

the front pew



Vol. 18 No. 4 RIVERBEND UNITED CHURCH 14907-45 Ave., Edmonton, AB Winter 2020

40th Anniversary Sunday

On October 25, we shared in worship in a “Mini-Anniversary Celebration to honour 40 years as the congregation of Riverbend United Church”. The Anniversary Planning Team originally had a host of activities to enjoy, all of which got pre-empted by these COVID days. Still, we couldn’t let our 40th year go by unmarked.

Below you’ll find Anniversary greetings sent by Rev. Bill Cantelon, Rev. Don Koots, and Mrs. Ella Symington.

Rev. Bill Cantelon:

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” (Philippians 1:3). These words of St. Paul, filled with joy and affection for his beloved congregation in Philippi, certainly capture my sentiments as Riverbend United Church celebrates 40 years of faithful ministry. Brenda and I were so looking forward to being with you this Sunday; however, the Novel Coronavirus changed all that.

Unprecedented times, uncharted waters, unexplored territory—these are phrases you’ve probably grown weary of hearing. And yet, Riverbend United Church is no stranger to uncertainty. The bold decision to build the present facility was made during a time of great upheaval in the church. The dire prediction that the decision regarding ministry, membership and sexual orientation by the 1988 General Council would result in the demise of The United Church of Canada, only strengthened the resolve of the congregation. I remember being told by a member that it was disheartening (and insulting!) when media outlets chose to cover the story of a break-away congregation

rather than the sod-turning ceremony on the construction site for Riverbend United Church.

Navigating uncertainty and disappointment is the church’s—and society’s—new mission. I’m confident that Riverbend will not only survive the pandemic but thrive under the splendid ministry of Rev. Valerie Oden and the dedicated spiritual leadership of the congregation. Paul concludes his greeting to the Philippians with this commendation which, I believe, applies equally to Riverbend United Church: “I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you—forty years and counting!—will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.” (1:6). May it be so! This day, till we meet again, indeed, forevermore.

Rev. Don Koots:

Forty years is definitely something to mark and celebrate. When Riverbend United Church became a congregation in October 1980 Cec Purves was Mayor, Peter Lougheed was Premier, and Pierre Elliott Trudeau was Prime Minister for the second time. How the times have changed! When I reflect upon my time with you fine people I remember a passion for the Gospel and a drive to accomplish faithful and good works. I remember faithful and capable leaders, faithful and caring congregants, and all the ways that faith is lived out in times like these—built up by inspiring music, a deep care for the integrity of Creation, a commitment to caring for one another and others like refugees and women in need, and a willingness to let children and youth express themselves creatively in so many ways. As you celebrate 40 years together, may the Spirit continue to incite and inspire you as it has throughout the years up to now. Congratulations!

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Greetings From Your RUC Music Department

Christmas comes early for musicians, and that includes our talented Riverbend singers, ringers, and players! We are already fully in the spirit: I've been singing carols to myself since Halloween!

We've got lots of wonderful Christmas music planned for our upcoming services and, of course, for Christmas Eve. But as you undoubtedly expect, we will be taking a different approach this year, and will be capturing much of the joy and excitement of Christmas...remotely!

Picking our music from the vast array of wonderful Christmas pieces is always a challenge, and this year we really NEED to hear some musical "comfort and joy"! Spoiler alert...we're starting Christmas Eve off with "Joy to the World"! And, of course, you will need to get your candles ready at home for our traditional "Silent Night."

In other choir news, I am happy to report that by the end of October, we completed singing through the ENTIRE More Voices book during our Thursday Zoom Sessions!! That's 225 pieces of music! We voted on our favourites and we plan to record a few of them in the new year for you to sing along with and perhaps expand our Sunday repertoire.

As you have undoubtedly noticed, we have recently welcomed a new pianist for our "live" services, Rebecca Parsons, who is doing a wonderful job, and you have also been hearing (but not seeing!) Brendan McGrath every week playing for our choir recordings. We hope to feature him via video playing the prelude for the Christmas Eve service so you will be able to actually SEE him in action!

I would like to take this opportunity to personally wish you all the best for this holiday season. Although we may not be able to see each other in person this year, I can already feel the spirit of Christmas in the air as we connect via Zoom, on the phone, and in the previously "unlikely" place for church camaraderie - the Youtube live chat during the Sunday services!

Paula Roberts, your RUC Music Director

Continued from page 1

Ella Symington:

At 100.5 years old, Ella Symington is Riverbend United Church's eldest member. She sent this greeting by live phone call in worship on Anniversary Sunday, October 25, 2020:

Good morning, Rev. Oden and friends in the congregation. It is a real pleasure to be able to speak at this very special occasion and bring wishes and thoughts from the UCW.

Forty years. Just think of that: all the occasions in the church and all the people who have enriched their feelings.

We, my husband and family, came from the little town of Irma, where I started the UWA long ago. And then we moved to Central United Church in Edmonton where I was under Rev. Hart Cantalon for a long time and got to know the whole family. At this time, Bill, their son, came to me and said, "I have become the minister at the Riverbend United Church now." And his last words to me that day were, "Ella, if you ever need me, just holler and I'll be there for you."

At this time my husband had past away and I seemed lost in heart and soul. But the next Sunday, I was at Riverbend listening to Bill preach. I liked the feeling I got. He asked me how I liked coming to Riverbend United Church. I said, "I like it, all but one thing." And he said to me, "What in the world is that?" I said, "There is no women's group, and I am especially fond of that line of business."

So, he took my hand and looked at me and said, "Well, if you're so inclined, I'm sure you could start one in Riverbend right away. Get at it! Go for it!" Guess what. I did.

It was a lot of work at first to get started. But finally we had enough women. And we re-did the kitchen a little bit and started catering meals. Well that was what the Lord liked. So, I want to tell you, that group is still active this very day. I tried to bring hope, forgiveness and love when we had our devotional period once a month.

During this lockdown now, it has made me think, and think hard, because I want to say in closing, please remember: follow the rules, and try a little kindness. And smile at whoever you meet, even though maybe you don't feel like it.

With that, I close with blessings on you all—Ella

Winter Health Corner

Greetings everyone. I thought I would start this Health Corner on the topic of vaccines. As I write this article, there is word that there will probably be a COVID-19 vaccine available in early 2021, which is good news indeed for us all! I am sure you are all as tired as I am during this pandemic in regard to social distancing, wearing a mask, and feeling isolated from our loved ones.

This got me thinking about vaccines and exactly how they work. Well, this is the “Cole’s Notes’ version...When disease germs enter your body, they start to multiply. Your immune system recognizes these germs as foreign invaders and responds by making proteins called **antibodies**. These antibodies’ first job is to help destroy the germs that are making you sick. They may not act fast enough to prevent you from becoming sick, but by eliminating the attacking germs, antibodies help you to get well.

The antibodies’ second job is to protect you from future infections. They remain in your bloodstream, and if the same germs ever try to infect you again, even after many years, they will come to your defense. Only now that they are experienced at fighting these particular germs, they can destroy them before they have a chance to make you sick. This is called **immunity**. It is why most people get diseases like measles or chickenpox only once, even though they might be exposed many times during their lifetime. However, vaccines can help you develop immunity without getting sick first. Vaccines are made from the same germs (or parts of them) that cause disease. But the germs in vaccines are either killed or weakened so they won’t make you sick. Vaccines containing these weakened or killed germs are introduced into your body, usually by injection. Your immune system reacts to the vaccine in a similar way that it would if it were being invaded by the disease, by making antibodies. The antibodies destroy the vaccine germs just as they would the disease germs. Then they stay in your body, giving you immunity. If you are ever exposed to the real disease, the antibodies are there to protect you. I am attaching a link to a very short YouTube video that does a great job in simplifying how vaccines work.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8OOqnLJs2Q>

Ok, on to what is happening this winter in regard to health promotion activities...

December:

- World AIDS Day: December 1

- National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women: December 6
- Human Rights Day: December 10

January:

- Alzheimer's Disease Awareness Month
- World Braille Day: January 4
- Weedless Wednesday: January 20
- Bell Let’s Talk Day: January 25
- World Leprosy Day: January 31

February:

- Heart & Stroke Month
- World Cancer Day: February 4
- Rare Disease Day - February 28

March:

- Liver Health Month
- Nutrition Month
- National Kidney Month
- World Water Day: March 22
- World Tuberculosis Day: March 24
- Purple Day: March 26

I hope I provided you with some useful information. I would remiss if I didn’t mention one of my favourite days of the year, the Winter Solstice. It marks the start of winter; when the South Pole is tilted closest to the Sun, creating the Northern Hemisphere day with the shortest period of daylight and longest night of the year. In Edmonton, the solstice begins on Monday, December 21 at 3:02am. It is after this time when the days gain a little more light each day. Couldn’t we all do with a little more light in our lives right about now?

Peace, Dawn



Children's Ministry



Our Children's Ministry is quite different this year, with all of the safety protocols, changes and unknowns.

Through different innovative ways, lessons can still be taught, and activities still managed. Instead of taking the children downstairs, I've sterilized boxes and created individual activities for the children to do at their designated areas. This (hopefully) will keep them engaged so that the parents are able to enjoy the service. I know it is definitely working for me.

Every Friday, I have been sending out a lesson for the children to do at home with their families. These activities include a Bible story, some questions, and an activity. These can be helpful to engage the children a little more. I have also been looking for videos to go along with the lessons, to make it a little easier for the children who cannot read.

This year, our Christmas is going to be different too. We are hoping that families with children and youth will send us a video of their children telling us what Christmas means to them. That way, we can incorporate it into our service, and have more children and youth involved. If you have any questions about how your family can take part in this, please do not hesitate to ask.

Wishing everyone a very happy Fall!

Krystal Manuel,
RUC Children's Ministry Coordinator
Contact me: krystal_manuel@hotmail.com

Thank you, Corrina Chetley-Irwin!

Corrina has for many years (12, perhaps?) been the person on "The Front Pew" team who puts together all the contributions sent to her by Christine Ens or Bev Sawyer, who have received them from various contributors. Using the Publisher program, she fits them together like a jigsaw puzzle, so that the final product is appealing and easily read. When finished, she sends it along to the church office for distribution.

Now Corrina is "retiring". This issue will be her last. So we are looking for a new person to step in and fill this important role in our congregational communications. If this appeals to you, please contact Christine Ens (ens.christine@gmail.com) or Bev Sawyer (bevsawyer@telusplanet.net) to discuss it further.

Meanwhile, we wish Corrina all the best in the upcoming Christmas season and beyond.

Christmas Eve Service 2020

The Spiritual Formation Committee has given much thought as to how to manage Christmas eve services in a pandemic. Ideally we would like to accommodate all who might choose to worship, but COVID makes this impossible. As a result, we have decided to pre-record a service of lessons and carols filmed in our beautifully decorated sanctuary, and featuring all of our talented musical groups. We encourage you to gather your family in some virtual fashion to enjoy the service together on Christmas eve. You will receive an email from the church on the morning of December 24th - this will include the link to the service which you can view at your leisure. Wishing you all a blessed Christmas!

Soup for the Soul

The Turkey Team has been missing the opportunity to create food-centred gatherings at church these past months, but we are very excited for our new Soup for the Soul initiative. After hearing of food insecurity concerns at the Brander Gardens housing complex, we launched Soup for the Soul. Each household - all 95 - will receive a bagged meal including 2 large containers of soup, a dozen buns, a bag of mandarin oranges, and a dozen home-baked cookies. These will be delivered to each doorstep on November 28th. Thank you to our members who have purchased soup for themselves as well as a neighbour, and to those who chose to forego their own soup meal and contribute both meals to BGRocks! As well, a special shout out goes to Canyon Creek Food Company for a very generous contribution of soup. The Turkey Team looks forward to when we can all dine together in community again!

Tom's Talk!

This Christmas will be very different for most Riverbend United Church families. In recent years our own family has together attended the first (of four) Christmas Eve services at Riverbend United Church, then gathered for a light meal at our son's household where we had Jesus' birthday cake (angel food cake). We distributed Christmas stockings to be filled at home on the basis of a draw done earlier, then brought to the gift opening at our daughter's home Christmas morning. We open our stockings individually while "pull-aparts" are baking and begin the process of distributing – one at a time – our presents, selected by the youngest to the oldest (not to themselves) so each person can see each gift opened. At an agreed time we break for a Christmas breakfast, then return to gift distribution and opening. When all gifts have been

opened and clean-up completed, we return to our own homes to reassemble later at grandma's and grandpa's for a traditional dinner with various households contributing items. After supper is a time of board games.

In this year of Covid 19, gatherings won't take place as in the usual way. We are learning to gather in other ways such as zoom, and to adapt our traditions to the new reality.

Christmas 1963 found Bev and me in our ten by forty foot trailer sitting at mile 299 on the Alaska Highway 780 miles from her family's traditions while I was minister to a congregation of six official members when we arrived five months earlier. Bev had never lived in a city smaller than Calgary or Edmonton. The clerk of session's family invited us to have Christmas dinner with them, but we felt as isolated from our family traditions and contacts as in our present Covid 19 isolation.

We did, however have a Christmas Eve Communion Service scheduled for 11:00 pm. I wondered how many might show up at the new – Ft. Nelson – service. I could hardly believe when the first arrivals were a family of five, including three young children, who had driven 100 mountain gravel highway miles to attend, then would drive 100 miles back home. We were not the only ones feeling isolated in that north country. That experience was a major factor leading to the development of a 1,000 mile (1600 km) round trip chaplaincy from Beaton River crossing to Watson Lake YT.

Sometimes adverse conditions lead to creative spiritual breakthroughs. I wonder how the Holy Spirit will be working through our creative-minded members for new ways to celebrate the birth of Christ.

Tom Sawyer, Minister Emeritus

December Outreach Activities

As in previous years, the Outreach Committee will be delivering Christmas gifts to 10 women who live permanently in "Our Place" and to about 10 adults residing temporarily in another group home.

Because of the pandemic, we plan to keep it simple this year by having the committee purchase the actual gifts.

Therefore, please consider making a financial donation by December 1 in one of three ways:

1. Mail a cheque to the church or put it in the offering and indicate that it is for the Outreach Christmas project.
2. Call the office at 780.430.7275 if you would like us to pick up your donation, or
3. Send us your donation by e-transfer to contactus@riverbendunited.org. Please designate your donation to Outreach Christmas Project.

You will receive a tax-deductible receipt for your donation (minimum \$20 for a receipt).

New Initiative: The 24-7 Centre at the Edmonton Convention Centre is in great need of new or gently used indoor and outdoor clothing (warm outer-wear, everyday clothes, sleepwear, underwear, socks, footwear) for all ages. Until one month ago, only new donations were being accepted, so the usual stockpile does not exist. Please leave your donations in one of the two big "egg carton" boxes to your right when you enter the church. The Food Bank is no longer able to collect the egg cartons and requests that you put them in the food donation box at any grocery store.

Thank you so much from your Outreach Committee. For further information or if you would like your donations picked up, please contact Judi Cook at 780.435.0838 or by email at judi@royalpage.ca or Erin James at 780.987.4702.



A Big Thank-you to Everyone!

Well here we are 8 months or so into the pandemic and I would have to say that Riverbend United Church is doing pretty darn good! On behalf of the official board, I'd like to say a great big thank you to everyone.

Everyone has had a part to play during these times: from all the behind the scenes work, recording music, meeting the AV requirements, changing banners, disinfecting the church, counting the offerings, ensuring contact is maintained by our phoning shepherds, continuing to support the church financially, and of course taking the time to watch the worship services.

Perhaps the most important component to our success has been the continued financial support of our congregation. For the first 6 months or so our givings were outstanding, exceeding our budget. However, we have recently seen our monthly givings decrease a little and we are worried about December. We normally receive considerably more offerings at this time, which we call it "the Christmas miracle" due to our extra Christmas Eve services – but not this year. This year we will be producing a special pre-recorded Christmas Eve service with all the favorite elements from our traditional Christmas Eve services. We are hopeful that people will be able to “put a little extra in the (virtual) plate” in December so that we can have another Christmas miracle and meet (or exceed!) our December budget.

So far we have been able to maintain our staff and most, if not all, of our programming. All of the church staff have had to adapt to new ways of doing things in order to continue to carry on our ministries and support our congregation. The choir has been Zooming and recording hymns remotely with the assistance of Paula and her husband Jamie, as well as our new pianist Brendan. Lois and the bells have been meeting virtually and dusting off recordings of their music that we can share. Joel has been keeping up with the youth via virtual meetings and also assisting with the services. Krystal has been working hard to find ways to engage our children each week and leads a children's time most Sundays. Jackie has been keeping the office running smoothly during these ever-changing times. And of course, we have Valerie making sure we have enriching services each Sunday, plus leading Zoom book studies and maintaining connections with her flock. Valerie continues to provide us calm in the storm as our spiritual leader.

Then there are the awesome volunteers. I always say I hate to single people out, but then I do it anyways. I am sure there are people behind the scenes doing good work that I am not aware of, but here are a few folks that I think deserve special mention:

- Our new facilities chair, Don Trenn has continued to keep busy with projects such as re-caulking the sanctuary windows (the super high ones). No, Don did not do it himself (although he is almost tall enough), but he found a contractor who used a 44 ft extension ladder to get up to the top of the church and complete the work. I hear it was quite the sight to see. This has been on our “to do list” for a very long time and Don was able to find someone who could do it without requiring an expensive lift. Don also oversaw the replacement of the lights in the cross at the front of the church plus a bunch of other stuff described elsewhere in this fine publication.
- Kristen Michalko – in addition to helping with the book-keeping and selling of Safeway gift cards, Kristen made hundreds of masks which she sold and dedicated a portion of the proceeds to the church.
- Ray Hawrelak - not only is Ray our Treasurer, he got us going with pre-recorded services on YouTube back in March and taught himself how to do livestreaming which we began in September.
- Matthew Schoenhardt – another person with multiple roles, Matthew is not only our lease manager, dealing with our renters in these unprecedented times, but he is also our COVID-19 protocol expert, ensuring everyone's safety in the building.
- Isaac Schoenhardt – following in his father's footsteps, Isaac has been helping with the COVID protocols at our services and of course he is also our resident apiarist, generously giving the proceeds of his heavenly honey to the church.

I am sure I have missed many deserving people, and I do apologize for that. Feel free to pass on any names of people who you think should be recognized.

Once again, from the bottom of my heart I thank everyone for helping to keep the church viable and well positioned to emerge from the pandemic as strong as ever. I wish you all a safe and happy pandemic Christmas!

Marv Severson, Board Chair

A View From the Rear Pew By Brent Skinner

Oxygen. It has the chemical designation of O₂ and is essential for human life. I have now been put on oxygen and it has changed my life.

On the positive side, I feel much better on the breathing front and have much reduced my night time snorting, wheezing, and gasping (at least according to my wife and partner). I am sleeping better and my mouth is not as dry.

On the negative side, I am anchored to an oxygen-making machine (called an oxygen concentrator) by about 2000 meters of plastic tubing. Everywhere I go, I am close to tripping on this tubing which is now invading our condominium like some alien life form. Somewhere I recall seeing a Greek statue with a man and his son wrestling with a sea snake. A modern version might replace the snake with plastic tubing. The oxygen tube connects to my body via a nose cannula. Whenever I am bored, I can fiddle with this plastic cannula. I wish it was a more exciting design - you know, like the leather helmet and huge mouth piece in "12 O'Clock High".

So, one more step in my heart failure journey. I will continue to keep writing this column as long as I can. If there is no column in March, do not despair. I might be in Rio for Mardi Gras dancing on a festival float and doing amazing rope tricks with my oxygen tube.

Hello everyone and nice to meet you!

For you those of you that I have not had the pleasure to speak with and meet in person, my name is Ian Meier and I will be taking over as chair of finance committee for Riverbend United Church.

For those I have not met in person, you may remember me as the bulky red headed man wandering around the narthex after church on Sunday with a confused look on my face. The confusion stems from wondering I how could lose track of my wife Val, daughter Ivy and son Mark in a matter of steps from the pews to the doors.

Most people wonder, and many have asked, what would possess someone to take on a finance position. The only answer is that there is a fine line between passion and madness. Professionally, my passion is the financial world. I have been an accountant for the past 20 years, 18 years of which have been in Edmonton. As a Chartered Professional Accountant, I spend my time demystifying finance (and tax) for people and their organizations to help them with their financial decision making.

I would like to thank both David Olson for his time and efforts in the role for that past number of years and Matthew Schoenhardt for "manning the helm" for the past number of months while transitioning the finance chair role.

My hope is that, in the near future, we will be able to meet again as full congregation and we can have a conversation face to face!

the front pew



CONTACT US AT:

Phone: (780) 430-7275

Email: contactus@riverbendunited.org

Co-Editors: Bev Sawyer & Christine Ens

Publication Design: Corrina Chetley-Irwin

Mail List Manager: Jacqueline Hunt

A newsletter of Riverbend United Church, distributed quarterly by e-mail or inserted in Church mailboxes. Call for contributions will be made about two weeks prior to the next deadline as noted below.

Next Submission Deadline: Friday, March 19, 2021.

