

THE FRONT PEW

A seasonal newsletter celebrating the life and work of
Riverbend United Church

Spring 2021– Volume 19 Number 1

Valerie's Reveries

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see.

All I have needed thy hand hath provided.

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

As we approach Holy Week and Easter, following a winter none of us could have imagined a year ago, these words keep rolling through me. They were written in 1923, taken from the Book of Lamentations.

Lament in our lives carves us out, takes us deeper— deeper into the love that knows no bounds, deeper into the Source that births us and sustains us, deeper into the call that is written on our hearts.

This year, we have known lament. We have known loss. We have known fear. And we have known love.

Only one of these lasts.

As we rise from a winter of darkness into the light of the Easter promise, may we “keep the faith” in an eternal love that abides, no matter what. It is our true home.

Peace, friends,
Valerie

Front Pew Contributors

Brent Skinner's column, “A View from the Rear Pew”, was for many years a highlight of our newsletter. With Brent's passing, that column is no more. However, we would welcome contributions from anyone who has an observation or an idea they would like to share - long or short, a sentence, one paragraph or several – if you'd like to contribute, please send your item to either Christine Ens or Bev Sawyer, who more or less take turns editing *The Front Pew*.



Message from the Chair of the Official Board

As I write this, we have just passed the one year anniversary since suspending live worship and we are about to open our doors again to live worship starting March 21. In keeping with AHS guidelines, numbers will be limited and all attendees will need to pre-register and follow all our Covid protocols.

As tough as this year has been I am continually amazed at how our church has been able to maintain meaningful weekly worship services via livestreaming and pre-recorded services as well as continuing with most of our regular programming and committee work. I am also very thankful that our members have continued to give faithfully and generously so that the church has been able to remain financially strong.

I am optimistic that as Alberta's vaccine program continues, it won't be too long before we can all safely gather again. Nobody is putting a date on when this will happen, but if the majority of Albertans have their first shot by June and we are all fully vaccinated by the summer, I am hopeful that in the fall our church life will be relatively back to normal.

The annual report was released recently and contains much information about the work of the church and our finances. You can find it on the church website. We are still in need of someone to join the board as chair elect to take over from me as my 2 year term will be over next spring (2022). The role of chair was traditionally a one year position, but the last 3 or so chairs have had 2 and even 3 year terms so I am willing to stay on for a second year (unless I am overthrown). *Marv Severson*

Lent 2021

The Spiritual Formation Committee, with Valerie's leadership, sought ways to reflect upon and observe Lent from a distance. While our traditional pancake supper was not possible given the COVID circumstances, an Ash Wednesday Meditation was held on Zoom. This online gathering, led by Reverend Valerie Oden and Dr. Doug Spaner, included traditional readings for Ash Wednesday, a time of connection and prayer along with a self-directed application of ashes.

The theme of "Faith on the Move" was selected for our Lenten season, and in keeping with this, members of the congregation have been encouraged to walk daily as part of their Lenten journey or to undertake breathing exercises at home. The sights and sounds of these walks, as an expression of 'faith on the move', have been shared during our worship services. Thank you to all who have contributed photos, and especially to Carolyn Miller for her careful curation of these images for inclusion in each Lenten service. On page 8 of this edition, you will find a small selection of the images shown during worship for you to enjoy.

Easter Sunday

After much debate regarding the best way to celebrate Easter Worship with COVID restrictions on attendance, the Official Board agreed that the best approach is to pre-record the service. This will be available for viewing on our YouTube Channel on Easter Sunday, **April 4**, at 10:30 AM. Should you prefer to watch the pre-recorded service in community, the service can be viewed in the sanctuary on Easter morning at 10:30. Keep in mind that on a bright morning, the images on the screen may be difficult to see. Please [register here](#) in advance if you are planning to attend.

Crafting Group

For the past few years, we have had a crafting group here at RUC. The original idea was for squares to be knitted or crocheted by RUC members during Lent and then sewn together to make blankets to be given to those in the congregation and beyond in need of our prayers. From that small acorn of an idea, a mighty oak has grown. We now have our prayer shawl ministry, due in no small part to Audrey Skinner, who can create an amazing crocheted prayer shawl in a matter of hours; as well as our prayer hearts, which are available in the Narthex for anyone to take and share. Indeed at the 2019 Bissell lunch, hearts were sent along with the sandwiches, which were given to all those attending the lunch and, of course, we have the beautiful cascade of red poppies which adorn the Sanctuary on Remembrance Day. We met every Tuesday afternoon in the Chapel to work on our projects and enjoy fellowship. Due to COVID we have been unable to meet in person for the last year. However, that has not stopped us from enjoying fellowship with each other, through Facebook Messenger, each Tuesday afternoon. It has to be said that the quantity of completed crafting projects has diminished somewhat; however, we have been there to support each other as we have adjusted to the “new” normal. We have shared family news, health issues, thoughts on the pandemic, and of course, the best Netflix shows to watch! We have realized that the Spirit continues to weave us together whether we are in the same physical space or not.

“For where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them”.

Matthew 18:20

Affirming News



Although your RUC Affirming Committee has not been meeting during the pandemic we have been active both at the RUC Official Board level and within the Northern Lights Affirming Ministries Group. This group is headed by Shylo Rosborough, who has been hired by the UCC to gather and coordinate all Affirming Congregations and those seeking to be Affirming in the Region, to share support and educational resources. One of the ideas emerging from last month’s meeting was to use our newsletter to include articles of particular relevance to Affirming issues. Watch this space in future *Front Pew* editions for such articles.

In the meantime, if interested in joining our small but dedicated committee or have a calling for action regarding a particular marginalized group, please let us know.

Lenten Study

Since Ash Wednesday 2021, a group of nine faithful congregation members (including Valerie, who in this context assumes the role of Tech Wizard!) have been meeting, on Zoom, to journey together through Lent. We have, loosely, been following the Study Guide offered in the United Church’s Lenten publication *Faith on the Move*, edited by Julie McGonegal. This book contains “daily reflections on hope and change” and uses the images/stories of pilgrims, refugees, and justice seekers to illuminate bible passages and all of our living dynamic faith journeys. I (and I hope we) have found the discussion, prayer, study, and particularly the fellowship of a shared and safe place to be a weekly grounding to our experiences this Lent. *Jill Spaner*

Thank you to Jill Spaner and Valerie Oden for their leadership. *The Editor.*

We have a new Giving Steward!

With the recent retirement of Doug McEwen as our Envelope Steward, we are pleased to announce that Kristen Michalko has graciously accepted the role. As we pass along this responsibility, the role has been renamed to Giving Steward to reflect the many ways we now receive our gifts. Many, many thanks to Doug for the countless hours he has given to our church in this role since 2015. Kristen has transformed our count room procedures since joining our congregation a few years ago and has helped out immensely with changes in our bookkeeping procedures. Thanks to her for taking on these new responsibilities.

There are many ways to donate to Riverbend United Church:

- **PAR (Pre-Authorized Remittance)** - This allows for a monthly direct withdrawal from your bank account. These will be recorded as a taxable donation and will show up on your annual tax receipt. Contact Kristen Michalko, the new Giving Steward, at givingsteward@riverbendunited.org to either set up or change your PAR or if you have any questions or concerns about your existing PAR donation.
- **Envelopes** - as always, you can either drop off or mail in your giving envelope. These will be recorded as a taxable donation and will show up on your annual tax receipt.
- **Donation Now button** - simply go to the main www.riverbendunited.org web page and on the right hand side there is a red button "DONATE NOW". You are directed to a form that allows you to select whether to donate once now, or to donate monthly. This form is driven by the CanadaHelps organization and allows you to pay with credit card or PayPal. Please note that if you donate through this form, your tax receipt will be issued by the CanadaHelps organization and a small portion of your donation will go towards processing fees. You cannot pay for any services or events through this portal.
- **e-Transfer** - you can send an e-Transfer from your bank account to contactus@riverbendunited.org. You can send payment for services, events and grocery cards through this method as well as sending in donations. Donations received through e-Transfer will be recorded as a taxable donation by the Church and will show up on your annual tax receipt.

Thanks to all who contribute in so many ways to the financial and spiritual health of our congregation!



Kristen Michalko



Carolyn Miller

Front Pew Publisher

We welcome Carolyn Miller, as the new publisher of the *Front Pew*. You may notice some changes to the design, as when asked if she had a vision for the newsletter Carolyn said "I would like to incorporate the new logo colours and add more photographs so that those members who no longer attend in person can see for themselves all the ongoing activities in this faith community". Thank you to Carolyn for taking on this important communications role!

Lasagna with Love

The Turkey Team's underlying goal has been to build community, and this is often achieved through food. After hearing of food insecurity concerns at the Brander Gardens housing complex, we launched a "dinner on the doorstep initiative". Following the success of the Soup for the Soul venture in the fall, we are now launching our spring initiative: **Lasagna with Love**. On Saturday, April 17th we will provide a delicious lasagna meal to every household in the Brander Gardens ROCKS community – all 100. To do this, we are giving you the opportunity to contribute a lasagna meal for a Brander Gardens friend. For \$25 you will provide one bagged meal to a BGR household including lasagna, baguette, romaine and dressing for caesar salad, and a chocolate pudding dessert. There will also be some meals available for purchase for your own enjoyment if you choose!

Orders will be accepted **on or before Wednesday, April 14th**

- To order: Place your order at church on Sunday or phone the church at 780.430.7275 by April 14th.
- To pay: Either e-Transfer the funds to contactus@riverbendunited.org, drop off a cheque at the church or pay at the door when your meal is delivered.
- To receive: Pick up your lasagna meal at church on April 17th or arrange for free delivery with a smile.
- Questions? Email or phone Christine at ens.christine@gmail.com or (780) 435.0302

“Let us come before God with thanksgiving and sing joyful songs of praise.”

Psalm 95:2

A quick note from Paula:

The last time I checked in with everyone, I was happy to report our singers' (including members of both the ensemble and the choir!) growing expertise at recording hymns every week. Well....they are now EXPERTS! We have developed a routine and are turning out 2 hymns per week like a well oiled machine and are having fun doing it! We now have over 50 recordings! And I have reports of singers singing along daily with their collection of favourite RUC choir mp3's just for their own amusement! So when our "best of" CD comes out, we hope you'll all buy a copy so you can enjoy it too!! (And no, I'm not kidding!!)

Our choir Zoom sessions are still going strong and the hot topic is now comparing notes on who has gotten their first dose of the vaccine, what kind it was, and how many times they had to dial before getting an

appointment! There is excitement in the air!! We will be patient, however, even though we are longing to sing together in person. I won't even try to speculate on when we might be singing again from the front of the sanctuary, but we are thrilled that it even seems like a possibility in the not so distant future!

In the meantime, we hope that all of you are singing with us LOUDLY at home when you tune in to one of the Sunday YouTube services. And if you attend in person, we hope you hum along with our soloists and recorded hymns under your masks. Then when we are all back together, you might even consider joining the choir! (And I'm not kidding about that either!!)

Happy Spring!!

Paula

Spring Health Corner

Greetings everyone! As I write this, the COVID-19 vaccine has indeed rolled out and certain populations are in the process of being vaccinated. This past year has been a trying one for us all but there is hope that with the help of the vaccine that we will be able to return to most of our pre-pandemic activities soon.

This touches on the question the congregation have been asked, “What are you most looking forward to doing when COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, and many folks are vaccinated?” Hmmmm, well as an introvert by nature, I have not really thought about what I cannot do. I have turned it around and thought, “Thank heavens I don’t have to do anything.”

Nevertheless, I do miss sitting in a darkened movie theatre and enjoying overpriced popcorn and a cold drink! However, my biggest disappointments have been not being able to watch my son play soccer, rugby, and see him walk across the stage receiving his high school diploma. The lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions will not bring any of these events back and they will be lost into the ether of time forever. Still, I am happy that Griffin is left with great memories from all the youth sports teams he was involved with and that he will be entering a new chapter of his life after high school.

Moving on, some health promotion activities occurring this Spring are...

April:

- IBS Awareness Month
- Rosacea Awareness Month
- World Autism Awareness Day - April 2
- Green Shirt Day - April 7
- World Health Day - April 7
- National Organ and Tissue Awareness Week - April 18 to 24
- World Hemophilia Day - April 17

May:

- Brain Tumour Awareness Month
- Celiac Awareness Month
- Mental Health Week - May 3 to 9

- World Red Cross & Red Crescent Day - May 8
- World Ovarian Cancer Day - May 8
- National Nursing Week - May 10 to 16
- International Nurses Day - May 12
- World Melanoma Day - May 14
- World Hypertension Day - May 17

June:

- Thyroid Month
- World Environment Day - June 5
- World Elder Abuse Awareness Day - June 15
- World Sickle Cell Day - June 19
- Brain Injury Awareness Month - June 29

The number of health events tend to lessen the closer we get to the summer months but each one of the events above are important to some and meaningful to many individuals.

Spring also brings my favourite holiday of all...Easter. Did you know that the date of Easter is calculated from the first Sunday after the first full moon following the Spring Equinox in March? Thus, this year, Easter Sunday is on April 4. The Easter egg has also become an ancient symbol of new life and rebirth. In Christianity, it has become associated with Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection.

May we all experience the joy of Mary Magdalene this Easter season. Her elation was palpable when she told the disciples she had met Jesus outside his empty tomb. “I have seen the Lord!” (John 20:18). Wishing you all a very Happy Easter!

Peace,
Dawn

Gardening for the Soul

If you are a gardener, aspiring to have space to garden, or were a gardener at a different time in your life, you know that gardening is a year-round commitment. I've been thinking about vegetables and flowers—mostly flowers—since my seed catalogues started to arrive in December. My family is amazed that I can spend so much time trying to choose between hundreds of tomato varieties or carefully plotting the colours of annual & perennial flowers to ensure a colour scheme that matches the garden plan. Of course I have a plan! And perhaps for me much of the pleasure is in the planning—executing the plan frequently doesn't go as expected—but in its theoretical form the plan itself is perfect!

For example, although I loved my gardening trials last year—I found that some things required much more time & effort in relative comparison to the results that I achieved. Reserving a huge terracotta pot for broccolini (and giving up a beautiful floral display) meant no flowers on that part of the deck—and resulted in only two or three somewhat “spindle-y” and slightly woody bunches of broccolini. That was definitely not the plan, I had hoped to harvest enough broccolini for a number of meals from all those seeds. But of course not all of them germinated and the ones that did grew at wildly different rates. I mean, I love broccolini, but for all that time and effort my results were less than stellar. For \$5.99 I can buy some at the market or grocery store—and it's a noticeably better product. Given that it was my first attempt, I suspect I erred in some critical ways — did I fertilize too

much, too little? Did my dedicated watering hinder growth or ensure it kept growing? Did my absence for three days in late July (and the lack of water then) doom me to failure? Did I buy the wrong kind of seed? Can you even grow broccolini in Edmonton? Was growing it in a pot on a hot and sunny deck an overly hopeful and optimistic venture from the start? I guess I'll never know, I'm not trying that again this year! One member of the household is lobbying hard for broccoli instead ... we'll see. Perhaps the plan can be adapted ...

So many questions, and like so much of life no easy answers. All the planning in the world simply can't anticipate every possibility. Last year I had started seeds under grow lights in late January—who knew what would be happening in our world scarcely two months later. I think that's the beauty of gardening—like much of life we make plans, and then have to adapt because of what is going on around us and in us. One thing I am reminded of and “re-learn” over and over again, is to adapt and roll with whatever comes—I adapt, revise my plans, fail miserably, learn some more, make another plan, and try again. Just like gardening, we start over, we try something else, we plant something different this year. But we don't give up—and perhaps that's the critical part for me—trying again, letting optimism be my shining light, knowing that eventually my efforts may be rewarded. My faith—in the wonders of life and gardening—is truly my northern star!

Jacqueline Hunt



Canadian Geographic Photo of the Week

This amazing photo, taken by RUC member Emily Bamforth, was selected as Canadian Geographic photo of the week on January 25th, 2021. Here is Emily's description of how the photo came to be taken: "Freezing fogs often roll into the Frenchman River valley, where my home in the small town of Eastend, Saskatchewan is located. When the fog condenses on surfaces, it forms crystalline (and highly photogenic!) rime ice. On my way to work that day, I was taking photos of trees sparkling with rime ice when I noticed this stem of grass with its picture-perfect cloak of winter." Congratulations Emily!

Lent 2021

Faith on the Move



Farewell to “A View From the Rear Pew”

I am sure many of us, when we open our newspapers, have a favourite section we go to first, maybe you want to check how the Oilers fared the night before or you like to head straight to the letters page. I am sure I was not the only one in the congregation who would head straight to “A View From the Rear Pew” “when the latest edition of the *Front Pew* hit my mailbox. I knew I would always be guaranteed a smile as Brent Skinner shared observations on life and family, with gentle humour, in a way only he could. My favourite story, from a few years ago, was when he bought a new car: he was thrilled with the bright green colour, his family was horrified, but nothing they said diminished his pleasure in the colour he had chosen. Even declining health did not stop Brent from submitting articles faithfully for each issue. In his last submission, Brent said “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.” You might not be in Rio, Brent, but I imagine you are dancing in heaven, telling amazing stories. The rich collection of articles shared is a wonderful legacy to leave us with. *respectfully submitted by Carolyn Miller.*

Did you Know?

Did you know that the Christ Candle, which we light every week during worship, and its stand were donated to the congregation by Rev. Bill Cantelon and Karen Bridges (now Rev. Bridges) on Easter Sunday, March 31st 2002. They were given in loving memory of Bill’s father, Rev. Hart Cantelon and Karen’s grandmother, Awji Langlands-Thompson. A beautiful and lasting gift to the people of Riverbend United.



Riverbend United Church
Exploring Faith, Engaging Community

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A newsletter of Riverbend United Church, distributed quarterly by email or inserted in Church mailboxes.

Call for contributions will be made about two weeks prior to the next deadline as noted below.

Next deadline: 18th June 2021