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"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13 (NRSVUE)

Dear Friends in Faith,

Advent invites us into a season of anticipation, hope, peace, joy, and love. God's presence continues to unfold among us, bringing possibilities for renewal, connection, and transformation. Thank you for your faithfulness, your willingness to explore new possibilities, and the countless ways you embody Christ's love throughout Atlantic Canada and beyond.

I offer my heartfelt gratitude for the faithful ministries happening throughout our communities of faith. Through all the ways we connect, I have encountered remarkable stories of resilience, generosity, creativity, and courage. I have heard about neighbours becoming friends, new partnerships emerging, and communities discovering fresh ways to share God's love. Each story reminds me that the Spirit continues to move among us, inspiring new possibilities and inviting us to participate in God's transforming work.

Each tentative first baby step represents a leap of faith. Reflect on 2026, as it informs your next steps in 2027. celebrate and share your stories as we learn together.

With the numerous links and attachments included in this package, I encourage you to invite a person or two or a group to be your growth and stewardship enthusiast s) who can share resources, be an intentional voice of growth and stewardship. Who might be invited to this leadership interest, offering this gift? Please ensure I also have their contacts. Explorations that resonate might also be of interest to neighbouring communities of faith. Let's chat about supporting your cluster and strengthening relationships.

Advent offers an opportunity to pause, reflect, celebrate, and imagine what might come next. For some communities of faith, this has been a year of significant change. Others have experienced challenges with finances, leadership, buildings, or the energy needed to sustain ministry. Many are discerning how to honour cherished traditions while remaining open to emerging opportunities.

Wherever your community finds itself, I hope you will recognize the strength, faithfulness, and gifts already present among you. Resilience grows through relationships, shared leadership, encouragement, and the willingness to take one hopeful step at a time.

Our journey "Toward 2035" invites us to embrace a hope-filled vision of inspired, resilient, and diverse communities of disciples, deeply connected with their neighbours and the world around them. Strengthening invitation is central to this journey. Growth takes many forms: a new relationship, a meaningful conversation, an emerging partnership, a young person discovering belonging, or a neighbour finding friendship and community. What are we waiting for? As we prepare for the arrival of the Christ child, how are we also preparing for every person to experience belonging in our midst? When we hesitate to invite another, we are taking away their choice to participate. Stay open to God providing new opportunities in your heart and the hearts of others. A response of "no" to an invitation is

a seed plant that needs time to take root. Continue to explore the ways you can say “yes” to opportunities.

Every genuine invitation creates an opportunity for relationship. Every act of hospitality helps nurture belonging. Stewardship encompasses the many gifts God has entrusted to us: our time, talents, financial resources, relationships, buildings, creativity, and care for creation. Practicing generosity strengthens our capacity to participate in God's work and helps sustain ministries that make a difference in people's lives.

As you celebrate the generosity within your community, share the stories of how those gifts are transforming lives. Express gratitude to volunteers, donors, ministry personnel, and all who quietly offer their gifts. Invite and remind people to imagine how their generosity continually helps shape a hopeful future. When we recognize that every person has something meaningful to contribute, we nurture a culture of shared responsibility, abundance, and possibility.

Remarkable beginnings can emerge in unexpected places. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem reveals God's presence among ordinary people, within everyday circumstances, opening a future filled with hope.

I wonder what new beginnings might already be taking shape within your community of faith.

What relationships are growing? What gifts are emerging? What opportunities might the Spirit be inviting you to explore? What small step could strengthen invitation, deepen generosity, or create greater belonging in the coming year?

These questions are part of developing a growth mindset rooted in faith, curiosity, and trust. Our Toward 2035 journey encourages us to listen, learn, experiment, and discover what God may be bringing to life among us. Every community of faith has its own context, gifts, challenges, and possibilities, as we seek a faithful and hopeful future together.

God of hope and new beginnings,

Open our hearts to the possibilities you are bringing. Help us recognize your presence in our communities of faith, in our neighbours, and in the unexpected opportunities to share your love.

Inspire us to be courageous in trying new things, curious in our listening, and generous in sharing our time, talents, and resources. Strengthen our invitation so that everyone may experience welcome, belonging, and connection.

Nurture our stewardship as an expression of gratitude for all we have received. Give us wisdom to honour what has been, imagination to explore what might be, and faith to take the next small step.

Amen.

With gratitude, hope, and blessing,

Sharon

Here are some resources attached and links:

Please distribute widely within your community of faith so people can explore resources of interest to them. Not sure what's right for you? Please reach out to **sballantyne@united-church.ca**

• ADVENT Share the Advent calendar2026 attached, helping to focus you on growth and stewardship, gratitude and generosity. A short invitation and a brief prayer. In just two sentences take a mindful moment daily

• Contact me to explore upcoming Stewardship Programs through CHURCHx– Getting Started in Stewardship, Setting Up your Giving Plan, Stewardship Best Practices, and asynchronously on demand bequests and estate giving about legacy gifts, budgeting and more. January 2027 courses are anticipated to be posted next week.

• see all the latest resources for Toward 2035, invitation and stewardship here

• Explore Gifts With Vision Gifts with Vision! https://unitedchurchfoundation.ca/what-is-mission-and-service/mission-and-service-resources-united-church-of-canada-foundation/Advent 2026

• Join the weekly virtual drop-in Tuesdays 11:45-12:15 Atlantic (12:15-12:45 NL), with growth and stewardship animators Rob Shearer and Sharon Ballantyne. Join the Zoom Meeting at https://united-church.zoom.us/j/81090286783

• TOWARD 2035 Watch for a nine-part webinar series coming in 2027, which will be available through CHURCHx. Come for all nine or select ones of interest.

• new video on Toward 2035, what's next on YouTube- from Moderator the Rt. Rev. Kimberly Heath, here

• Scroll down to downloads for Prayer and Session 1. https://united-church.ca/toward2035

• Strengthening Invitation – United in Prayer Registration Please join the weekly national prayer time, every Thursday at noon ET, 1:00 AT, 1:30 NLT Meeting Registration - Zoom

• Church Tech Best Practices Network
Register NOW on CHURCHx to get access to our upcoming events as well as resources and peer support for all your questions related to tech and ministry.

• The story of a United Church building that has found new purpose.
https://mailchi.mp/41a1c964be86/baltimoreucbreathesnewlife?e=83a9ae0ac7

• Grants – Visit United Church Foundation Grants page. The Next Seeds of Hope application will open in January for the April 15, 2027 due date. Start planning now.

• Additional possible external grants of interest Read the grant details carefully to ensure that you are eligible to apply and start your application early.
Capital Assistance Programs: https://united-church.ca/leadership/church-administration/local-administration/capital-assistance-programs
• Technology Grants: https://united-church.ca/leadership/church-administration/local-administration/capital-assistance-programs/capital-assistance-fund/technology-support-grants-pastoral-charges-and-community-ministries

External Grants

- Celebrate Canada Grants: Grants of up to $100,000 are available to fund activities organized to celebrate National Indigenous Peoples Day, St. Jean-Baptiste Day, Canadian Multiculturalism Day, or Canada Day. Applications are due November 23rd, 2026.
- Canada Summer Job Grants: Grants equivalent to $17.95/hour are available to organizations providing work experiences for youth. Applications close December 3rd, 2026.
- Seniors Community Grant Program: Grants of up to $25,000 are available to help not-for-profit and community organizations deliver projects, supports and resources that offer older adults (aged 55+) with opportunities for greater social inclusion, volunteerism, and community engagement. Applications are due December 17th, 2026.
- RBG Foundation Community Spaces Grants: Grants of $25,000 to $2.5 million are available for retrofits, repairs or upgrades of existing public community buildings and spaces as well as construction of new public spaces that reduce environmental impacts of their operation and/or improve building accessibility. Applications are due December 18th, 2026.
- Air Canada Foundation Grants: Grants of approximately $40,000 are available to fund programs that support the health and well-being of children and youth from equity-deserving groups. Applications are due December 31st, 2026.

https://ions.ca/funding-opportunities/ - Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia. Provides a list of several current opportunities

With thanks to Beacon United, Yarmouth who shared about these provincial possibilities (Nova Scotia)

https://cfns.ca/ourfunds/ - Community Foundation of Nova Scotia – multiple funding opportunities across the province

https://www.communityhealthboards.ns.ca/wf-intro - Community Health Board Wellness Funds – province wide

https://www.agingwellns.ca/micro-grants - Seniors' Support and Connect Grant (Aging Well Nova Scotia)

https://www.mynslc.com/corporate/social-impact/community-investment/for-the-good For the Good of Our Community

https://cch.novascotia.ca/investing-our-future/community-funding-and-awards/community-access-ability-program Community ACCESS-Ability Program – supports renovations to make community buildings more accessible.

https://nschallengefund.ca/ - Sustainable Communities Challenge Fund"