

# THE FRONT PEW

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

Winter 2024 – Volume 22 Number 4

## Valerie's Reveries

When I was a child, a snow angel was something we created by lying down in the snow (preferably in a snow suit) and moving our arms and legs. Remember doing that? Showing your grandkids how? Such a beautiful shape it creates!

This morning, I learned a new meaning of "snow angel." It came in the form of a neighbour who fired up his snow machine, cleared his own driveway of the 20 cm. that had fallen, then cleared his neighbour's driveway, then continued around the block clearing the whole sidewalk all the way around.

I doubt Jesus ever had to shovel snow, as snow is rare in Israel, but I enjoy imagining that he would have done the same thing as my snow angel neighbour did this morning. Such an act of kindness seemed a lot like loving your neighbour. As an aside, do you think Jesus ever made a "sand angel?"

This year, a courageous project accompanies our Advent journey: a daily devotional written by members of RUC. You can read more about it in these pages. It's available online or in the narthex.

As we move together toward that holiest of nights, there are also other opportunities to share the journey, details of which you will find throughout this issue.

We're now only a few weeks from the solstice, and then it all turns the other way, into the light. And right at the turn, after the waiting and preparing, we share in the birth of the Christ.

Peace, friends,

Valerie



Wishing you  
a Joyous Christmas and a Happy New Year



*Thank you to everyone who contributed articles to the 2024 Front Pew. You have helped to keep our faith community up to date with activities happening around the church and beyond.*

## Riverbend United Church Advent Reflections and Meditations 2024

*“Hark the glad sound! The Saviour comes,  
the Saviour promised long:  
let every heart prepare a throne,  
and every voice a song.”*

*VU 29 Hark the Glad Sound v1*

The Advent Devotional 2024 written by the people of Riverbend United, for the people of Riverbend United, is now available. In it, you will find a reflection or meditation for each day, from December 1st, 2024, up to and including December 24th, 2024. You can download a copy of the devotional published on the church website at <https://riverbendunited.org/2024-advent-devotional/> (or indeed visit the website daily should you prefer). There will be hard copies available in the narthex, from December 1st. If you worship with us online and are unable to pick up a hard copy, please contact the church office and delivery arrangements can be made. We are blessed to have so many members of this faith community willing to share some of their thoughts on the Advent season. As you read them, you will see that each reflection or meditation is thoughtfully written and heartfelt. May this devotional enhance your own Advent journey, as we watch and wait for the Christ Child to be born again. *(Thank you to the Spiritual Formation Committee for this initiative).*



## Blue Christmas Service Sunday, December 1st at 4:00 p.m.

Sometimes the holidays are hard. Maybe we miss someone we've lost, or maybe life is presenting other difficult challenges these days. You're invited to begin the season of Advent with this quiet, reflective service. We'll give space to honour the season even when we don't feel the joy in "joy to the world." The service will be held in the Chapel, which is through the double doors to your right as you enter the narthex. It will be led by Valerie Oden and Holly Ruryk, with music by Sherry Steele.

## Community Christmas Carol Sing Sunday, December 15th at 4:00 p.m.

Do you and your family enjoy singing Christmas carols? Then make sure you mark your calendar for our annual Community Christmas Carol Sing on Sunday, December 15<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 p.m. which is sure to get you in the Christmas spirit. Our music groups come together for this joyous event, leading us in a selection of Christmas carols and popular secular music. Under the twinkling lights of the Christmas tree, our amazing RUC musicians will also perform some beautiful anthems for our enjoyment. Everyone is welcome to come and join in the singing, so why not invite your friends and family to share in this special time. Come for the wonderful music and stay for the fellowship. Coordinated by Paula Roberts.

## Music Playlist – an Advent Devotional Companion

In the RUC Advent devotional, you will find references to various music in several submissions. Joanne Little came up with the inspired idea of creating a musical playlist of some of the music mentioned. This will allow you to listen to a piece of music after reading the reflection, without having to search for it. The playlist can be found on the church website on the Advent 2024 page at:

<https://riverbendunited.org/2024-advent-devotional/>.



**“Make a joyful noise all the earth! Worship your God with gladness”.**

**Psalm 100 Voices United page 820**

**An Evening of Marvelous Music**

The 2024 "Evening of Marvelous Music" was held on November 2, and it was a rousing success. We had an almost full sanctuary, and we raised about \$3300 for the church mortgage fund.

This year's concert was co-hosted by Doug Spaner who curated a number of peace themed songs to go along with other well known hits from the 60s and 70s. We were fortunate again this year to have 5 string players, who one observer noted "added a touch of class" to the evening.

I would like to thank all the people who attended, and all the people who donated and a special thank you to the musicians: Sheryl Bowhay, Hailey Bowhay, Connor Bowhay, Lukas Bucerius, Annika Schoenhardt, Joanne Little, Emily Severson, Owain Bamforth, Doug Spaner, Jonny Spaner, George Irwin, Joel Fleck and Randy Nelson. We have so much talent in our congregation!

And finally, many thanks to Rob Beghin who did an excellent job running the sound and projection and also to the members of the Turkey Team who provided hot apple cider and treats. *(you will find additional photographs of this “marvelous” event on page 8)*

Cheers,  
Marv Severson



**Christmas Eve Worship Services**

- ◆ 5:00 p.m. Candlelight Service with the Choir and John Tessier, soloist
- ◆ 6:30 p.m. Candlelight Service with the Choir and Handbells
- ◆ 8:00 p.m. Candlelight Service with Holy Communion

We hope you can join us as we greet the arrival of the Christ Child.



**RUC Children’s Choir**

RUC is blessed to have so many wonderful musicians of all ages who share their talents with us regularly. On November 3rd, our children’s choir sang the introit, Joyfully Sing! Their voices filled the sanctuary, and looking around, there were many smiling faces in the congregation. Thanks to Paula Roberts and Sherry Steele, our music director and accompanist, for leading this important ministry.



## Ministry and Personnel Committee Update – Request for Feedback

The Ministry and Personnel (M&P) Committee acts under the guidelines of The Manual of The United Church of Canada. The committee functions around three roles, which are the consultative and supportive role, the healthy relationships role, and the supervisory role. We provide resources and support for the staff and the community of faith with respect to any issue affecting staff of our church, including our minister and lay employees. The committee works to build positive and trusting relationships between staff and members of the community of faith.

If congregational members have praise or concerns about any of our staff including the minister, these can be shared in signed correspondence with the committee. Comments can be sent to a confidential email address:

[mpchair.ruc@gmail.com](mailto:mpchair.ruc@gmail.com). The issues will be considered confidentially by the M&P Committee, who will recommend action.

Riverbend United Church is blessed with staff who are committed to their work and we are thankful for this work in our community of faith. M&P committee members include Christine Ens (Chair), Doug Spaner, Moira Walker, Diane Hawrelak and Lisa Bossert.

Submitted by Christine Ens

## Children's Advent Worship

Don't forget...our amazing children will lead worship on December 15<sup>th</sup>, which is appropriately Joy Sunday. We expect the sanctuary to be filled with smiles and joy that morning! Join us as we share the magic of the season through a child's eyes.

# JOY

## Care Team Update

The Care Team continues to actively reach out to our members.

The Ease the Burden end of life planning presentation has been rescheduled to Sunday, December 8, 11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. This will be held in the church basement. There is no cost to attend, goodies and refreshments will be provided.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out to our team or contact Holly Ruryk, Care Team Coordinator, through the church office.

Submitted by Holly Ruryk  
Care Team Coordinator

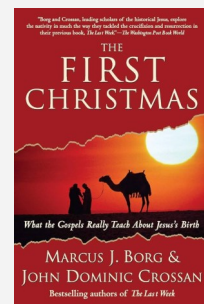
## RU in Action 2024

Thank you to all the committees and groups that participated in RU in Action at the end of September, our first since 2019! From colourful displays to smiling faces providing information, it was a great way for the congregation to learn more about all the activities in our church. Thanks go to Christine Ens for coordinating the event.



### Advent Book Study

Advent Book Study: *The First Christmas - What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Birth*. This book study takes place each Sunday at 9.30 a.m. up to and including December 15th. The book written by Marcus Borg and John Crossan, and available from Amazon in a variety of formats, shines a light on our traditional scriptural story with scholarship and wisdom. You are welcome to join the discussion even if you don't read the book.

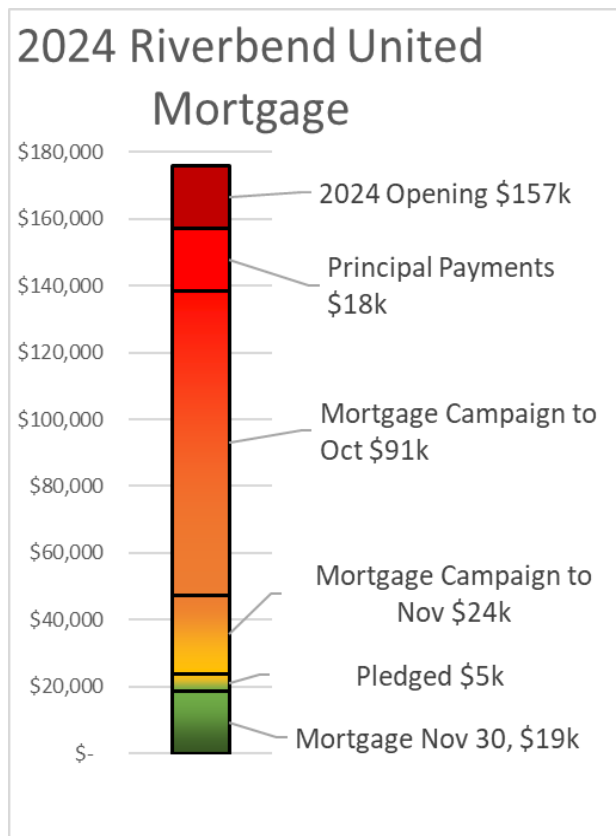


### 2024 Mortgage Campaign Conclusion

Back in 2013, I shared a business case at a Congregational Meeting so we could have an informed vote on the expansion of our building. Coming in at ~\$1.25 million, the expansion would clearly be a massive undertaking for a church of our size. The numbers indicated that we would have to take on a sizeable debt of nearly \$800,000. At the time, I said it would take us over a decade of diligent effort to pay off this loan.

In some respects, I was correct. Over the past near decade, we have been forced to look inward to address our debt. While we had many outward looking campaigns and initiatives, we were still bound by our financial obligations. Several times during this period we did not have the means to pay our debts and fund our Ministry. We were forced repeatedly to extend our mortgage amortization. We paid so much money on interest (as one does with a loan), and too little on expanding our Ministries.

In 2024, we started the year with nearly \$160,000 outstanding on our mortgage, paying nearly \$16,000 a year in interest. That was a lot! We would all rather have these funds go towards our Ministry and our Calling. So, we started (another) mortgage campaign.



The plan was to have four speakers give stewardship reflections in May, let us all discern over the summer, and ask for offerings to be made in the fall. How did our (final!) mortgage campaign go? Smashingly! Between principal payments, offerings and pledges, we now stand at roughly \$19,000 remaining in our mortgage. Incredible!

There is a line in the parable of the Shrewd Steward (Luke 16:11), “So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?” I am so pleased to say, it looks like the bounty that God has entrusted us with has been well placed and we have returned our blessing and given back a portion to God.

With our mortgage close to complete, I look forward to 2025 and the launch of our bequest-endowed Opportunity Fund. It is my hope that these two together will let us cease the inward looking and start to look outward at what Riverbend United Church’s calling in this world will look like.

In closing, I have renewed our variable-rate mortgage with Servus Credit Union at Prime+. The terms are that it is an “open” mortgage so that we can make penalty-free principal payments at any time.

Matthew Schoenhardt, Treasurer

## Affirming News



This is just a friendly reminder about the “*Gifts With Vision*” catalogue, which is available year-round, and is invaluable at this time of the year if you struggle to think of a gift for the person who has everything! All the gifts in the catalogue help sustain the work of the United Church of Canada’s Mission and Service partners, and part of the fun is selecting a gift for the recipient's interests and activities. Each year new gifts are added to the varied selection; among the new gifts this year you will find:

- *Dignified Life Project.* This supports the 1JustCity’s Dignified Life Project which provides unsheltered guests in areas of Winnipeg with everyday necessities, like toothpaste, shampoo, fresh clothing and underwear, as well as shower and laundry services. Feeling and looking clean can make a big difference in the lives of 1Just City’s guests.
- *Fueling Empowerment with Biogas.* Many people in the city of Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of Congo have no access to electricity. This project will train 50 women in biogas technology, from collecting the fuel to the final steps of using the gas to power electric generators. The aim is to share the project throughout the country. Women become independent through technology and then help others do the same.

Affirming Team member, Carolyn Miller, uses the catalogue to select gifts for her family each Christmas. Two of her favourite gifts to give are *A Kindergarten in a Refugee Camp* and *Home Care in Cuba*. Maybe you have a favourite too.

For more details on these, and many other wonderful gifts, visit <https://giftswithvision.ca/>.

## Outreach Committee projects

The Outreach Committee has been busy with a number of initiatives. Please help with one or all of these projects as you are able and inclined. Thank you in advance.

- **Women’s Shelters:** With Christmas rapidly approaching the Riverbend United Outreach Committee is preparing for its annual support of two women’s shelters in the inner city. We are asking the congregation to assist so that we can brighten the lives of these women once again. Your financial donation can be made by e-transfer, leaving a cheque in the offering plate, or speaking to Judi Cook or Erin James.
- **Winter clothing:** We are collecting winter items for people in need. A collection box can be found in the narthex.
- **Food pantry collection:** The Outreach Committee is also responsible for the Food Pantry located outside the church. Items for the winter months need to be carefully selected due to our freezing temperatures. Food such as pasta, rice, dry beans/lentils, crackers, dry soup, instant noodles, cereal, peanut butter, granola bars, etc. should work for these colder months. Donations can be placed directly into the Food Pantry or dropped off in the collection box found in the narthex.
- **Operation Friendship for Inner City Seniors:** Please donate new toiletries (razors, shaving cream, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner or liquid or bar soap) to the winter clothing box in the narthex by December 15<sup>th</sup>.

Joan Robinson, Outreach Committee



*Pictured is Taun Bangsajayan, our church handyman assistant, standing beside the newly installed (with his assistance) Little Free Pantry stand.*

## Children's Ministry Update

This Fall was a very busy time for our Children's Ministry.

We introduced "Visual Journals". These Journals will remain downstairs, and the children will get a designated activity to complete in them most Sundays.

This year, I have focused most of our Lesson plans on Bible Stories. Biblical storytelling allows kids to engage with the Bible on a personal level, connecting the stories to their own lives and experiences. It also helps them understand and remember the key themes and messages of the Bible in a way that is relevant and meaningful to them.

We started the year off with "The Good Samaritan" and focused our discussions and activities on how to be a good "neighbour". We discussed "bucket filling" - how we fill others' buckets as well as our own, bucket dipping - what takes away from our bucket and how to prevent it from happening, and we made some wonderful drawings of things we needed to have a healthy, happy, well sustained "bucket". The children shared many of their experiences and thought about the themes throughout the story, and how things would be very different if this was a modern situation.



We finished up "Jonah and the Whale". We discussed how we trust that God cannot always keep bad things from happening - but God will always be with us.

We dove deep into the Nativity Story, and we are now preparing for our **Christmas Pageant on December 15th**. The children are working together creating costumes and props. The Nativity Story is so important – *and we are very excited for the performance.*

As we head into the Advent Season, we will be exploring the candle meanings and working on some pretty awesome art projects. Can't Wait!!

On an exciting note - for Ayla - and a sad note for our Ministry – Ayla is venturing off to Athens in January for school. She has been such an amazing asset to our Children's Ministry. She is such a bright light downstairs, and we were so lucky to have her help for the past couple years. While we are so joyful for her trip, she will be missed by us all.

Krystal Manuel,  
Riverbend Children's Ministry

**Also:**

**There is a family event scheduled for December 1st after church in the basement. We will be working on our costumes, props, and having a little festive fun along the way.**



## 2024 Maintenance Department Annual Report

On behalf of the maintenance department I would like to wish you all a safe and Happy New Year. This brings up some nostalgia for me which clearly indicates I must be getting old. I still clearly remember everyone being concerned about the year 2000 coming upon us and planning for security for computers as no one seemed sure about what would happen to computer memory in the advent of changing to a new century. And it seems that just a few years have gone by but next year is already 2025!

The following is a list of projects completed by the maintenance department in 2024:

- ◆ Basement floor stripped and waxed.
- ◆ 2 new air conditioning units installed to replace the original units located on the east side of the church.
- ◆ Installed 4 motion sensor floodlights on west side of church. These were installed as a security deterrent after a break in attempt at the E2 school trying to break in through a basement window.
- ◆ Replaced the track lighting bulbs on track lights located on the upper beams at the front of the Sanctuary.
- ◆ Painted both main floor boardrooms.
- ◆ Replaced one parking lot light that was not working.
- ◆ Installed Little Free Pantry on North East corner of the church property. This is being maintained by the Outreach committee.
- ◆ Replaced and installed 14 strings of Christmas lights on the outside trees. All the required extension cords are in place and the outside Christmas lights are now ready to be fired up.
- ◆ Several ongoing general maintenance duties: replace burnt out light bulbs, adjust doors that are not closing properly, tighten loose kitchen taps, minor painting etc.

I would like to thank my fellow maintenance department team members: Marv Severson, Tom Sawyer and Arnold Rumbold for attending our recent maintenance meeting to discuss the 2025 Maintenance Capital Project Budget items. Their input and discussion will ensure that these budget items have been evaluated and put forward to ensure maximum payback of investment.

Respectfully yours,

Don Trenn,  
Facility Manager.

## Some additional photos from an Evening of Marvelous Music



## Winter Health Corner

Greetings everyone. While the days get shorter as we anticipate the arrival of the Christ child, our health continues to be one of the most, if not *the* most important thing we can have. Although the winter months are scant regarding health promotion days, nevertheless, there are some important ones to know...

### December

World AIDS Day: December 1

National Day of Remembrance & Action on Violence against Women: December 6

Human Rights Day: December 10

Anti-Bullying Day: December 17

### January

Alzheimer's Awareness Month

World Braille Day: January 4

Weedless Wednesday: January 24

World Leprosy Day: January 28

### February

National Heart Month

World Cancer Day: February 4

Pink Shirt Day: February 28

I would be remiss if I did not mention one of my favourite days of the entire year, the Winter Solstice. It marks the official start of winter; when the South Pole is tilted closest to the sun, creating the day with the shortest period of daylight and longest night of the year. In Edmonton this year, the solstice begins on Saturday, December 21 at 2:20 AM when Edmonton will only receive 7 hours, 27 minutes, and 40 seconds of daylight on that day. It is only after this time when the days gain a little more daylight each day, hence the reason this day is dear to me.

Speaking of the Winter Solstice and light, the following stanzas and lyrics of some familiar poems and Canadian songs capture these two concepts flawlessly.

From the poems...

### **Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**

"...My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen lake  
The darkest evening of the year..."

~Robert Frost

### **The Hill We Climb**

"...For there is always light,  
if only we're brave enough to see it.  
If only we're brave enough to be it."

~Amanda Gorman

From the songs...

### **Anthem**

"..... Ring the bells that still can ring  
Forget your perfect offering  
There is a crack, a crack in everything  
That's how the light gets in."

~Leonard Cohen

### **Lovers in a Dangerous Time**

"...When you're lovers in a dangerous time  
Sometimes you're made to feel as if your  
love's a crime  
Nothing worth having comes without some  
kind of fight  
Got to kick at the darkness 'til it bleeds  
daylight."

~ Bruce Cockburn

I hope these little bits of poetry and song help to emphasize that there are indeed brighter days ahead for us all...

Peace,  
Dawn

### RUC Word Cloud

During our Whole Community Worship in October, the culmination of the Fall series “Being Church”, the congregation were invited to write a word describing what church means to them on a strip of paper. The strips were then collected, and a paper chain was created. Valerie took that paper chain and with help from Catherine, our office assistant, created a word cloud, which was projected during a service a couple of weeks later. For those unfamiliar, a word cloud takes all the words and the ones that appear most often are shown in the largest font and brightest colours and the words appearing less frequently are in smaller font and less bright colours. Below is the word cloud which was created. Hopefully, this will allow you to study it, at your leisure. Can you spot your word?



### An Update on the RUC Legacy Fund

Submitted by David Olson

In May 2018, the Finance Committee, Official Board, and the Congregation approved a plan for creating a Legacy Fund to be used for stimulating ministry projects in our community that are separate from operations, property maintenance, or the Mission & Service Fund. The Legacy Fund is comprised of two funds, the Opportunity Fund, and the Legacy Fund.

Over the summer and early fall of this year, the initial bequest that established the fund was received and deposited on our behalf with the United Church of Canada Foundation.

The Official Board then struck a committee to manage the fund and the dispersals for projects. Its members are Tom Sawyer, Diane Hawrelak, Jon Spaner, James Allen, and me.

The first of two funds, the Opportunity Fund, will be open for applications to fund projects in early 2025.

The Opportunity Fund supports one-time projects. It has a principal of \$50,000 that will be spent until depleted. The fund can be topped-up to continue to support more projects. Project leaders or managers can apply for up to 50% of the principal available at that moment to support projects that advance the ministries of RUC in its community. It is advised that the applicant(s) discuss their ideas first with the committee or one of its members. Then an application will be required, and the committee will adjudicate it. Applications can be made at any time; the committee will discuss each application at its regular meetings and share its decision with the applicant. Funded projects will require a timeline for completion and a final report describing how well the project worked, its successes, and suggestions for improvement. This information will guide the committee in future project support and advice to project managers. *(continued on page 11)*

## An Update on the RUC Legacy Fund

*(continued from page 10)* The Legacy Fund will be funded by the interest accrued from the invested principal, and I will write more about those projects in 2026 or after two years of interest is realized.

So, you might be asking, “What kind of projects will be supported by the Opportunity Fund? What can I or my group apply for?” Our committee response is to encourage you to DREAM. Dream big dreams about enhancing ministry in our community. Here are some suggested themes or topics you might consider: the environment, youth, young adults/young families, music, a pub night with focused presentations or talks, or other. There are innumerable possibilities within these suggested topics or many others not listed. The Legacy committee will hold information sessions in 2025 and work with congregational members and groups to inform, stimulate, and solicit your ideas for worthy projects.

The Opportunity Fund will promote new leadership within the congregation, new excitement, and increase the awareness of the presence and ministry of RUC in its community.

## All Our Advent Events

Here, at a glance, are all the upcoming events taking place around the church during this season of Advent which give us the opportunity to share fellowship in different ways. The Advent devotional is available on the church website, along with a link to the Advent playlist. Hard copies of the devotional can be found in the narthex.

### Upcoming Events

Sundays  
9:30 a.m.

**Book Study:** *The First Christmas: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Birth* by Borg and Crossan

Sunday, December 1  
4:00 p.m.

**Blue Christmas Service**  
*A meditative service honouring grief*

Sunday, December 8  
11:45 a.m.

**Ease the Burden Workshop**  
*End of Life planning session*

Sunday, December 15  
10:30 a.m.

**Children's Christmas Program**

Sunday, December 15  
4:00 p.m.

**Community Christmas Carol Sing**

Tuesday, December 24

**Christmas Eve Candlelight Services**

- \* 5:00 p.m. Choir and John Tessier, soloist
- \* 6:30 p.m. Choir and Handbells
- \* 8:00 p.m. Holy Communion



### Did You Know?

Did you know that we have a commemorative garden here at Riverbend United Church? Don't go searching outside (especially in these colder winter months), because you won't find it there. Our commemorative garden is inside, on the wall leading to the coffee area. If you look you will see a wooden tree, with leaves on the branches, framed with scripture from the book of Genesis, "*The Lord God planted a garden*". This was a fundraising initiative during the building of the new addition, with members of the congregation able to purchase a leaf to be added to the tree in commemoration of a loved one, celebration of an anniversary, or new member of the family.



### Chili and Games Night

In early October, the Turkey Team hosted a re-imagined "fall feast" - an intergenerational dinner with chili, cornbread, and of course our fabulous pie buffet. Following the meal, some folks broke into groups for a variety of games. Two 'turkeys', Jill and Diane, shut down the place with a rousing game of bridge. Thanks to all who attended, the bakers who contributed the pies for dessert, and of course the chief cooks and bottle washers - the Turkey Team.



**R**iverbend 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: 21 February 2025***