

THE FRONT PEW

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

Summer 2025 – Volume 23 Number 2



Sunday, June 8

100th Anniversary Celebration

We'll honour the 100th Anniversary of the United Church of Canada in worship at 10:30 a.m., followed by fellowship with ice cream. That afternoon, the Edmonton Area Cluster of United Churches will gather at Fort Edmonton Park for more anniversary festivities, including ice cream under the Big Top tent at 3:00 p.m. and a watch party of the national service, streamed live from Gower Street United Church in St. John's, Newfoundland. That service begins at 3:30 Edmonton time. Admission discount is provided for United Church members. All are welcome.

Sunday, June 15

Rev. Dr. Catherine MacLean

Catherine will share with us about the United Church Centennial initiative called *A Place at the Table*. This national project includes a reenactment of DaVinci's *The Last Supper*, celebrating the diversity of the United Church as we move into the future welcoming all.

Sunday, June 29

Choir-Led Hymn Sing

This Hymn Sing Sunday is sure to complete the season in joyous fashion! Let Paula know in advance if you have a request!

Sundays in July

RUC worships at St. Paul's

Beginning July 6th and throughout July, the people of Riverbend United will worship at St. Paul's United Church at 10:30 a.m. In August, the people of St. Paul's UC will worship here with us. St. Paul's birthed Riverbend in the mid-1980s and the two churches are in growing partnership.

St. Paul's United Church
11526 76 Ave NW, Edmonton



Valerie's Reveries

I only have two words: Thank you.

Okay, I have more words. But "Thank you" sums it up! We are in a beautifully busy season in the life of the church, and the way the congregation has stepped up is awe-inspiring. So much commitment you've shown. So much time you've given. So many talents you've offered. So much love you've shared.

I pray this summer is refreshing to all. Breathe, enjoy, relax.

Peace friends,

Valerie

Meet our Official Board Chair

As the incoming Board Chair, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. I am a retired schoolteacher who loves to read and listen to educational podcasts. I have been a yoga enthusiast for years, attending retreats in Mexico and on the West Coast. I have 3 sons and 3 grandsons with a fourth on the way. Certainly, a male-dominated family!



I have been a member of Riverbend United Church for over 35 years. I joined the congregation before our building was even constructed. In the past, I have co-chaired the Board, chaired the Worship committee, headed a team to hire a new minister and inspected the church furnaces in a hard hat as a part of the maintenance committee. I am currently a lead with the Walkers and Talkers. Some would say that I am well suited to that title.

Why did I agree to be the Board Chair? I am interested in learning about the current policies of our church. I would also like to play a part in determining our future endeavours. I am here to serve you. I look forward to meeting you and providing any assistance you may need.

Patti Hunter

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 have a slightly different format to last year, as you will read.

JULY

July services will be hosted by St. Paul's United (11526 76 Ave NW), with worship led by their ministerial staff; however, this year, RUC will provide the lay leader each Sunday to read scripture and take part in the service as invited by the worship leader. **There will be no Sunday service in our church building.**

AUGUST

August services will be hosted by RUC at our church. The service will be led by Rev. Valerie, but this time, the lay leader will be a member of St Paul's. As hosts, we will need greeters to welcome everyone 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 deepen our connection (or connect for the first time) with the congregation of St. Paul's (our birthing church).

Ice Cream!

On June 8th, we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of the United Church of Canada. After the service we will serve ice cream, and we hope you will stay to enjoy a cool treat and share stories as we celebrate this milestone event.



Meet our New Staff

We recently welcomed two new staff members to this community of faith. In March, we hired Nathan Schoenhardt as our new Youth Ministry Coordinator and Alec Gallant as our new Children's Ministry Coordinator. We are blessed to have them take on these very important roles and hope you will support them in their endeavours.

Alec Gallant

Hello Everyone,

For those of you I haven't had the chance to meet yet—hello and bonjour! My name is Alec Gallant (they/them), and I'm excited to introduce myself as the new Children's Ministry Coordinator here at Riverbend. Although I've been with the church since March, I wanted to take a moment to properly say hello and share a little more about who I am.

I'm originally from Alma, Prince Edward Island, though I like to say I'm from Tignish, as I spent much of my childhood there with my cousins. I'm the oldest of four siblings—I have two younger brothers and a sister—and our family includes my amazing parents, who will be celebrating 25 years of marriage this fall.

I'm a big animal lover, and back home you'll find our family dog, Gus (short for GusGus), who we think is a Labrador mix, along with my sister's cats, Garfield and Maple.

I moved to Edmonton nearly a year ago to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Secondary Education, with the goal of becoming a junior high or high school teacher. I also hold a degree in Journalism from the University of King's College in Halifax. When I'm not planning children's ministry lessons, I stay busy as Vice-President of Student Life with the Education Students' Association and working at Rogers Place.

My partner Jacob and I are looking forward to getting to know all of you better and becoming a deeper part of this wonderful faith community at Riverbend.

Warmly,
Alec

Nathan Schoenhardt

My name is Nathan Schoenhardt, and I've been serving as the youth leader here at Riverbend United since March. I'm currently finishing Grade 12, and this fall I'll be starting my first year of engineering at Campus Saint-Jean, the University of Alberta's French campus. Outside of church, I enjoy playing sports like curling and soccer, and I also play trombone in my school band.



Riverbend United has been a big part of my life — I grew up in this community and was both baptized and confirmed here. Youth Group is and has been a huge part of my life growing up, and I'm super excited to now take on a role in helping it flourish.

Youth Group Update

On Sundays, I lead discussions with the youth during the service downstairs. It's been a lot of fun organizing events this spring — some highlights include bowling, a DIY escape room, and biblical cake making.

I can't wait to do all I can to help the program grow. All are welcome — and if you know youth in your life, please encourage them to come check out one of our events!

Farewell Krystal

On May 4th, we said farewell to Krystal Manuel as our Children's Ministry Coordinator. For the past five years Krystal led the program with enthusiasm and innovative ideas, nurturing our children's faith. We are blessed to have had her leadership and thank her for sharing her time and talents with us. Her dedication to our Children's Ministry was appreciated by all the parents and church leadership.

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

Matthew 18:20

Care Team

submitted by Holly Ruryk, Care Team Coordinator

The Care Team has been actively reaching out to our Riverbend family through ongoing phone calls, visits and even lunch outings. Their dedication continues to be a meaningful source of connection within our community.

As fall approaches, we're planning to offer some informative sessions to support and engage our congregation. If you have any ideas for topics or any concerns you'd like to share, please reach out to me or contact the church office.

Recently, the Care Team joined with the wonderful group that provides luncheons for funerals at the church to enjoy a lovely spring high tea, hosted by Diane Trenn and myself. We even brought out fancy tea cups and had such a delightful time of fellowship and appreciation.



100th Anniversary Hearts

As part of RUC's celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the United Church of Canada, we have created 100 packages of two prayer hearts - one crocheted, one knitted (*thank you Crafting Group!*) - along with a short message. These small bags will be placed around our neighbourhood parks and surrounding communities for people to discover and keep. You may be wondering why there will be two hearts in each package - the idea is that the finder of the surprise will keep one heart, and the message will encourage them to spread the love further by sharing the second heart with someone they know. Our RUC walking groups will help to put them into the community and there will be some packages available on June 8th for you to pick up and place near where you live. Keep an eye on the announcements for more information.



Affirming News

This year Edmonton is celebrating the Summer of Pride, which runs from May 30th to August 24th. You can find details on the PrideEdmonton website, which continues to add events as more information becomes available <https://prideedmonton.ca/summer-of-pride-2025/>.

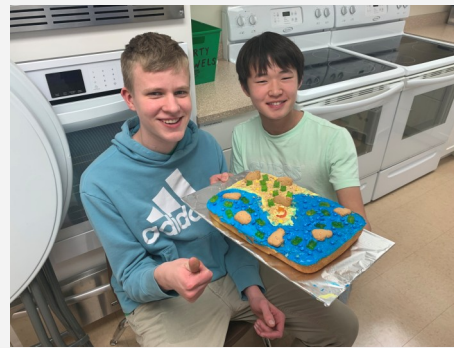


On **May 30th**, RUC will host *From the Heart: understanding the impacts of AB's anti-transgender laws* from 7 pm to 9 pm as part of the Northern Spirit Regional Council annual meeting. This event is open to the public, and you can attend in person or watch via a livestream. We will hear from several speakers about the impact on their lives of Bills 26, 28 and 29, and learn, together, how to take action in support of gender-diverse people. We invite you to come with open hearts and minds and hear their stories, no matter your opinion on the legislation.

Youth Group - Biblical Cake Making



A highlight in the youth calendar for many years has been the Biblical Cake making, and this year was no exception. Cakes were baked, frosting and sprinkles applied, and the finished creations were shared with everyone after church the following day. Fun for the youth and fellowship for the congregation... a great combination. The cakes depicted bible stories found in the book of Exodus, namely, Moses parting the Red Sea and the Israelites following the Pillars of Cloud and Fire.



Children's Ministry Update - Spring 2025

Hello Riverbend Family,

I'm excited to share a quick update from the Children's Ministry! Since officially stepping into the coordinator role this past March, I've fully transitioned into the position - and I've been having an absolute blast with the kids ever since!

We've already shared some fun and meaningful moments together. Our Easter Sunday celebration was a hit, with a joyful Easter egg hunt that brought smiles all around. On Mother's Day, the children helped brighten the day by handing our flowers to all the wonderful moms in our congregation.

Looking ahead, we have even more to look forward to! On **June 8th**, we'll be throwing a **Big Church Birthday Party** downstairs. I have also a small but thoughtful activity planned for **Father's Day** to help the children honour the dads and father figures in their lives.

Behind the scenes, I've selected our **curriculum for the fall** and have already begun planning for the year ahead. I can't wait to continue growing this ministry and walking alongside our youngest members in faith, fun, and learning.

Thank you all for your continued support and encouragement - it means the world to both me and the kids!

With joy,

Alec Gallant (they/them)

Children's Ministry Coordinator

Summer Health Corner

Greetings to all and welcome to the summer edition of Health Corner. To announce the arrival of the new summer season, the Summer Solstice greets us this year in Edmonton on Friday, June 20 at 8:42 pm. The word “solstice” comes from Latin solstitium - from sol (sun) and stitium (still or stopped). During that day, the sun reaches its highest position in the sky and we receive the longest period of daylight of the entire year: 17 hours, 2 minutes, and 44 seconds this year. After that Friday, our days begin to shorten, losing a few seconds of daylight daily until the Winter Solstice in December.

The summer months bring the fewest health events but perhaps the most depressing ones...ALS, glioblastoma, hepatitis, and overdose. It does not sound uplifting, does it?

However, not all events occurring in the summer are disheartening. For example, June 6 is National Doughnut Day as this sweet treat is always celebrated the first Friday in June. Last year, the best-selling doughnut in Canada was the Apple Fritter. However, certain parts of Canada have their different favourites. The Maritimes have an affinity for the Boston Cream while the Honey Cruller is tops in Quebec.

July is National Ice Cream Month. According to statistics, Canadians prefer chocolate ice cream over vanilla regarding flavour, but vanilla is always the perennial best seller. These two favourites are followed in popularity by the flavours of mint chocolate chip, maple walnut, butterscotch, cookie dough, cookies & cream, strawberry, and Moose Tracks.

August is National Dog Month. Did you know that the most popular breed of dog in Canada is the Labrador Retriever? According to the Canadian Kennel Club, this breed is followed closely by the Golden Retriever, German Shepherd, French Bulldog, Poodle, Australian Shepherd, Havanese, Shetland Sheepdog, Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, and the Portuguese Water Dog. These beloved breeds are literally from all over the world! So, please pay special attention to your furry friends this August and maybe give them an extra treat, scratch behind the ear, or a belly rub.

A list of health events recognized this summer are...

June

Pride Month

ALS Awareness Month

World Environment Day: June 5

National Doughnut Day: June 6

National Health and Fitness Day: June 7

World Peace & Prayer Day: June 21



July

National Ice Cream Month

National Injury Prevention Day: July 7

Glioblastoma Awareness Day: July 17

International Self-Care Day: July 24

World Hepatitis Day: July 28



August

National Dog Month

Gastroparesis Awareness Month

International Youth Day: August 12

World Humanitarian Day: August 19

International Overdose Awareness Day: August 31



The dog days of summer refer to weeks between July 3 and August 11. These are usually the hottest days of summer. They are called dog days not because the temperature can make you pant like a dog but because these days were named after the Dog Star Sirius, which rises around this time. Sirius is the brightest star in the night sky. The name means "glowing" in Greek; a fitting description as only a few planets, the full moon, and the International Space Station outshine this star.



That is about it for this edition of Health Corner. I hope you all continue to shine throughout the summer, and I will “see” everyone back here in the fall.

Peace,
Dawn

Garage Sale Update

This year's garage sale was a tremendous success- thanks to all of you!

We are incredibly grateful to the many volunteers who gave their time and energy throughout the week. From setting up and taking down tables, to sorting, pricing, assisting on sale days and helping with the final cleanup - your hard work made all the difference.

You've heard it before, but it's worth repeating: **many hands make light work.**

And this team proved it once again.

It was a true joy to work alongside each of you every day. Your dedication and teamwork helped us reach an amazing total of **\$6,500.00!**

Submitted by Janet Pattison and Holly Ruryk

Garage Sale Co-Coordinators

(Some great photos from the garage sale setup - the FP Team)

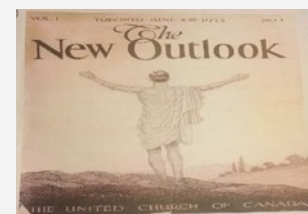


United Church of Canada Celebrates 100 years!

Thanks to Gayle Simonson for this content. Gayle is a lay member of the United Church at Southminster Steinhauer in Edmonton, an experienced history researcher, and a writer who has written for historical journals and UCC publications.

As western Canada was settled, communities sprang up but populations remained sparse. It was difficult to sustain a church congregation, so many churches of different denominations came together to form union churches. As the idea spread, denominations were encouraged to look at amalgamation. By 1925, Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists had agreed and the United Church of Canada was formed by an act of parliament. Not all Presbyterian congregations agreed to join.

The Basis of Union to form the United Church of Canada was signed in 1925. Methodist Louise McKinney, an activist who was the first woman to sit in the Alberta legislature, was one of only four women to sign and the only one from western Canada. Along with Henrietta Muir Edwards, Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby and Emily Murphy, she was one of the "Famous Five" who, in 1929, had women in Canada declared as "Persons."



Before Union, each denomination had its own printing business to produce news and resources. Ryerson Press, the Methodist church publishing business, boasted "the most completely equipped printing and binding plant in Canada." Its *Christian Guardian* dated to 1829, *The Presbyterian Witness* to 1848, and *The Congregationalist* to 1854. At union they combined to form *The New Outlook*. In 1938, merged with two other United Church publications, it was renamed the *United Church Observer*. That name was recently changed to *Broadview*. It remains the oldest continuously published magazine in North America and the second oldest in the English-speaking world.

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!

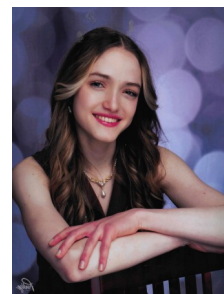
Ayla Sevigny

Ayla was born February 24, 2002 at the Grey Nuns Hospital in Edmonton. She moved to Regina, Saskatchewan when she was two years old and attended Ecole Massey and Campbell Collegiate until 2017 when she returned to Edmonton. Ayla started University in 2020 and is graduating from the University of Alberta with an honours degree in political science. She will be crossing the stage at Convocation on June 12! In the fall she will begin her graduate degree in political science at the University of Uppsala in Sweden. Ayla was a committed Sunday School teacher here at RUC until recently when she moved abroad for her studies, and she is the only person both baptized and confirmed by Rev. Valerie in her ministry career. Ayla's chosen confirmation scripture came from Matthew 6.



Annika Schoenhardt

Annika was both baptized and confirmed here at RUC and is a familiar face on Sunday mornings. She is musically very gifted and in addition to singing, she plays flute, violin, and piano and is an integral member of the Ensemble. She is also a very talented composer and we have been lucky enough to hear some of her compositions here at RUC. Annika has been selected for the Edmonton Symphony Young Composers Project and her work will be premiered next season. She will be graduating high school and in the fall attending the University of Alberta, pursuing a Bachelor of Commerce with a minor in music. Annika selected verses from Psalm 108 as her confirmation scripture.



Graduates 2025

During worship on May 11th, 2025, we acknowledged the graduates highlighted on this page. However, we know that there are many among the congregation who also have family members and friends who have reached the milestone of graduating from either high school or university, some of whom were lifted up during joys and concerns in the same worship service. We offer congratulations to everyone who is graduating and wish them much success as they move on to life's next adventures.

Nathan Schoenhardt

Nathan was both baptized and confirmed here at RUC and recently took on the role of Youth Group leader. You can read more on his hobbies and interests in our *"meet the new staff"* on page 3. In the summer he works as a camp counsellor, and also helps out with the family bee-keeping business, which results in delicious honey for us in the fall! Nathan graduates high school and will be pursuing an engineering degree at Campus Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta in September. Nathan chose a passage from Luke 6 as his confirmation scripture.



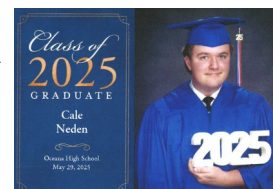
Amelio (Leo) Skinner

Leo grew up here in RUC and is the child of Alan and Kelly Skinner and the grandchild of Audrey Skinner. In 2024, during our Pride service, Leo shared, movingly, some of his transitioning journey with us, touching many of our hearts that day. Leo graduates from high school and will be attending the University of Alberta next year.



Cale Neden

Cale is the great grandson of Mary Neden and is graduating high school in San Fransico, California. Throughout high school Cale worked in the school cafeteria and is also a lifeguard. His hobbies include snowboarding, fishing and "tinkering" with his truck.



35 Years of Walking – and Talking – *Together*

Every Wednesday morning, a group of ladies meets in the church parking lot to go for a walk in the neighbourhood. And while we walk, we talk. Some of the ladies gather at 10 am in the kitchen area, coffee cups in hand, and we all come together for the talking part. A few of the ladies have been part of the group almost since the beginning.

The Ladies Walking Group, or The Wonderful Wednesday Walkers, now known as the “Wednesday Walkers and Talkers,” was first organized in 1990 by Bette Woodhead as a support group. Originally three members, the group has grown and from the beginning, has changed with the needs, interests, and indomitable spirit of the group.

The ladies were asked to share some of their memories and reflect on what the walking group means to them.

- * For some of the women, they had recently moved to Riverbend and began coming to the church. Becoming part of the walking group helped them to get to know others in the group and in the congregation. It's given them a sense of belonging and community.
- * One of the ladies shared that at the first service she attended, first-time attenders were invited to sign up for a supper at a church member's home as a mystery guest. She met others at the dinner and was invited to come to the walking group. “The church has become our family.”
- * Another lady said that when she came to “this” group, everyone was on the same “wavelength”; there was no one directing what you should do.

I enjoy the moment at coffee when there are 10/15 conversations going on at the same time. The topics are from books to movies to politics and there is ALWAYS laughter!! It is the best group!

Dorothy

The Walkers & Talkers group is a jolly bunch! Rain or shine we meet, and you can be sure to hear lots of talking and laughing around! For me belonging to this group was a good way to get to know other active and interesting ladies who go to the Riverbend United Church, and along the way I made new friends.

Johanne

How wonderful it is that our walking group is celebrating 35 years as a group at Riverbend United Church! I would like to express a few words about my experiences with the group:

“I joined the Walking Group in October 2003 and have had many wonderful experiences with the group. The friendship of the ladies and the fact that the group appreciates walking for exercise have been appreciated by me all these years and I am glad to be a part of this group.

One of the most impressive memories I have is back in the summer of 2009 when the walking group made a trip to Canmore and were invited into the home of Joan and Jim Fargey who were the most hospitable people. They welcomed all of us with their warm approach and kindness and truly made us feel welcome. We enjoyed delicious food and drinks. I remember Jim asking me to slice the pork tenderloin that he barbecued that day, and he was so kind to say to me that the slices I cut were just the right thickness and how impressed he was with what I had done. He was always a gentleman, and Joan was such a gracious lady. They were a couple to remember - I will never forget them.

The walking group has been on a number of field trips over the years, and I have such fond memories of being with the ladies and enjoying some good conversations and laughter at some of those trips that I was part of. The support we give one another is something to be cherished. What a great bunch of ladies! This is really worth celebrating!”

Vera

(continued on page 10)

35 Years of Walking – and Talking – *Together*

I joined around 2002. It is such a warm and caring group. My favourite memories are Canmore hikes (which I never would have experienced but for this group and the Fargeys), great meals, and scavenger hunts!! Also, fun trips to Stony Plain for lunch then shopping for clothes.

Lois

These are a few of my favourite things:

- walking on top of the river valley ridge no matter what the weather
- rolling rum balls - dozens of them
- hiking at Canmore where the cougars walked
- celebrating Christmas and birthdays where you bring your own cake
- sharing grief journeys of dear husbands - our own members passing and friends and family members
- discussing politics, civic affairs and national events
- laughing and commiserating with dear friends

Georgianna

Shared laughter has always been a hallmark of the Walkers. On a guided tour of the Devonian Gardens, Hilde and I took the last two seats on the tram, sitting backward to the rest of our group. The guide would announce, "Look to your left," and of course, Hilde and I would have to look to our right. After a bit of confusion, we got the giggles. The laughter spread. A group of not-so-serious seniors giggling like schoolgirls as we rode along the winding trails!

Patti

I am one of the ladies who, on my first time walking through the doors of Riverbend United, I encountered the minister, Bill Cantelon, on his way out the door. He said, "Come meet the walking group." That was in 1994.

Why am I here almost every Wednesday? Because I will be greeted by a friend, newly made or someone I have walked miles with. As we walk through the neighbourhood, or perhaps on an "outing," someone will pause for a moment to point out a flower, a bird's song, a lovely home, a beautiful view. The ladies I have been blessed to share a walk or sit with at coffee time, are fun to be with, talented, generous, gifted, encouraging, brave, interesting, optimistic, experienced, wise, and each has a story to tell.

I'm a prairie girl who never dreamed that one day I would be hiking in the mountains and experiencing such grand beauty – and even more wildflowers than I ever knew existed! I also learned from Bette that you're never too old to ride the carousel at Fort Edmonton Park!

Glynis

In memoriam, we remember: Lois Brown, Faye DaFoe, Joanne Mullins, Bev Kenney, Leslie Berezowski, Doris Lee, Carol Turner, Liz Woolnough, Bette Woodhead, Teri Smith, Joan Fargey, Jennifer Horne.

For our 25th anniversary, we chose a hymn that reflected what our group was all about. The hymn is by John Rice, "Walk with Me."

*Walk with me - I will walk with you
and build the land that God has planned
where love shines through.*

You will find a wonderful photograph of our Walkers and Talkers on page 11.

Contributors Welcome (and encouraged!)

The purpose of the *Front Pew* is to share in the life and work of Riverbend United Church. We also love to be able to highlight stories from members of the congregation. Perhaps you have a particular hobby, or have attained a milestone in your life, or are involved in a community project that you would like to share with us all. We would love to hear from you!

Did You Know?

For this issue of the Front Pew, the *Did You Know* article is more of a “do you know”? We have all seen the beautiful New Creed banner hanging in the sanctuary, and many of us are aware that it was a Spiritual Formation Committee initiative, spearheaded by our late, dear friend, Sharon Hoekstra. The groups and committees of RUC provided inspiration for each square, however, the question is, who put the squares together and created the banner? There is no information on the reverse (as there is with several other hangings), and even though Carolyn Miller has used her best Miss Marple and Sherlock Holmes skills, she has been unable to track down the team involved in stitching the banner. If you were involved in the project or know who was, please let Carolyn know, so this mystery can be solved! Hopefully, we can provide an update in the next issue!



The Walkers & Talkers

Back Row: Hilde Leighsmith, Patti Hunter, Ruth Bowes, Janet Brown, Maureen Miller, Glynis Maley, Dorothy Hitschfeld, Vera Smeall, Susan Merritt, Johanne Duchesne, Ceyri Jones

Front Row: Judi Cook, Donna Chamberland, Fran Cuyler, Sandra Marsh, Marlene Ramsey, Doreen Hall, Nicola Whitnack, Georgianna McDavid, Lois Christie, Betty Otterdahl

Missing: Mary-Jean Buchanan, Erin James, Colleen Lefever, Ann Olsthoorn, Joanne Ross, Linda Schofield, Karen Tweed



Riverbend United Church
Exploring Faith, Engaging Community

Contact us at:

Phone: (780) 430-7275

Email: contactus@riverbendunited.org

Website: www.riverbendunited.org

Co-Editors: Bev Sawyer & Christine Ens

Publication Design: Carolyn Miller

Mail List Manager: Jacqueline Hunt

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

Next deadline: 29 August 2025