

THE FRONT PEW

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

Summer 2024 – Volume 22 Number 2

Valerie's Reveries

It seemed like a typical day in the church office, until it wasn't.

A young man came in and asked to see the minister. He wanted to say thank you. I hadn't met him before. He is a gay man in partnership with a transgendered man, new residents of the neighbourhood. They had seen the church's Garage Sale sign and saw the Affirming flag and decided to come in, not quite sure if they would be welcome but trusting the flag.

He was touched by how warmly they were welcomed by our volunteers. He didn't feel "other than." He felt included. That was not his experience in the past, neither in his former church nor with some of his family.

He had been in the closet for ten years, and had endured hardship, judgment, mal-treatment since recently "coming out." He came in to say thank you to the church.

Being a safe space for those on the margins is not optional for us. It is vital to our call as followers of Jesus, to our lives of faith, and to those who desperately need to know that there are communities of faith who are truly open, welcoming and affirming of all.

Most of us don't have personal connection with a transgendered person. Though it's common among today's youth to have such connection, it's not so common amongst us older folks. So I offer this specific invitation to you: On Pride Sunday, June 2, we will hear from one of our own - Amelio Skinner, Brent and Audrey's grandchild. Amelio grew up in this congregation as a little girl and now identifies as male.

Amelio will share some of his personal journey of transitioning and speak of the importance of a supportive faith community in that journey. If you are reading this after June 2nd, I encourage you to find the service on YouTube and listen to this wise youth. Being a safe, welcoming place for all *matters*.

Have a beauty-filled, restful summer,

Valerie



Youth Retreat 2024



In early March RUC youth headed to Jasper for a retreat, together with youth from other Edmonton churches. They stayed at Jasper United Church and engaged in many fun activities including nightly vespers, creating artwork from their nature hike photographs, and celebrating an outdoor communion in the forest.



Thanks to both Luke and parent volunteer Darryl Sparling for leading the youth retreat.



– the FP team

RUC - in Fellowship



Lenten Study Group 2024



Wednesday Walkers April 2024

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

Matthew 18:20

RUC - A Poem

A year in review for RUC, we have been busy as you will see.
 In the Narthex there were sales of honey, from local hives, it tasted yummy!
 From the handbells ringing, to the children’s choir singing,
 a night of marvelous music, with dancing! The children’s Advent worship was entrancing.
 Inviting the community, some carols to sing, singing together, what great joy it brings.
 The youth, on retreat, to Jasper did go, hopefully, they all enjoyed the snow!
 From feasting together in the Fall to a pancake supper, open to all.
 Sunday morning coffee and chat, with an occasional muffin Sunday on top of that.
 Our annual garage sale took place in May, sale items were donated without delay.
 RUC church groups continued to flourish, being together, helps our faith to be nourished.
 This is just one small snippet, of all that’s been achieved with the help of the Spirit!

(Check out some photos of RUC – in fellowship, throughout the issue!)

Outreach Committee

We are providing about 250 bagged lunches on Father's Day at the Bissell Centre. We need at least \$1200 in donations to buy the suggested foods. If we collect more than that, we can drop off extra lunches for the next day – the need in the inner city is extreme.

Please consider making a donation prior to **June 11** in one of three ways:

- * Drop off a cheque or cash at the church. Please call first to ensure that the church is open (780.430.7275). If the office is closed, you can put a cheque under the door in an envelope marked "Outreach Committee". Please call if you would like someone to come to your house to collect your donation.
- * Send an e-transfer to contactus@riverbendunited.org. Please designate your donation to the Outreach Committee.
- * Mail a cheque to the church and indicate that it is for the Outreach Committee.

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

Thank you so much from your Outreach Committee. For further information please contact the church office 780.430.7275.

Affirming News



In our last issue we highlighted the work done by the RUC Learning Together Group, which considered the United Church of Canada Remit One question. This remit proposed a change in structure that would support our Indigenous communities of faith. RUC submitted a "yes" vote, at the start of 2024, and voting remained open until the end of March 2024 for all United Church of Canada pastoral charges to register their vote. We are pleased to let you know that Remit One has passed and we look forward to sharing more details of the structure changes as they become available.

June is Pride month, and there will be many events taking place in the city from June 1st to June 30th. In addition to events happening in June, Edmonton PrideFest will be taking place at Sir Winston Churchill Square, between August 17th to 24th. You can check out the calendar of events by heading to the Pride Edmonton website. <https://prideedmonton.ca/summer-of-pride-2024/>

We will, again, show our support for the 2SLGBTQIA+ community with our "rainbow railings" at the entrance to the church for the month of June.

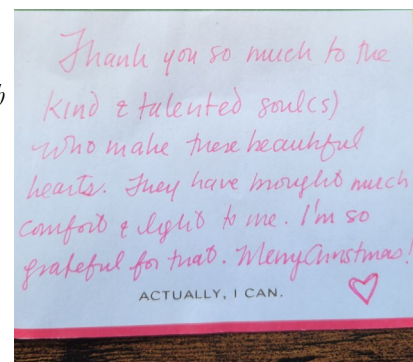
Congregational Picnic

The Spiritual Formation Committee invites you to a year-end picnic and celebration of our faith community on Sunday, June 9th after the service. We will gather outside to enjoy fellowship, food (provided) and fun! To be sure there is enough for everyone to eat, please RSVP by signing up in the Narthex, notifying the office, or [registering here](#) by Monday, June 3rd. If the weather is uncooperative we will meet downstairs in the lower level hall. *(Even if you don't manage to RSVP, please join us for this fellowship time.)*



A Prayer Heart Thank You

A thank you note was found in the prayer heart box, which reads: *"Thank you so much to the kind and talented soul(s) who make these beautiful hearts. They have brought much comfort and light to me. I'm so grateful for that. Merry Christmas!"* Thank you to the crafting group, who ensure the prayer heart box is never empty, and that hearts are always available to anyone who would like to take one as a reminder of God's love for us.



Children's Ministry

This spring was very busy for our Children's Ministry. We started off the season learning about the significance of Lent and the journey to Easter. During this time, we made resurrection buns, played Lenten symbol bingo, worked on our activity books and created some beautiful artwork.

We took a deep dive into prayer this season. We explored the many paths and reasons we pray. Our children all had an opportunity to talk to their peers about how they pray and the things they pray for. They shared many of their thoughts and feelings about prayer with our congregation in a Lenten service. We then shared their words on a display board for folks to read.

We enjoyed a wonderful family event at Whitemud Creek Park with our youth members. We built a campfire to roast hot dogs and marshmallows for our lunch. We designed our own natural biodegradable bird feeders using nuts, seeds, pinecones and honey. They were very tasty and fun to make. The families all took part in a scavenger hunt hike throughout the trails. It was a beautiful day, and we had such a great time.



This spring we have enjoyed many topics inspired by 'God in Nature' including the study of creation and an examination of the natural world around us. Together with the youth and our congregation, we created a beautiful butterfly tree to celebrate new life for the Whole Community Worship service. Each butterfly was a symbol of our own uniqueness.

The children and youth celebrated Christian Family Sunday this year. We decorated cards and frames for our families. Together with the Youth, we made muffins and thank you cards for our congregation.

We have a couple of things coming up to finish the year:

- **Fieldtrip to visit the bees on June 2nd (thanks to Matthew Schoenhardt)**
- **Congregational Picnic on June 9th**

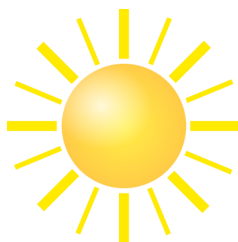
As a reminder, there is no Sunday School in July and August. We will resume again in the fall!

Krystal Manuel
Riverbend Children's Ministry



Summer Worship

We are, once again, partnering with St. Paul's United (11526 76 Ave NW) for summer worship in July and August. It will follow the same format as last year.



JULY

July services will be hosted by St. Paul's United (11526 76 Ave NW) and **there will be no Sunday service in our church building.**

AUGUST

August services will be hosted by RUC at our church. As hosts, we will need greeters to welcome both our own congregation and the congregation of St. Paul's each Sunday. More details will be provided in the weekly announcements, with information on how to sign up as a greeter.

The weekly service will take place at 10.30 am and will continue to be livestreamed.

We hope that you will be able to attend some, or all, of these services. It is an opportunity to become reacquainted (or connect for the first time) with the congregation of St. Paul's (our birthing church).

Care Team Update

I'm very happy to report that the care team has been very successful with a large number of people choosing to serve on this committee. We stay connected with our congregational members by sending cards, in-home visitations and making phone calls. We are also planning to offer various workshops in the near future; stay tuned for more information.

Our wonderful team can be identified with a small red heart on their name tags. So please reach out to the care team with any concerns or requests.

Holly Ruryk
Care Team Coordinator

RUC- in Fellowship



*Fall Feast
"turkeys"-
October 2023*

Garage Sale 2024

This year's Garage Sale, held in early May, netted the church almost \$5100. Many thanks to our dedicated volunteers, who sorted and priced donated items for the first half of the week, then "staffed" the sale itself. Our Garage Sale always brings many eager shoppers; in fact, our opening hours on Thursday, May 2 were almost overwhelming!

In last year's sale (2023), we decided spontaneously to make items on the Saturday morning free. The response was such that we decided to do the same this year, advertising it late Friday after our sale hours. Some of our Saturday shoppers this year came because of that, while others were unaware. We also posted a "Donations Appreciated" sign, and the cash table remained open. The volume of unsold items was rapidly reduced! We believe that our revenue that morning was probably at least equivalent to the amount an actual sale would have earned. At the same time, it certainly lightened the load of packing up at the end of the sale, a much-appreciated bonus.



At the post-sale volunteers' meeting, we discussed whether or not to plan a sale for next year. This was a serious concern, as the number of volunteers since resuming after COVID has not been sufficient to allow the workers to take shifts, especially in the preparation stage. The group decided to try one more sale, with recruitment as a major focus. Please mark your 2025 calendars: **May 8, 9, 10 2025** for next year's sale.

Transition in the Leadership of our Youth Program

Our congregation, and particularly the youth of Riverbend United Church, have been blessed with the leadership of Luke Nelson over the past three years. Luke has chosen to step down from the role at the end of June to focus on his studies – in the fall he will be entering the second year of his Master's of Science program.

For the first two years of leadership, Luke shared the role with Madison Prairie. Madison left the job last summer to pursue her elementary education teaching career, and this past year Luke has worked on his own. Luke transitioned from a youth participant to the leader of our youth ministry program. Like his predecessors, Luke developed all-important youth leadership skills like calculating how many pancakes will be consumed by an unknown number of our church members on Shrove Tuesday, and how to encourage youth to regularly check their email.

As youth coordinator, Luke executed several of the historic youth activities including Biblical cake decorating, fall visits to the corn maze and a retreat, along with some new pursuits. Luke also assisted in planning and leading a number of worship services that included youth participation. In addition to leading Sunday morning discussions in the youth room, Luke successfully collaborated with other United Church youth groups and leadership to coordinate several successful joint events with other churches.

The youth will miss Luke and all his enthusiasm, creativity and humour. Thank you for your dedication, Luke, and we wish you the very best!

Please join us in celebrating Luke's final Sunday as youth leader on June 23rd!

Christine Ens,
Chair, Ministry and Personnel Committee

Parting words from Luke: Over the past several months I have been considering the future of my role as youth leader at Riverbend. Next year, I will be working on finishing my Master's thesis research and will have to commit more time and focus to my studies. With this in mind, I have decided not to return as the youth leader next year. I have enjoyed this role over the past several years, and very much valued my time with all the youth. It has been incredibly rewarding to see you all grow as people. This decision was not an easy one for me to make. That being said, I am optimistic for the future of Riverbend's Youth Program. This summer, the church will be interviewing candidates to find a new leader for next year. The church values this program very much and intends to keep it strong and growing.

Thank you for all the good times!

Luke



Note from the Ministry and Personnel Committee:

- A candidate search for the position of Youth Ministry Coordinator is currently underway with the goal of having a new Youth leader in place for September. Interested? [Click here](#) for details. If you are interested, please submit your cover letter and resume to searchruc@gmail.com. This position will remain open until a suitable candidate is found.

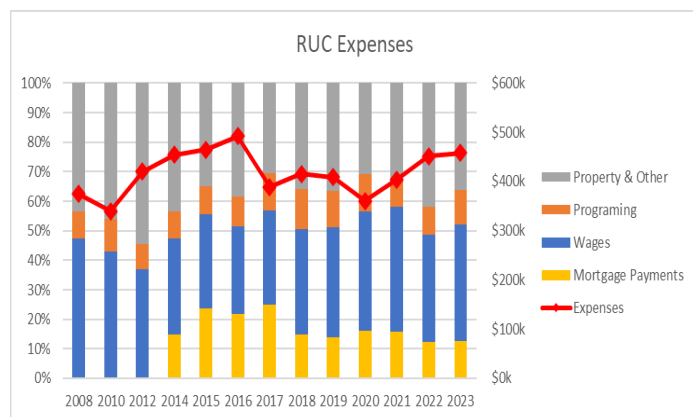
Mortgage Campaign

How could our Calling as a Community of Faith at Riverbend United look different if we didn't have a mortgage? Consider that in your heart, then consider how we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ in this world.

Over the past decade we have been spending about \$75,000 a year paying our mortgage. Consider how our Ministry would look if we were putting that to some other ends.

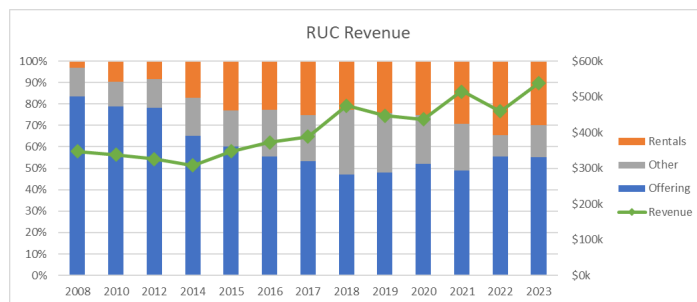
For instance, back in 2010 we had a combination of three paid Ordained and Lay staff to directly support our Ministry in worship, pastoral care and outreach (I am not including office staff or musical contractors in this count.)

Some history: we launched the United in Faith campaign in 2013 to expand the physical footprint of the building. While we raised about half the total amount of \$1.5 million, we took on \$800k of debt. This created a forecasted deficit of ~\$60k annually. In the graph below I stripped out special donations and transactions to try and give a "typical" portrait of our spending budget. Our mortgage consumed 15-20% of our expenses that noticeably rose (red line) after the expansion by ~\$100k. Effectively this expansion made us "house rich" and "mission poor". This was an extremely courageous decision as very few United Churches have expanded their property in the past 20 years.



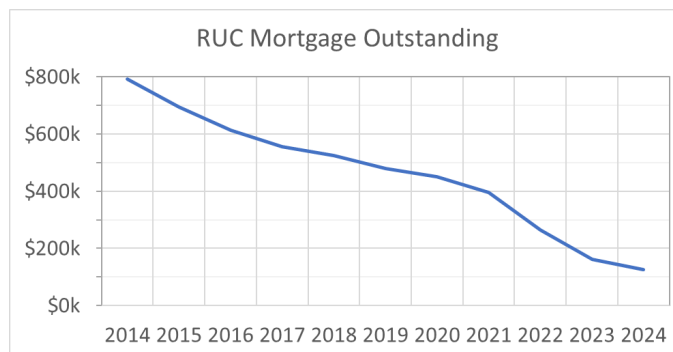
So how did we pay for all of this? Regular Offerings held more or less constant, so the increased expense was primarily covered by our rental income which increased from \$30k to \$160k annually.

In the graph below I again tried to remove special expenditures to give a feeling of "normal" expenses.



Even with the massive increase in rental income, we were forced to extend the duration of our mortgage term twice: once in 2017 and again this year(!). We simply didn't have the cash to pay the full amount. Of course, the longer amortization means we pay more interest over the duration. When we started the mortgage interest rates were at 4.25%; they are now at 8.5% !

Since 2013 we have knocked down the principle by about \$75k a year going from \$800k to only \$125k today. **Only \$125,000 left!** At the Board, we discussed if getting to zero was a reasonable goal. I am hopeful it is. Imagine what our Ministry would look like without it ...



Building a Church is an intergenerational endeavour: we do it in small steps every day, week in and week out; and, we occasionally do it in great leaps and bounds. I am hoping this donation campaign can be one of those leaps and bounds. *continued on page 8*

Dinner and Drumming: A Community Party in the Parking lot

Saturday June 22nd, 5:00 p.m.

Entertainment to start, dinner to follow; come dressed for the great outdoors!

The Turkey Team is excited to embark on another community dinner following our tried and true collaborative model. This has been an annual event since 2013, but we haven't hosted one of these gatherings since COVID. We invite you to join in a delicious cultural supper, along with time to visit over some live Afro Caribbean music. Our own Dr Ayanna Rocke and her husband Jay Smulski are in a steel drum group and we look forward to grooving to some lively tunes shared by a few members of their group, along with an opportunity to learn how these melodic drums work.

Our community guests are from 'Riverbend ROCKS'. They are residents of the Civida housing complex west of Riverbend Jr High school - 98 units of subsidized affordable housing largely occupied by new immigrant families.

Our goal is to have many of our RUC members join us in hosting our Riverbend ROCKS guests. We will mix and mingle, enjoy some great live music and dine on a great meal. We anticipate a grand intergenerational event outdoors and encourage all ages to attend. The turkey team will provide the food and labour but we need you to be our hosts for the evening as we welcome the newcomers to our church home.

Tickets are \$20/person or \$60/family; children 12 & under are free. You can purchase tickets after church or by contacting the office. Our Riverbend ROCKS guests will attend at no charge, but if you would like to help cover some expenses, feel free to buy a ticket for a community friend.

Mortgage Campaign *continued from page 7*

This fall we will likely have a special announcement about expanding our Ministry. The full extent of the expansion depends on the size of our mortgage.

Please consider a special donation to pay down our mortgage. Options:

- Cheque with Mortgage in the memo
- E-Transfer, with Mortgage in the memo
- Share, mutual fund donation (great for special occasions!)

For details on how to make share donations, please contact Jackie in the office.

As a reminder of the magic math turning share donations from \$50 to \$350:

	Cash Donation	Share Donation
Value of Shares	\$350	\$350
Book Value of Shares	\$100	\$100
Capital Gain @50% on sale	\$250	\$0
Tax on Capital Gain	-\$125	\$0
Proceeds	\$225	
Donation to Church	\$50	\$350
Tax Refund from CRA on Donation @50%	\$25	\$175
Left in my pocket	\$200	\$175

Matthew Schoenhardt, Treasurer

RUC - in Fellowship



Youth Christmas Cookie decorating - December 2023



RUC Maintenance and Facilities Department - Spring Update

Seasons greetings to all! After all our rain this Spring, it will be nice to finally head outside to do some yard work, go for walks and bike rides, and just enjoy being outside. The following is an update on maintenance of the building so far this year and further planned activities.

- Parking lot recently swept to remove all the gravel .
- Installing security cameras to deter break-ins to building. There was an attempted break-in to the E2 school through the outside windows earlier this year. The outside storage shed was also vandalized but they were unable to gain entrance through the person-door.
- Installing some new motion sensor floodlights on the building's west side, again to deter theft.
- Replaced 16 of the floodlights in the upper beams of the Sanctuary.
- The remaining 8 floodlights that are located higher in the beams will be replaced in July using a small manlift to reach this height.
- Mowing of the lawns will start in June.
- Basement floor will be stripped and waxed in July.
- The two old air conditioning units located on the east side of building will be replaced in July.
- We will be replacing some of the planks on the outside upper walls on the front and east side of the church that have either been damaged by woodpeckers or wood rot; this area will then need repainting.

- We had budgeted for a roof inspection and for two large spruce trees to be replaced this year but due to financial constraints, we will defer these both to next year. The two large spruce trees have been attacked by a virus that turns the branches purple and eventually kills the tree.

That is it for planned maintenance, but of course the church is an older building and as a result there are always several small repair projects on the go.

Help Wanted! The Maintenance department is looking for additional volunteers to assist in our ongoing maintenance of the building. We believe that a well maintained and clean facility helps the congregation to feel good about their facility. These additional volunteers can either just assist with a semi-weekly walk through of the building to note any small repairs that may be required or if able, can assist with light bulb replacement, small painting duties, etc. If you have 1 to 2 hours of your time available every second week that would be a huge assistance to the maintenance department. If interested, please contact me directly.

Respectfully yours,

Don Trenn
Director of Maintenance, cell: 780.218.3089

RUC - in Fellowship

*Whole Community Worship
April 2024*

*Community Christmas
Carol Sing
December 2023*



Initiating a Men's Group at RUC

In the fall of 2023, I had encouraged my partner, Johanne, to try the women's walking group, and she did. I wondered why the men didn't get together since they too could benefit from a little exercise, conversation and camaraderie?

I thought back to the online book study led by Reverend Valerie in October 2023. We read *"Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World"*, written by the U.S. Surgeon General, Vivek H. Murthy MD. He said "We have a massive, deadly epidemic hidden in plain sight: loneliness. It is as harmful to health as smoking and far more common." The world had become increasingly lonely after a few years of COVID and it was time to turn things around, to start talking to each other and sharing - connecting!

I even saw an article on the need for connection in the Costco magazine, November 2023 edition. Connecting had become a big topic! And not just for young people on their cell phones, but for older folks too. When we are lonely, it's just telling us that we need more connection to feel better.

I grew up in a large family and I was never lonely, but as an adult, I experienced a tiny bit here and there, but with a busy job and active lifestyle, it was nothing to be concerned about ... until now. I am retired and I don't play pickleball as often or go hiking in the mountains much or do long bike rides, preferring now to do local walks and bike rides, and lawn bowling. I have more free time now and would like to increase connections with other people.

I thought it would be nice to have a men's group at the church to provide a time and place for men to meet, chat and do things together. In late October, after discussing my idea with a few people, I announced the start of a men's walking group. On November 4, 2023, we met at the local McDonald's for a coffee and an optional walk. We continued doing this for a few months and in February we shifted to the chapel for a quieter place with more space. We get anywhere from 2 to 5 guys weekly, so we are still a small group.

One of the men, David James, was keen on the men's group idea, and became my co-leader.

David arranged for a visit in March from the leaders of the local 'Men's Sheds' to give us a talk on their organization as food for thought about what we could do with our own group.

Our men's group meets on most Saturdays at 10:00 a.m. in the chapel, for a one-hour chat followed by an optional 30-40 minute walk. When both David and I are away, the weekly event gets canceled. During July and August we plan to meet only once, resuming our regular sessions in September.

We are still adapting our program as ideas come up including bike rides, longer walks and maybe helping to serve a meal to the homeless, seeing a hockey or baseball game, or trying lawn bowling! We may plan a summer event combining the women's and men's walking groups - perhaps lawn bowling at the legislature as Johanne and I are on the board there.

I am also a small-time volunteer with Riverbend ROCKS (*Riverbend Reaching Out to Community and Kids Society*) providing community services to the residents of the Civida townhouses a few blocks north of the church) and suggested to them that perhaps our men's group could help plant some of the fruit trees as part of their planned "food forest".

To keep up to date on the men's group activities:

- review the announcements in the church bulletin;
- contact the office by email at contactus@riverbendunited.org to get on our email list; or
- leave Dennis a message at the church office: 780.430.7275.

Please consider joining this group for fellowship and health. Drop in and check us out – no big commitment; we're pretty easy going!

- Dennis Nolan



Did You Know?

Did you know that we have four large crosses around the church and its grounds? The first one is easy, as we see it at the front of the sanctuary each Sunday morning as we worship. The other three are outside. There is one at each end of the building, but do you know where the fourth one is? For that one, you need to look up, more specifically to the top of the cell tower. When RUC agreed to the installation of the cell tower on our grounds, a cell tower committee was formed and it was their suggestion to have a cross incorporated into the tower. You may also notice a slight slant at the top of the tower, again a suggestion by the committee, which gives the illusion of a steeple. On a clear day, you can see it from the westbound lanes of Whitemud Drive (*obviously only look if you are a passenger and not driving!*).



RUC - in Fellowship



*Christmas Eve Worship
December 2023*



*A night of marvelous music
November 2023*



Riverbend United Church
Exploring Faith, Engaging Community

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

Next deadline: 30 August 2024