

THE FRONT PEW

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

Spring 2025 – Volume 23 Number 1

Everything In Between: Lent, 2025 at RUC – Valerie Oden

This Lenten journey is produced by “A Sanctified Art” group and affirmed by the Spiritual Formation Committee

Our Lenten series this year explores how Jesus’ ministry disrupted the established social, political, and religious divides of his time. Jesus intentionally pointed out cultural and political extremes to emphasize the radical, inclusive, and surprising love of God. When we look at the parables recorded in Luke’s Gospel in their historical and cultural context, we see how they mirror the divisions many of us experience in our families, churches, and communities today.

Our theme, *“Everything In Between,”* invites us to navigate the polarities in our lives with more faith, intention, and openness to be transformed. Each weekly sub-theme explores two *supposed* binaries, like “faith & works,” or “rest & growth,” or “grief & hope.” We often consider these ideas to be opposing. However, as we explore these concepts within the scriptures, we find nuance and complexity. We find that these dichotomies are false. We might begin to see a full spectrum instead of black and white. We might find that God is present in between.

And so, this season, we invite you to look beyond black and white binaries and easy answers. We encourage you to notice the dichotomies that define our lives, but also imagine where God might be meeting us beyond the categories we create. This Lent, we’re trusting that God shows up in shades of grey, rainbow hues, and everywhere in between.

We will be guided in our journey by the theologians and artists in ministry who comprise *A Sanctified Art* organization: www.sanctifiedart.org. Will you join us on this special Lenten journey?

Special Guest March 30th

Please join us on Sunday, March 30th as the Very Reverend Jordan Cantwell joins us as our special guest preacher in worship. In addition to being an inspiring presence and speaker, Jordan was Moderator of the United Church 2015-2018 and currently serves as the Growth Animator for the Prairie Regions of the United Church.



Lenten Devotional

Beginning with Ash Wednesday, March 5th, this weekly devotional follows the scriptures of the *Everything In Between* series through Easter Sunday. Each week, the devotional offers commentary through poetry, visual art, written reflections, hymns, and reflection prompts.

Our friends at A Sanctified Art have provided a special e-reader version of this year's Lenten devotional, which you can access on your computer and mobile devices:

online.flippingbook.com/view/676218946/

In order to protect their work, please refrain from sharing this link or posting it on social media.

A few printed copies are also available in the narthex.



Lenten Conversations

Join us Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m. March 16th through to April 13th in the Chapel for reflection and conversation. We'll use the Lenten Devotional described above as our springing off point for discussion. See the link above for the digital version. A few hard copies are also available in the narthex.

Lenten Daily Cards

Would you like to receive a brief daily email throughout Lent that includes a question for your spiritual journey and a prayer? These are produced by Sanctified Art and they are part of our all-church Lenten Program, *Everything In Between*. The daily emails will be sent by Valerie beginning Ash Wednesday, March 5th. If you would like to receive these, send an email by Monday, March 3rd to valerie@riverbendunited.org.

Lenten Steps

Some years ago, we had a health component of our Lenten Journey guided by Dr. Joanne Olson. Part of that program was setting a *step goal* for the day. Let's re-ignite this for Lent this year! Set your goal and let's walk. As a Lenten discipline, consider the in-between-space of each step: you're leaving the old behind and welcoming the new, step by step. With Easter so late this year, it *should* be a warm Lent for getting out and about. You can also participate by sitting in a chair and lifting your legs or arms to meet your goal. If you want some accountability and partnership for this, you can put your name on the "Lenten Steps" list in the narthex. Then we'll know we are not alone on those rainy days.

Pancakes and Ashes Tuesday March 4th

Please join us as we begin our Lenten journey on **Tuesday, March 4th** - rather than having pancakes on Shrove Tuesday and a service on Ash Wednesday, we will combine both celebrations into one evening. At **5.30 p.m.** a pancake supper with sausage, fruit and, of course, pancakes will be offered by the Turkey Team. After supper, there will be an *Imposition of the Ashes* service at **6:30 p.m.** We'll gather upstairs for a few hymns, prayer, scriptures, and remember our dependence on the divine for our very lives. The service will last around half an hour and will be led by Valerie Oden, Doug Spaner, and Sherry Steele.

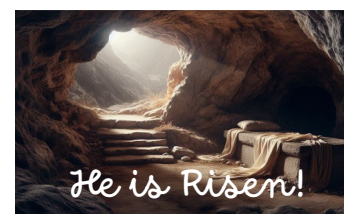
Pancakes: 5:30 p.m.

Imposition of the Ashes: 6:30 p.m.



Easter Sunday

Join us on Sunday, April 20th as we celebrate the risen Christ at 10:30 a.m.!



AED Defibrillator

Did you know that RUC has a wall-mounted AED defibrillator available in case of emergency? It is wall mounted, and located to the right of the double doors on the main floor. Have a look at it the next time you walk by!

Affirming News



In this issue of the Front Pew, we want to highlight the Pride Centre of Edmonton, <https://pridecentreofedmonton.ca/> and the resources it provides in our community. The following paragraph is on the home page of the centre:

“The Pride Centre of Edmonton provides a non-judgmental, welcoming space where people of all attractions, identities, and expressions can be themselves, find support, meet new people, and be part of a caring community. The Centre offers resources, counselling, and sensitive and expert information and referrals for those seeking support. The Centre also organizes programs that prioritize Queer Joy to help improve the social, mental, and physical health of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.”

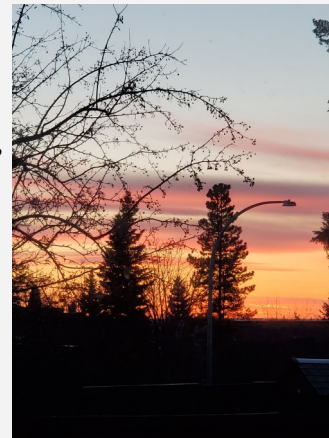
On the website, you will find the drop-in schedule, with options for adult-only, youth-only and general drop-ins together with many resources, ranging from youth resources to resources for refugees and newcomers and everything in between, as well as links to several other community groups.

We hope that you will check out the website where you will find a wealth of information.

Sunrise, Sunset.... Submitted by Carolyn Miller

Our final Whole Community Worship before we enjoy the summer will be on April 27th and, as has become tradition, once again we will celebrate Creation and how amazing it is.

Where to start? Well I am sure you will agree, there is something magical about sunrises and sunsets. You never know what colour or combination of colours, the sky will be painted, or what shapes and patterns the clouds will make. Planning for the service is underway, and I hope there will be an opportunity in the service to enjoy sunrises and sunsets together as a faith community and for that I need



YOU! I am looking for photographs of sunrises and sunsets that I can put into a slideshow to use in the service. If you have a photograph you would like included please email it to either myself or the church office by March 30th. As always, please feel free to chat to me if you have any questions.

Thanks,
Carolyn

P.S. If you would like to read a short verse during the worship please let me know as I will need several volunteers.

Garage Sale Coming Up!

MAY 8, 9 & 10 – SAVE THE DATES!

Yes, it's only 2 months until our annual garage sale! Please keep us in mind as you start to gather items to

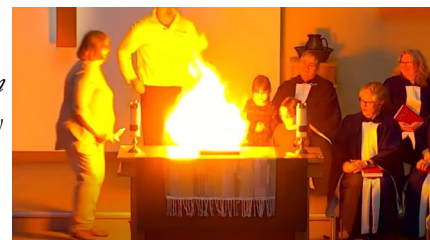


donate. **Donations** will be accepted starting **Sunday, May 4** – you can bring them to church with you.

We'll also be looking for volunteers to help with the set-up and take-down on Sunday, May 4 and Saturday, May 10. Please keep us in mind, and enter those dates in your calendar. More details to come – and thank you for your ongoing support.

Mortgage Burning

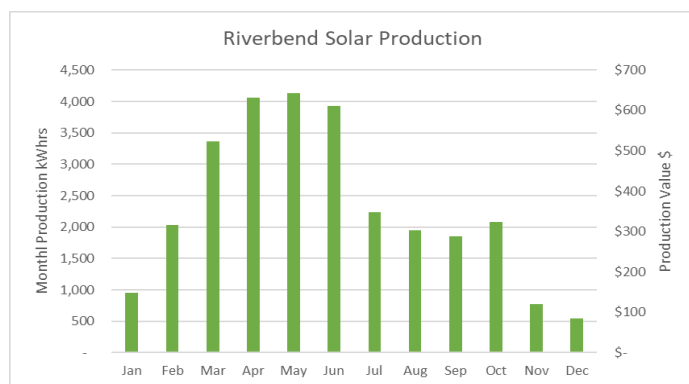
On Sunday, February 9th, we officially burned our mortgage (*as you can see from the picture, the flames got pretty high!*) at the end of our worship service. We were blessed to have Rev. Don



Koots, our minister when we went through the discernment process on whether to build or not, in our midst to offer the Benediction. After worship a time of fellowship was enjoyed, with hot dogs, fire, and sharing stories. We are grateful to all the volunteers responsible for the gathering and look forward to this new mortgage-free chapter in the life of RUC. If you missed this service, you can still watch it on our YouTube channel.

Solar Panels

The solar panels are quietly working away, saving us money and helping us Live with Respect in Creation. In 2024 we saved about \$4338 on our power bills of \$8,353 and received \$971 for selling our carbon credits. In comparison, our annual power bill pre-solar panel varied between \$12-\$13,000. The revenue/savings from our solar panels more than funds either our Children’s Ministry or our Youth Ministry.

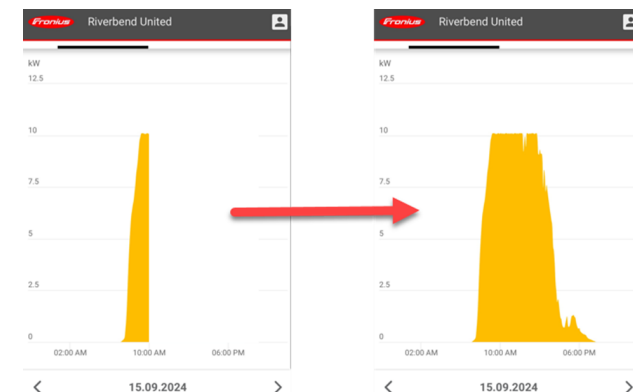


The energy from the solar panels does one of two things:

- Reduces our power purchases from the grid. This is the best as we save the cost of power.
- Transfers to the grid when we consume less power than we receive. In this case, we get paid about 0.08 per kilowatt hour, which is credited to our account.

In spring 2024 I was looking at our energy bills and could not find the actual credits! I called Epcor (power retailer) about this and they said that while the system was correctly connected to the grid, they never received start-up documents from Epcor (distribution provider). Yes, the right hand didn’t know what the left hand was doing. We got that fixed and recovered about \$5000 that they never credited us. So call that my win which might offset my error...

Now a trained eye will notice that the power production tapered off starting in July (in the diagram to the left) and you might think isn’t that the sunniest month? You are right and this was my fault. My habit is to stroll into church on Sunday and check the solar production, but I was away for a chunk of that summer. I would see pictures like this:



and think to myself that all is good; however, since I was checking around 10:20 a.m., I was actually missing our peak production.

Our solar panels make DC (direct current) power, like batteries, which the inverters change into AC power (alternating current) that our building and everything else works on. Our problem had to do with the connection between the two inverters on our system.

The two inverters work in tandem: when the first one reaches maximum capacity, the extra DC power flows into the second inverter. That second inverter had an issue that was missed. It is now fixed; I have set up our account to send me an automatic email warning when something goes wrong!

Submitted by Matthew Schoenhardt.

Sign-Up Sheets

Just a reminder that you will find a number of sign-up sheets looking for volunteers on a Sunday morning in the Narthex. You can sign up to be a lay leader, meaning you lead the call to worship, opening prayer, and read the scripture. If you prefer something outside of the service itself, we are always looking for people to sign up as greeters. As the word suggests you greet everyone arriving and ensure they have a bulletin, usually while exchanging a few words. It’s a great way to get to know people. Just before the service starts you put the offering plate in the office and shut the door. We hope you will consider these volunteer opportunities.

Annual Sock Toss

The Outreach Committee is again having a drive for **new** socks for adults and children. Please practice your hook shots, lay-ups, and dunks and bring lots of pairs of warm, **new** socks to church to toss on **March 9th**. Don't worry if you can't make it that day, you will be able to drop off socks at the church office for approximately 10 days after the sock toss. Last year we collected over 560 pairs of new socks, can we collect even more this year?



All socks will be taken to the Bissell Centre, the Mustard Seed, and Hope Mission who will ensure they get to needy people living in the inner city.

Mark Your Calendars!

The congregation of a pastoral charge must meet at least annually, and this year RUC's Annual General Meeting will take place immediately after worship on Sunday, **March 23rd, 2025**. You will be able to access the Annual Report before the meeting (keep an eye on the announcements to let you know when it's available) and we hope you will look at it to see all the activities around RUC in 2024.

This meeting is your opportunity to comment and ask questions so please join us.

Christmas Eve Offering

As many of you know, part of the Christmas Eve offering is donated to the *No Room in the Inn* (an ecumenical justice housing initiative) campaign, which in 2024 was supporting **Youth Empowerment & Support Services (YESS)** to replace the roof on their Whyte Ave. facility. In recent years we have also donated to initiatives in our immediate community. This year the Official Board voted to donate \$1000 to the *No Room in the Inn* campaign and the same amount to RUC's food pantry. As has become apparent the food pantry is well-used, is needed in the community, and is one way to show love for our neighbour. These donations are only possible because of the generosity of everyone who attended Christmas Eve worship. Thank you.

Children's Ministry

This winter was a very busy time for our Children's Ministry, and we are now excited for Spring!

As we journey through Lent, we will be following a skit-based children's curriculum focusing on Luke's Gospel. We plan to explore scripture skits, where the children will get opportunities to act out, or table read, different bible stories. The children will be creating props and completing activities pertaining to each story.

There will be visual journal reflections with their thoughts about making decisions, a this or that concept. We will be exploring the choices we make everyday, and why we make them. Are we influenced? Is the right decision always our first choice?

I am planning to have a prayer workshop for the older children; to build the language of prayer and discover what is weighing in their hearts and heads...and, of course, my favourite, Lenten Bingo while we bake. We bake Resurrection Rolls and play Bingo while we wait for our delicious treat.

In addition, there will also be some take home activities for families to complete together. Emails will be sent out to families closer to the date. If you would like to be included in our Children's Ministry e-mail list, please let me know.

Krystal Manuel
Riverbend Children's Ministry

Did You Know?

Did you know that the banner which can be found on the first page of each issue of the *Front Pew* was created to commemorate our faith community becoming an Affirming congregation? There is, however, more to the banner than you may see at first glance as, before the leaves on the banner were put together, we were invited to write our initials on a leaf.

This was just another small way to reinforce our commitment of being a safe space for all.



Spring Health Corner

Greetings everyone and welcome to another edition of Health Corner. This edition, we will be concentrating on health events occurring in March, April and May which are the busiest times of the year for health promotion occasions. Since there are so many events to cover, I will just highlight the more common ones.

March

Epilepsy Awareness Month
 National Social Work Month
 Nutrition Month
 World Hearing Day: March 3
 International Women's Day: March 8
 World Water Day: March 22
 World Tuberculosis Day: March 24

April

IBS Awareness Month
 Parkinson Awareness Month
 National Organ and Tissue Awareness Week: April 18 to 24
 World Autism Awareness Day: April 2
 World Health Day: April 7
 World Hemophilia Day: April 17
 EASTER, April 20

May

Celiac Awareness Month
 Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month
 Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month
 National Nursing Week: May 12 to 18
 International Nurses Day: May 12
 World Hypertension Day: May 17
 World No Tobacco Day: May 31

My favourite holiday of the year is Easter. There are many reasons for this...the weather is starting to improve compared to the long, dark, cold months of winter. Easter is more of a celebration and has less pressure involved in it than the stress-filled, perfection-seeking, and busyness of Christmas. Easter is fun, breezy, and filled with sweet treats and vibrant colours.

The date we celebrate Easter changes from year to year. Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the Vernal Equinox, and thus takes place annually between 22 March and 25 April.



Fun Fact...Easter is the second best-selling candy holiday in North America after Halloween! When I was thinking about Easter, my mind went to chocolate and the Easter Bunny, and I wondered to myself why Easter is associated with rabbits, eggs, and chocolate. Well, according to some sources, the Easter bunny first arrived in North America in the 1700s with German immigrants who settled in Pennsylvania and brought their tradition of an egg-laying hare called "Osterhase" or "Oschter Haws." Their children made nests in which this creature could lay its coloured eggs so the children could find them on Easter morning.

The largest Easter egg in Canada is a pysanka, a Ukrainian-style Easter egg sculpture in Vegreville. It was created in 1975 to pay homage to the Ukrainian immigrants in that region. It is 31 feet long and weighs 5512 pounds!



The egg, an ancient symbol of new life, has long been associated with pagan festivals celebrating Spring. From a Christian perspective, Easter eggs are said to represent Jesus' emergence from the tomb and resurrection. Decorating eggs for Easter is a tradition that dates to at least the 13th century. One explanation for this custom is that eggs were formerly a forbidden food during Lent, so people would paint and decorate them to mark the end of the period of penance and fasting, then eat them on Easter as a celebration.

The first chocolate Easter eggs were made in Europe in the early 19th century with France and Germany taking the lead in this new artistic confectionery. A type of eating chocolate had been invented a few years earlier, but it could not be successfully moulded. *(continued on page 7)*

Spring Health Corner *(continued from page 6)*

John Cadbury made his first Cadbury Easter Eggs in 1875. The modern chocolate Easter egg with its smoothness, shape and flavour owes its progression to the two greatest developments in the history of chocolate - the invention of a press for separating cocoa butter from the cocoa bean by the Dutch inventor Van Houten in 1828 and the introduction of a pure cocoa by Cadbury Brothers in 1866. The Cadbury process made large quantities of cocoa butter available, and this was the secret of making moulded chocolate or indeed, any fine eating chocolate.

The earliest Cadbury chocolate eggs were made of dark chocolate with a plain smooth surface and were filled with sugary sweets. The earliest decorated eggs were plain shells enhanced by chocolate piping and marzipan flowers.

The launch in 1905 of the famous Cadbury's Dairy Milk Chocolate made a tremendous contribution to the Easter egg market. The popularity of this new kind of chocolate vastly increased sales of Easter eggs and did much to establish them as seasonal best sellers. Today the Easter egg market is predominantly milk chocolate, much to my joy.



Finally, just a friendly reminder that the clocks “spring ahead” on Sunday, March 9 at 2:00 a.m.; this will certainly make our evenings a little brighter. Speaking of light, the Vernal Equinox occurs here in Edmonton on Thursday, March 20 at 3:01 a.m. This is the first day of Spring and the time when the tilt of the Earth (with respect to the Sun) is 0° and because of the Earth’s tilt, or rather lack thereof, the amount of daylight compared to darkness on this day is almost equal. For us in the Northern Hemisphere, the Vernal Equinox brings earlier sunrises and later sunsets...Yay!

Wishing you all a very happy and healthy Spring!

Peace,
Dawn

2025 Property and Maintenance Report

The following are planned capital expenses projected by the Maintenance Department for 2025:

- * Basement floor stripped, waxed and polished
- * Narthex, Sanctuary, Chapel, main level kitchen area and hallway carpet cleaned
- * Basement area repainted
- * Front stairwell repainted
- * Sewer line inspected
- * Roof inspected and repairs done as required
- * Two large Spruce trees to be removed and replaced
- * Three furnaces in the old furnace room to be replaced

- * Church sign on the east side of the building to be repainted and have landscaping upgraded

These are the planned capital expenses, and we are hopeful that our proactive actions will reduce the opportunity for any additional capital expense requirements. There will still be the requirement for the ongoing maintenance expenses, such as changing lightbulbs, light ballasts, ceiling tiles, paint touch-ups, lawn mowing, parking lot maintenance, janitorial supplies, funeral and celebration set-ups, furnace maintenance, etc. We are striving to keep this aging building in a very presentable condition so it can be enjoyed by all.

Respectfully yours,
Don Trenn
Property and Maintenance Director

Riverbend United Church hosts Northern Spirit Region Annual General Meeting

The Northern Spirit Regional Council is “a collection of Communities of Faith serving in northeastern British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, and northern Alberta, united in bringing God’s hope, peace, joy and love to our part of God’s creation”. Riverbend United Church belongs to this Regional Council, and our representative, Jill Spaner attends NSRC meetings.

The NSRC holds Annual General Meetings to conduct the business of the Council, and in 2024 the AGM was held virtually. The last in-person AGM was held in Camrose, Alberta from May 4 to 7, 2023.

In 2025, the NSRC Annual General Meeting will be held at Riverbend United Church from May 29th to June 1st. Riverbend United is excited to host this important gathering of over 120+ representatives from many communities of faith across the Region.

A Planning Committee for this AGM has been established, and the members are:

- Rev. Valerie Oden, Lead Minister;
- Jill Spaner, Northern Spirit Council Representative;

- Diane Trenn, Congregational Coordinator; and
- Jacqueline Hunt, Office Manager.

The Planning Committee is currently focused on clarifying the Region’s requirements in terms of space, audio-visual and technical requirements and expectations around hosting. We’ve recently received a draft Agenda for the AGM and are identifying plenary and breakout rooms for the 3 day session.

In addition, the Region will be leading a worship service on Sunday, June 1st for AGM attendees as well as members of Riverbend United Church.

Please stay tuned for more details and the specific ways that members of Riverbend United Church can help with this exciting opportunity to showcase our vibrant, engaged and growing United Church.

Jacqueline Hunt
Office Manager



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: 23 May 2025