sparking a wave of community service projects both within and beyond the church.

This happened in Sydney, on the beloved Isle of Cape Breton. I led a youth group deeply involved in worship, often dramatizing Scriptures. Two high school students, experienced in drama, led the group. One student, thrilled with our worship contributions, felt compelled to extend our activities beyond the church. After dramatizing the story of the feeding of the five thousand, she asked about the Loaves and Fishes food bank downtown, where I served on the board. She wanted to see it for herself. Excitedly, she and a few others from the youth group visited the food bank, smiling, serving, and chatting with clients. Inspired, the entire youth group started incorporating Scripture performances into our services. This student then motivated other youth groups to join us. Later, she organized a food bank at her school, encouraging many non-churchgoers to participate. They did. I couldn't hold her back. The joy of serving was etched on her face from then on.

-Doug Pilsworth

Loaves and Fishes



Sydney, Nova Scotia

Rest, Reflect, Restore in Spirit Glen

Spirit Glen, born from the vision of Pictou United Church gardeners, offers a serene sanctuary for all, fostering community and reflection amidst nature's beauty and tranquility.

In 2016, a group of five Pictou United Church gardeners wondered how their church lawn could benefit the community. This led to the transformation of a well-manicured lawn into a contemplative garden, eventually named "Spirit Glen." The congregation warmly embraced the idea, contributing suggestions like a performance space, resulting in the creation of an elegant gazebo for worship services and concerts.

With entrance signs inviting visitors to "rest, reflect, restore," Spirit Glen offers various amenities, including a sandstone finger labyrinth, a water feature made of local grindstones, a Little Free Library, benches, a Ponderings Door, and a Garden Journal. The garden's atmosphere is broadly spiritual, appealing to all.

Thanks to grants and donations, including those from Embracing the Spirit's Innovation and Growth Grants, Spirit Glen was made accessible with a brushed concrete pathway, handrails, and benches. Even a fallen black walnut tree was repurposed into a live edge bench.

Now, Spirit Glen invites everyone to celebrate creation through sensory experiences like touching textured foliage, listening to nature's sounds, tasting fruits, admiring art, and smelling herbs and flowers. Located at the corner of James and Faulkland Streets, Spirit Glen is open to all, all year round.



-Spirit Glen Gardeners

United in Faith: A Story of Collaboration and Renewal

Two neighbouring churches in Halifax, Fairview United Church and Rockingham United Church, combine their resources to create a new faith community, embracing change amidst a transforming neighbourhood with hope and courage for the future.

This is the recent story of two neighbouring churches: Fairview United Church and Rockingham United Church in Halifax, NS. For many years, these two communities of faith have been nurturing their relationship with one another by sharing summer services, alternating Ash Wed and Maundy Thursday services each year, book studies, as well as joint outreach projects. They also shared the load of pandemic pressure by offering regular joint online services during lockdown. These two communities of faith are old friends who care for each other. Recently, they began to wonder: what if they combined resources and talents to create something greater?

Geographically, both of these communities serve the people of Fairview, Rockingham, and Clayton Park. Fairview is changing rapidly, with new developments along Dutch Village Road to accommodate growth, but underlying this is unaffordable rent and increased food insecurity. At the same time, with the current state of our aging communities and the high costs associated with maintaining a large, aging building, it has been evident for some time that change is necessary. The decision to work toward the creation of a new faith community was officially made in November 2023 by both churches. This new chapter of their story together is marked by both a profound sense of loss and an equally profound sense of hope and courage. The difficult but faithful decision of the people of Fairview United to sell their building will allow for a renewed and revitalized United Church ministry presence across these three neighborhoods in Halifax.

Each community brings its own strengths to the table and must let go of what no longer serves them to make room for the new.

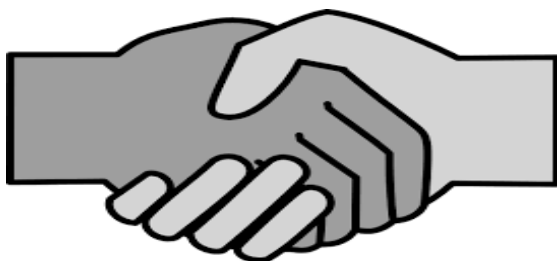
Is there uncertainty? Yes. But when we do not know what is next, we enter the world of infinite potential. We're currently in a space of infinite potential, dreaming and seeking visions of greater things to come. Like a baby being nurtured in their mother's womb, we are nurturing the amazing potential of a new community of faith in the womb of love, co-operation, generosity, and respect. Working together with God, we will serve a new generation of God's people. That is something to celebrate!

As of January 7, 2024, both faith communities have continued their tradition of shared services at Rockingham United Church as the amalgamation process unfolds and a new name for the community is established. There are plans to renovate the church at 12 Flamingo Drive blending the best of both communities into a welcoming, warm atmosphere where all feel welcomed and have a sense of belonging. This story is still unfolding and there is much work to do but there is a new energy in our faith community: one that is joyful and hopeful for what is coming next.

Rooted in our faith and growing in our leadership, one thing we know on this journey is we are better and stronger together than we could ever be apart.

*For the ones who dream of greater things -
step, and the path will appear. -Brianna Weist*

- Angela MacLean



Rooted in Faith: Rooted in Community

Discover the journey of Beacon Community Garden, from a humble suggestion to a thriving hub of community engagement, providing free plots, nourishing meals, and environmental stewardship in Yarmouth.

By the time I arrived in Yarmouth almost 11 years ago, the story of Beacon Community Garden had already begun. It started when a local resident and retired farmer suggested the empty lot beside the church could be put to better use. That year it was planted with potatoes, which were sold to church members. The following year, the decision was made to build a few raised beds for people to use. When I arrived here in 2013, there were between twenty and thirty 4-foot by 8-foot raised beds.

Today, there is a central cross-shaped flower bed, 2 designated bee gardens that attract pollinating bees, and 169 individual plots for the use of anyone in the community. Plots are offered free of charge to anyone who wants one, but people are encouraged to make a donation to help cover the costs if they are able.

Produce from the garden is used by the individual gardeners, used in the preparation of Beacon United Church's monthly community meals, and even sold in the local Farmer's Market as a fundraiser. We also have a "Free Produce" table just outside the garden where gardeners are encouraged to place extra produce that they are unable to use themselves.

Over the past few years, we have begun holding a Fall Market where gardeners sell donated produce, jams, jellies, pickles, baked goods, and other garden-related produce to help raise money for the garden.

One major project we have been working on for the past years is a water mitigation project. The hope is to divert rainwater from the roof of the church for use in the garden, thus offsetting runoff and flooding as well as decreasing the cost of using municipal water at the expense of the church. We have also built

a “Water Garden” which helps absorb runoff from the garden itself and prevents excess water from flooding into the town storm drains.

This project not only grows produce for those who take part it also builds community and cooperation far beyond the walls of our church.

- Sharon Lohnes



**COMMUNITY
GARDEN**

Wilma's Journey: From Shyness to Service

Wilma, once a shy church attendee, embarks on a transformative journey from reluctance to leadership, ultimately becoming a registered nurse dedicated to serving others.

On the North Highlands Pastoral Charge in northern Cape Breton, a shy young lady named Wilma Buchanan started attending church. Despite numerous invitations, she declined to participate in worship activities. Each year, I urged her to join the Youth Forum at Conference, but she always refused. Wilma had never left Bay St. Lawrence and was hesitant to travel to Sydney. After persistent persuasion, she finally agreed to attend the Youth Forum. During the 7-hour trip to Sackville, Wilma remained silent, her hands tightly clenched. Despite my attempts to reassure her, she remained apprehensive. Upon arriving at the Conference, there was a hiccup with her room key, but eventually, she settled in. Throughout the event, Wilma was surrounded by friends, laughing and engaging. When it was time to leave, it took considerable effort to pry her away from her newfound friends. On the drive home, even before I started the car, she insisted on wearing her seatbelt, joking that she might "float away" if she didn't. At a stop before the Causeway, fellow Conference attendees teased her about giving a speech at church, to which she jokingly responded that I had better let her. Upon returning home, Wilma enrolled in a CPA course, became an Elder, started a youth group, and became the youngest Clerk of Session on the Charge. Excitedly, she shared her plans to join a program that sent health professionals on a tramp steamer to South America to provide assistance and share the teachings of the Bible. Today, Wilma is happily married and working as a registered nurse in New Brunswick, serving others—a true gift from God.

- Doug Pilsworth.

Rooted in Faith: Branching out to Community.

Beacon United Church in Yarmouth initiated free monthly community meals in 2017, fostering bonds of friendship and trust while providing essential nourishment to 150-250 people monthly.

Here at Beacon United Church in Yarmouth, we often hold non-traditional services during the summer. In 2017, one of these services included a discussion of the needs of the community beyond our church building. One of the greatest needs identified was food security.

As the discussion progressed, the question became, “What are we, as a church, being called to do about this?” The answer seemed obvious. Feed them. But the question then became, “how”? The decision was made to take a bold risk and begin offering free monthly community meals for anyone who wanted to come.

Several things happened. We were amazed that donations towards this project soon covered the costs of the meals and more. This allowed us to continue to provide meals but it also helped to update our kitchen to make it more efficient. Secondly, this became a real connection between Beacon and the community. We got to know people that, under different circumstances, we would likely not encounter. Bonds of friendship and trust were built up in unexpected ways.

At that first meal in September of 2017, we served approximately 40 people. Today, our regular monthly meals routinely feed between 150 and 250 people from all social and economic groups. This is only possible because of the huge roster of volunteers both from the church and from the community who are committed to seeing this continue.

-Sharon Lohnes

An Advent Walk

Reflecting on a cherished Advent walk in Glace Bay, the story recounts musical performances and a debut liturgical dance, symbolizing the theme of "Waiting" and the growth of those mentored in ministry.

Twenty years is a long time, but in consideration of which story to tell, I remember this one like it just happened last week. The memory fills us with pride as we think about the kind of people we ministered among. My husband, the Rev. David MacLean and I always tried to foster leadership and embrace new ideas in our volunteer lives and in our various roles in the church. We completed the Supervision in Ministry course and collectively supervised 6 ministry candidates in the United Church.

That year, to celebrate the beginning of Advent, the ecumenical community in Glace Bay planned an "Advent walk." About 150 people gathered at St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church on the beautiful crisp afternoon in December. We made brief stops for worship at the Salvation Army Citadel, the Baptist Church, the Anglican Church and ending at Knox United Church.

The theme of "Waiting" was woven into the gathering and evident at each stop along the way. That year, Knox was a learning site for a student minister. Heather McClurg Murphy, who now serves the Storrington Pastoral charge in Ontario, offered her musical talents as she accompanied herself on guitar and sang "She Walked in the Summer". We were very emotional as one of our young people, Catherine Barkhouse, (now Rev. Catherine Stuart) offered liturgical dance, for the very first time, during that service. Catherine was loved and encouraged along her faith journey by many people, but we remember her at this beginning as she danced down the aisle of that stately old sanctuary.

In a season which prepares as it waits for a birth, this event brought depth, meaning and community connection to all who participated. We remain proud and supportive of the many who have been a part of our own faith journey as we watch them lead and in turn encourage others.

- Catherine MacLean



Call to Ministry: An Inspired Journey

Florence Antle-Brisson reflects on her journey from childhood dreams of missionary work to embracing a life in ministry, inspired by Rev. David White's guidance and influence, as shared through a high school essay excerpt.

Greetings, please find attached parts of my high school essay that I had saved in a scrapbook. At one point in the essay, I wrote “happened was strange, for very seldom would he speak of school or my future.” However, when I was in grade five, we were standing around the oil stove in our school, talking about what we wanted to be when we grew up. I remembered a dream that I had months before. So, I said, I was going to be a missionary. It was Rev. David White, a few years later, who interpreted my childhood dream. He told me that I didn’t have to go overseas to be a missionary. My dream was a Call to Ministry. He informed me, that, at that time, there had been ten women, ordained by the United Church across Canada. In December 2007, I used that dream, as an introduction for my advent article in the Outlook:

..... My hair trailed in the wind, as cool breezes gently brushed past my face. I lifted my head and gazed at the snow-blazed trail hurling ahead of us. Dressed in my Sunday’s best, feet positioned sideways on the runners, hands gripping the tall horns on the catamaran, while the four large huskies frolicked behind the lead dog, we glided across the Arctic tundra. My only thought was to hold fast to the Bible tucked under my arm and held in place by my elbow that hugged my left rib cage....

.....Entering the open door, my stomach churned as I viewed the large hunk of raw, red mahogany-colored seal meat, lying on the ledge that protruded from the side of the one-room dwelling. Moving to the far end of the ledge, I laid down the only possession that I carried, my Bible. I eyed the surroundings.... (end of the dream)

Somewhere I read the First Nations people use the expression “leaving your bones.” It means being there, being fully present for others, and making a difference. While I have had many dreams over the years, yet as a child of nine or ten years of age, with this dream of going off into the unknown carrying only a Bible, I was willing to “leave my bones”. No longer would I say a doctor, a teacher, a ballet dancer, or a step-dancer on “Don Messer's Jubilee, when asked, what I wanted to be when I grew up! My answer became, “a missionary”.

Matthew 13:1-9 – “Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

My Most Unforgettable Character

A character, a friend, I shall never forget is the Reverend David White. I will always remember Dave, as he so often addressed himself, for his ability to express reality, to understand people and to adjust himself to different age groups. The most important reason for me remembering him

is for his influence on me. Not everyone can come from a young generation into the older generation, as for Rev. Dave, he could. When a kid was around, he did the things to interest them. In church part of the service was dedicated to them. He would ask the children to come up to the front and there he would talk with them. For this part of the service, he was a child as they were. Before or after church, he would meet with the teenagers. For this hour, he was one of us. My aunt, an elderly, sick woman, told me that when he visited her, he was like an elderly minister, not the young guy as I knew him. No matter, what the situation or problem was, Dave had a solution. He was the most understanding person I ever met. He seemed to understand the ways of all people. Whenever, I needed help, whether it was with homework or with the generation gap, he was the one to which I would turn. I can't ever remember asking him anything and not

getting a reply. He was filled with answers on everything, from the most serious crime to religion.

Rev. Dave is responsible for my interest today. When I was in grades seven and eight, I cared no more for school than school cared for me. In grade nine, I thankfully came under his influence. Whenever we met, he spoke on topics that made me look a little closer at my actions. For the first time in my life, I really listened and understood what people were saying to me. Before this for some unknown reason when people spoke to me, I pretendedly listened and heeded little. He made me understand what school was for and what a good future would mean. How this happened was strange, for very seldom would he speak of school or my future. However, our conversations set me thinking as I had never done before. Did Rev. Dave set out to make a change in me? Chances are he didn't because when we first met, he didn't know me, and before you got to really know me, I was a changed person. After a few of our teenage group meetings with him, I was changed in an indescribable way.

(The last paragraph of my high school essay reads.)

Now, I love school and I am looking forward to a life in the ministry, doing the things God wants me to do. No matter what good comes my way now Rev. David White will get the recognition.

-Florence Antle-Brison

Watching a Congregation Awaken to Possibilities

Through strategic changes like replacing pews with chairs, Stairs Memorial United Church fostered community connection and adaptability in worship, exemplifying their journey of revitalization.

As an Intentional Interim Minister, my ministry is rewarding, challenging, focused and time-sensitive. While I was at Stairs Memorial United Church, after a series of gatherings, they settled on three goals:

Connect to the Community & Outreach
Faith-Based Programs
Make Better Use of the Building

The following is just one example of how unstuck they became: At about the two-year mark of my ministry with them, the Governing Body made the decision to remove 6 pews on either side of the centre aisle and replace them with very comfortable chairs. This was instrumental in creating community with a reduced attendance post-Covid. We used Memorial Fund money to purchase them and Transition Team and Governing body took the lead on a campaign to dedicate a chair in memory or celebration of someone. These chairs are set up in curved rows, and almost everyone sits in them so that even with only 40 people in worship, they are all together and not scattered throughout a large sanctuary. The choir and keyboard were moved to the floor from the chancel, and when I was there, I preached from the floor, so we were all together. We moved the chairs around occasionally to accommodate different styles of worship, café style etc.

-Catherine MacDonald

Family, Faith, Food, and Fun

Successfully engaging young families, fostering community and increasing Sunday attendance through midweek gatherings featuring kid-friendly meals, teachings, and crafts.

This is a story from the past but an initiative that was very successful at the time. When I started at a new PC, there were no young families in the small congregation, so I started a midweek program called "Family, Faith, Food, and Fun". I called a few young families in the community, explained the program, asked them to invite their friends (not necessarily UC), and at least give it a try. I recruited congregation members to provide a kid-friendly meal (hot dogs, Kraft dinner, pizza, etc.)

The premise was parents would collect their children from daycare after work, come directly to the church hall, and share our meal with everyone pitching in to help. Then, I would do a teaching time around a theme similar to Time with the Children in church. Then some sort of craft with some parents helping while the other parents cleaned up. We always included grace and a closing prayer.

The first time I think we had 4 families and it gradually increased to about 7-8. The best thing was, that these young families got to know each other and started coming to church on Sunday mornings and looked forward to seeing each other. As well, we were able to start a Sunday School program because now we had about a dozen children attending.

-Gloria Churchill

Reimagining Church: A Journey of Transformation

St. John's United in Halifax's North End embarked on a transformative journey about 16 years ago, transitioning from a traditional church building to a vibrant, inclusive community of faith in a new location, symbolizing their readiness to tackle the challenges of the 21st century.

About 16 years ago, St. John's United in Halifax's North End realized that their big church building had turned from an asset into a financial liability. So they started the work of entirely re-imagining their building and how to do & be church in it. When this ambitious plan did not get the required approval from City Council, the congregation literally walked away from their church building to become tenants at the nearby Maritime Conservatory of Music for a while, to recover from this setback, and to re-assess who they were now and where to go next.

Once their church building sold in 2017 they felt they were ready to move on. They called a Minister with the skills and energy to help them find a new location that would *not* look like a church, that would be located in the Peninsula's North End, and most importantly: a building they would *not* own.

It wasn't easy, but they found just the right place. And so, after an extensive process of congregational and community consultations, they moved there in May of 2022 – during the pandemic. St. John's is a vibrant, inclusive community of faith that is ready to tackle the many challenges of being church in the 21st century in Christ's name.

-Hubert Den Draak

Rooted in Faith, Guiding the Future

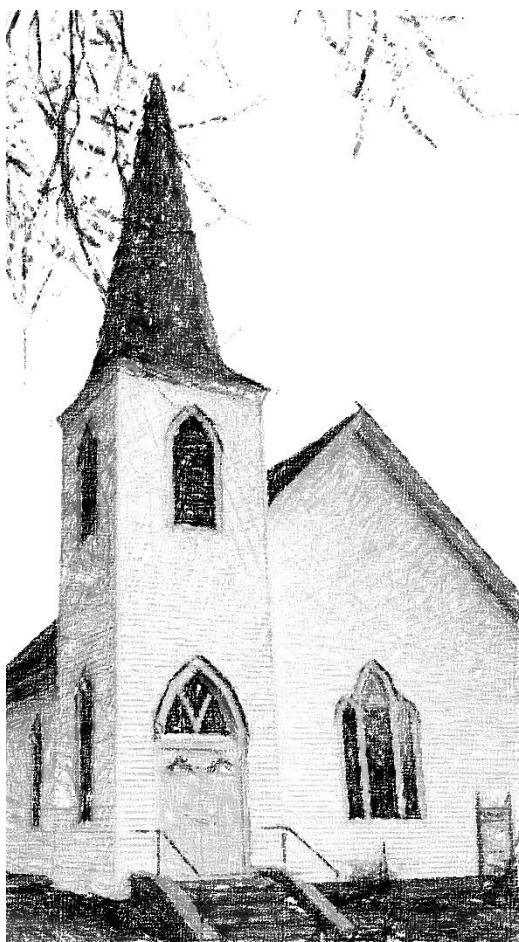
Emmanuel United Church in Kingsport, with a history dating back to 1760, embodies its tradition by actively engaging in community leadership and outreach while embracing a vision for a greener, inclusive future.

Emmanuel United Church, Kingsport is a small church with a large history. When The United Church of Canada celebrates its 100th Anniversary in June 2025, Emmanuel will be in its 265th year. This congregation dates to the arrival of the New England Planters in 1760. The congregation possesses a copy of the original letter that was sent back to Connecticut in December of that year, looking for help in finding a minister. This congregation remained part of the Congregational Church until Church Union. The last meeting of the Congregational Union of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick was held at Emmanuel, Kingsport in July of 1925. Of course, there have been challenges. There have been moves, fires, and schisms. Overall, these are a faithful people.

In 2025 Emmanuel is the United Church presence in this part of the County. We take pride in representing our liberal Canadian United Church tradition. Our voice is heard amongst the other local churches through our Interchurch Council. We take part in providing leadership in community services; we're engaged with the Interchurch Council outreach projects including the local Foodbank and Emergency Fund. We host a Lenten Soup Lunch. We enjoy coming together for worship on Sunday mornings. The coffee hour that follows allows folk to reconnect and everyone looks forward to opportunities to come together for potluck or pancakes. These occasions give newcomers the chance to become part of the community. Our Quilting group takes over the vestry two afternoons each week. They are focused on a 100th Anniversary Project: a large wall hanging celebrating The United Church.

This is a congregation that is focused on the future. The congregation realizes the importance of making the building greener and more efficient. Part of our 100th Anniversary focus needs to be around embracing the surrounding community. Kings County is a growth area and Kingsport has a growing population - with children. We see an opportunity to demonstrate that we are Rooted in Faith and have a commitment to Growing in Leadership.

-Ivan and Judy Norton



Renewal, Revitalization, and Growth

Despite rural challenges, Walton's Grace United Church experiences renewal as new families join, culminating in a joyful Baptism and Communion service welcoming six adults as members.

I have been serving the Walton Pastoral Charge as their Pastoral Charge Supervisor for the past 6 years.

These years have been challenging times for all of our small rural pastoral charges and Walton is no exception.

In the last couple of years, some new families and former residents have moved into Walton and Grace United has been blessed with some of these folks coming to worship and helping with projects.

On October 29, 2023, a service of Baptism and Communion was held and I, along with another retiree, Rev. Jeff Bursey, had the great privilege of baptizing six adults and welcoming them as members of Grace United Church.

We enjoyed a wonderful reception following the service.

The Spirit is alive and active on the Walton Pastoral Charge.

Thanks be to God.

-Karen Lynch

Expanding Horizons: UCC Chaplaincy at Dalhousie

The UCC Chaplaincy at Dalhousie University expands its services to address mental health, food insecurity, and LGBTQ+ support while navigating financial constraints.

The UCC Chaplaincy at Dalhousie University serves over 25,000 students from 115+ countries, providing presence, hospitality, and advocacy. The UCC Campus Minister, part of Dalhousie Multifaith Services, collaborates with diverse religious groups to support students' spiritual wellness. Recently, the focus expanded in three key areas:

1. **Counselling:** With mental health challenges on the rise, the Campus Minister counsels students facing various issues, from addictions to vocational crises.
2. **Food Insecurity:** As student food insecurity grows, the Chaplaincy organizes the Monday Night Meal, serving 1504 meals during Fall 2022 and Winter 2023.
3. **Affirming Ministry:** Recognized as Canada's first "Affirming Ministry," the Chaplaincy partners with DalOUT (Dal's Queer Student Society) for events like the Fall Retreat and PIE-Day fundraiser.

This ministry of The United Church touches the lives of 100's of young adults every year. Rooted in Matthew 25:31-40, we feed, visit, clothe and care for people, not because they'll become members of the church, but because they're hungry, lonely, cold, and suffering. This ministry exists outside the walls of a church building and beyond the boundaries of church membership. The future of the Chaplaincy is precarious as donations from congregations and Mission & Service Support Grants decline.

-Robyn Brown-Hewitt

Refugee Sponsorship

Reflecting on the transformative power of love-rooted faith through the experiences of refugee sponsorship and community integration at Trinity United Church in Pictou County, Nova Scotia.

“...as you are being rooted and grounded in love.”
-Ephesians 3:14-19

This verse speaks volumes for me. My whole life of faith has been rooted and grounded in love, but this story is about the love of helping others find and make a new home in Canada.

As a teenager, it included welcoming Vietnamese refugees, but later in ministry it involved welcoming families from the former Yugoslavia and Somalia. Nobody can deny the life-saving impact of the image of a little boy washed up on the beach like a piece of trash. It shocked and alerted my community and so many others to pay attention to the growing refugee crisis all over the world and started a new kind of welcome in Pictou County.

Trinity United Church of New Glasgow was among the many who said “yes” to supporting new families in our country. From our initial meeting with the whole community, the organization “Safe Harbour” was born. It was a brilliant beginning, inviting interested citizens within and outside our church to invest in this endeavour. We thought we would sponsor one family. The response to our efforts to raise funds, material goods and support was overwhelming, satisfying and sparked a bigger movement. People were eager to be a part of something so life-altering as a fresh start for a war-weary family. What we could not have imagined was how life would also be deeply enriched for the many people who travelled along the road to resettlement with them. That first family came eight years ago but since then, Safe Harbour has helped 11 families negotiate the difficult path

of life in a new country and made our community richer in doing so.

People from Syria and the Democratic Republic of Congo are now tightly woven into so many stories of success. Three things stand out.

1. members of our community experienced leadership in new ways.
2. significant partnerships enabled this growth.
3. our interactions with the Muslim community have provided ground-breaking opportunities for deeper relationships and embracing diversity.

Each outcome was rooted and grounded in life-changing love.

-Donna Tourneur



Cultivating Community

St. Andrew's Wesley United Church initiated a Coffee Gathering ministry, fostering fellowship and connection among members and neighbours in Springhill.

I am about to do a new thing; now it
springs forth, do you not perceive it?
-Isaiah 43: 18-19

During ministry within the Springhill Pastoral Charge, St. Andrew's Wesley United Church, we began a Coffee Gathering ministry. I brought it to the church council, seeking their permission. There were some questions – 'Why, what will this be about etc.?'

We began in the new year of 2021, gathering at a local restaurant in Springhill on Friday mornings at 10:00 AM. The first few weeks were strictly coffee/conversation, then it became a breakfast gathering. We are still gathering, with between 8-11 people, which might change each week, and this past summer they didn't even take a break – I did though.

The folks of St. Andrew's Wesley United Church are grateful for this weekly event, where we continue to learn each other's personal stories, we laugh, we celebrate each other, and it's a bit noisy at times! Something new became a wonderful ministry of community!

-K. Ruth Gamble

Rooted in Faith, Growing in Grace

St. James United Church in Antigonish undergoes renewal, restarting beloved traditions, embracing new initiatives, and expanding outreach to reach a broader congregation, ushering in a new era of growth and spiritual enrichment.

(Jesus said) “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit.”

- John 12:24

St. James United Church in Antigonish is undergoing a time of renewal. Following things returning to normal after the pandemic, the congregation took some time to prayerfully and carefully discern how God was calling us in this new normal. That discernment led to beloved parts of our life being restarted with enthusiasm, some activities and groups carefully let go, and new initiatives beginning. St. James was always a busy and active church but by taking the time to seek the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit we are experiencing a new era in our life together.

Our Sunday worship now includes an online congregation which reaches shut-ins and those living at a distance (including out of the country which still amazes us). Our music ministry of numerous choirs has expanded to include a guitar group and a children’s choir. The Hot Meal program, which feeds bodies and souls twice a week, now involves even more volunteers from the congregation and community. Growing from the tradition behind us, we are celebrating the work and witness which is ours in this time while remaining open to the new things God will call us to in the world.

-Peter Smith

Rooted in Unity: Growing together.

Orchard Valley United Church navigates the challenges of amalgamation, ultimately fostering a vibrant and inclusive faith community that embraces growth, renewal, and outreach in the Annapolis Valley.

Orchard Valley United Church resides in the Annapolis Valley, nestled between the North and South Mountains, which is predominantly made up of a series of larger communities running along the NS101 like beads on a string, surrounded by large areas of farmland, orchards, and vineyards. As time passed, reduced congregation sizes in the diverse communities and escalating maintenance costs in older and historic church buildings forced us, as pastoral charges, to start considering the need for amalgamation, hoping to build strength in a more centralized setting. In the earliest days, we moved our combined services around the various home churches, giving all an opportunity to start meeting our new prospective family members and see why each location held their site so dear.

Ultimately, the decision was made to amalgamate into today's Orchard Valley Pastoral Charge. However, this is not a process for the faint of heart – a majority decision is not the same as a unanimous one, agreeing on the optimal final location was difficult, and amalgamating/reducing staff positions was painful. For some, the change was too much; their hearts were tied to the history within a certain locale or spiritual leader. For some, the anger was too much; the frustrations of some members were too hard on the peace of other members.

The two factors that have healed this new and combined congregation the most are: a) People and b) People. Excellent interim ministry brought a loving leadership without history or perceived bias. People who had stayed firm during all the transitions continued to reach out to those who had stepped back. Time also heals. As our new, blended church family

stabilized, people were able to put their hearts together to seek and call a new spiritual leader who would be ‘ours’.

And more people returned. New people came. The dream of an inclusive faith community inspired us to become an Affirming Church with unanimous congregational support. And more people returned, and new people came.

During this time, this faith community put their heads together to start dreaming of ways to expand our facility to encompass our growing family. Relocating during renovations into the local shopping centre put us even more into the public eye. It may have provided some additional challenges, but the Spirit remained active and strong as still more people returned. And new people came. The expression most often heard as people returned or came for the first time was their feeling of being home.

With a freshly renovated building and the addition of a new expanded sanctuary, our enthusiastic and growing church family are bringing new energy and ideas, allowing us to do more for outreach in our communities and BE the hands and feet of Christ...which was what we had hoped for.

- Mindy Vinqvist-Tymchuk



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Navigating Change: A Journey of Faith

Facing declining attendance and mounting expenses, two congregations in Nova Scotia have chosen to sell their church properties and amalgamate, embracing change with faith and determination to serve their community, while exploring new partnerships and unconventional worship spaces.

“For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life,
and there are few who find it.” ~ *Matthew 7:14*

In a country and denomination where churches are closing at a shocking rate, the congregations I serve have courageously chosen to risk journeying down the hard road toward possibility and hope.

I am serving in a cooperative ministry with St David's in Bible Hill and Valley-Greenfield in Valley, NS. Over the past several years, and particularly after Covid, the proverbial writing was on the wall and seemed to be growing brighter quickly. Between the mounting expenses of old, inefficient, inaccessible buildings and a shrinking, aging set of bodies in the pews each week, it became evident that without some substantial changes, both communities of faith would face closing their doors in just a few short years. Instead, the two congregations decided to make the difficult decision to place their church properties for sale and begin the process of amalgamation.

The decision wasn't easy, nor has been the journey since, but their determination to be faithful, and to trust that they have a purpose to serve in our community well into the future, continues to propel them forward. For some, it has been difficult to separate the sale of our buildings and the movement away from old ways of doing things from notions of failure and death, but shedding the weight of their physical and organizational structures is allowing them to step into the potential of the future.

These days of major transition for our faith families are both exciting and terrifying all at once. The hardest, but perhaps most important, part is continuing to listen for how God is calling us forward - discerning what the Holy Spirit has in mind for us in terms of service to our community and the world. We are exploring partnerships in the wider community and discerning new ways to be the Church. We are also part of an initiative that was started to promote collaboration among the many United Churches in the Greater Truro Area (the GTA, as we like to call it). We are open to just about anything in terms of our future – more amalgamations, repurposing of old buildings, a new build, new ways of worship in unconventional spaces, community partnerships, etc. The only thing we know to expect for sure is continued change, and my oh my is change hard. So far, we have the faith, hope, and determination to believe that together, we can do hard things.

-April Hart

Mentors: Shaping Faith Journeys

Recounting the influence of Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, choir directors, and ministers, the author highlights the significant role these mentors play in nurturing the faith of young individuals within the church community.

My journey into faith and ministry is the story of the care, teaching, and support I received from my Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, choir directors, and the minister at my home United Church. They taught me the stories of the Bible, coached me to memorize some key passages, taught our confirmation class the Apostles' Creed, and gave me opportunities to sing and share in leading worship. Retreats, group meals, musicals, projects, and more added colour and texture to my growing faith. I remember them all with gratitude and fondness. If you are a local church Sunday school teacher, youth group leader, choir director, or minister, don't underestimate the huge impact you are having on the young folks you interact with! Your role in their lives is SO important!

- Rob Fennell

