

THE FRONT PEW

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

Winter 2025 – Volume 23 Number 4

Advent: The Coming

How will you prepare this year, for the birth of the One who brings light to the dark?

We are invited to set aside time each day to read, reflect, pray.

We're invited to create room in our hearts—

to let the light find its way,

to believe that the world might move a step toward peace,

and to follow the star to the manger.

(contained within this issue you will find full details of all our Advent events and invitations. We hope you can join us for some, or all, of them!)

Children's Advent Worship

Don't forget ... our amazing children will lead worship on December 14th, the third Sunday of Advent, which is appropriately Joy Sunday. We expect the sanctuary to be filled with smiles, laughter and lots of joy that morning! There is something very special about experiencing the magic of the season through the exuberance of our children.

Thank you Bev!

The Front Pew has been published since the early days of RUC and has a long history of connecting us to each other. Recently one of our long-term editors stepped down. Bev Sawyer took on the role of editor around 2015, after completing two terms as our Board Chair. Serving on the board, Bev was well apprised of all the goings-on of the church, putting her in an excellent position to suggest and review content for the newsletter. And I suspect her experience as an educator increased her proofreading skills!

Bev was asked about the significance of the Front Pew today and she shared: "Whether read as a printed or an online version, I believe that The Front Pew keeps us connected as a community. I like to know what's going on with the amazing volunteers who help keep things going in such a variety of ways."

Bev would like to acknowledge Carolyn's outstanding contributions - both her tech skills and her creative talent are essential to the final product. Here's wishing for many more issues of Front Pew to come!



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.

Sunday, November 30

Advent 1 - HOPE

Young Family Advent Gathering and Children's Program dress rehearsal after worship, 11:45-12:45.

Sunday, December 7

Advent 2 - PEACE

New members and Baptism.

Advent Café after worship -

Come to the Chapel for coffee and Advent conversation.

Sunday, December 14

Advent 3 - JOY

Children's Christmas Program in worship.

Community Carol Sing at 4:00 p.m. with RUC musicians, the Choir and Handbells.

Sunday, December 21

Advent 4 - LOVE

Wednesday, December 24

Christmas Eve Services

*** 5:00 p.m.** Worship with Choir and Handbells

Flame-free Service

*** 6:30 p.m.** Worship with Choir and John Tessier, Soloist

(see johnntessier.com for more info.)

Candlelight service with individual candles

*** 8:00 p.m.** Worship with Communion

Candlelight service with individual candles



Throughout Advent there will be opportunities to journey using a digital Advent calendar, a printed devotional, an interactive Christmas Trail, and a prayer tree in the narthex. You will find full details of each activity in this issue of the *Front Pew*.



**Wishing you
a Joyous Christmas and a Happy New Year**



Thank you to everyone who contributed articles to the 2025 Front Pew. You have helped to keep our faith community up to date with activities happening around the church and beyond.

Digital Advent Calendar

For the season of Advent this year, the Spiritual Formation Committee has created a digital Advent Calendar. Like a traditional Advent Calendar, the doors are numbered 1 to 24, one for each day from December 1st, until Christmas Eve.

Behind the doors you may find a photograph, a piece of scripture, music, or some audio.



To use the calendar, click in the centre of each numbered door, which will “open” to reveal what’s inside. Once you have finished looking at that day’s door click on “RUC Advent Calendar,” to return to the main page.

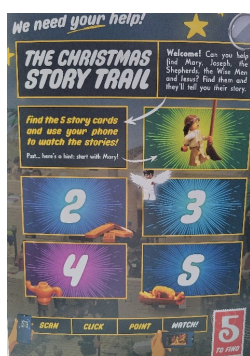
Advent Prayer Tree

“Take a prayer, leave a prayer”

In the narthex during Advent you will find a Christmas Tree, with paper star decorations hanging on it, some blank and some with prayers written on them, along with some prophet scrolls ... this is our Advent prayer tree. You are invited to look at the prayers hanging on the tree and, if the Spirit moves you, to write your own prayer on one of the decorations, for sharing with this community of faith. If one of the prayers really “speaks” to you, then please feel free to take it home for a week to reflect on and then return it for others to read. You are also welcome to take one of the prophet scroll decorations to put on your own tree at home.

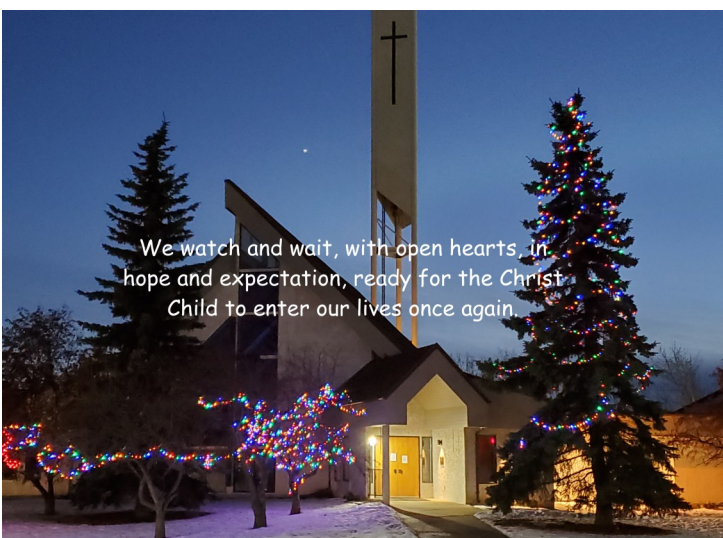
The Christmas Story Trail

Around the church during this Advent season, you will find five story cards telling the Christmas Story from the Angel appearing to Mary to the Magi presenting their gifts. Each card focuses on one of the characters. Using your phone, scan the QR code and follow the instructions to see their part of the story shown in LEGO animation. At worship on December 28th, the complete LEGO movie will be shown.



Community Christmas Carol Sing Sunday, December 14th 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, Dec. 14th 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 Director.



We watch and wait, with open hearts, in hope and expectation, ready for the Christ Child to enter our lives once again.

Printed Advent Devotional

Available in the Narthex during Advent will be a traditional printed devotional called: *Heaven's Earthly Life: Wendell Berry and the Poetry of Advent*. Wendell Berry is a “nature” poet, among other things. This devotional uses his poetry alongside Advent scriptures from our Liturgical Year A that we’ll be reading on Sunday mornings.

A Place at the Table for You

The United Church will be running an ad campaign in Edmonton during December through billboards and digital ads at LRT stations. The ads use the re-enactment of da Vinci's Last Supper that Rev. Catherine MacLean spoke with us about in June. The re-enactment was part of the 100th Anniversary celebration of the UC, and it emphasizes the diversity of the United Church as we move into the future. You can find Catherine's sermon about it [here](#) on our YouTube channel.

We may see visitors in worship this season who are intrigued or beckoned by the image. It's up to us to welcome them, and to remember that no matter what, *all* are welcome here at Riverbend United Church.

You may see the billboards around town. They look something like this:



Youth Update

The youth have had a busy fall, enjoying both RUC events and citywide events with other United Church youth groups. Here are photos of the RUC Pumpkin Carving Event and Biblical Cake Making (a highlight of the youth calendar).



Have a look at the cakes and see if you can guess the biblical story they represent.

Spoilers ahead!

Jacob and Lucas's cake is from 2 Kings when Elisha, as a new prophet, gets made fun of for being bald by some young boys and two bears come out and maul 42 of them (*probably a new scripture for most of us*). Audrey and Ben made Moses and the Burning Bush.



Advent Decorating

On Monday, November 24th, our Advent decorating team swung into action once again, preparing the sanctuary for Advent. As you can see from the photos no ladder was too tall for them to scale!



Affirming News



At our Whole Community Worship at the end of September, the day for Truth and Reconciliation was recognized, and the congregation was invited (with some excellent suggestions from Jill Spaner) to make a personal commitment to walking the path of meaningful reconciliation with our Indigenous siblings. These commitments were written down and attached to an orange shirt, which we continue to display in the narthex as a reminder of our commitments and an opportunity for you to take inspiration on walking the path of truth and reconciliation together. It's not too late to add your own commitment, should you wish. Please let the church office know, and we will write it for you and add it to the shirt.



(You will find a wonderful article from our Administrative Assistant, Sage, on pages 7 and 8 where she shares her thoughts on our orange shirt commitments, and provides many helpful suggestions – thank you Sage.)

Care Team

Our team continues to connect with our church family through phone calls, visits and sending cards. This source of meaningful connection remains an essential part of our church community. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to myself or Valerie.

We are excited to share that we are planning a Conversation café - a relaxed and welcoming space where people can gather after the service to enjoy fellowship and chat about selected topics. And yes ... there will be coffee and goodies! The café will be offered on selected Sundays and will run for about 45 minutes following the service.



Coming very soon is our Christmas Café on December 7th, with more details to be shared in the announcements. Hope to see you there!

Merry Christmas and wishing you all a very healthy New Year,

Holly Ruryk, Care Team Coordinator



New Contemplative Practice Series!

"Contemplation is resting with God in silent devotion..."
— Conor McCourt

What is 'contemplation' in the Christian tradition? Contemplative practices bring us out of our head and into our heart, where God's loving presence is always available to us. Building a contemplative dimension in your life is easier in a spiritual community. Starting in January 2026, our church will offer an inaugural Contemplative Practice Series, led by Graham Gaine.

Meeting in the Chapel at 9:30-10:20 a.m. on four consecutive Sundays from January 4 to 25, the group will be introduced to a variety of spiritual practices, including centering prayer, welcoming prayer, prayer of the heart, and lectio divina (sacred reading). Each meeting will include 15 minutes of silent group meditation, introductory instruction on contemplative practices, and sacred sharing. Feel free to join us for any or all meetings (choir members may join from 9:30-10:00 a.m. to participate in silent meditation before choir rehearsal). Looking forward to seeing you there!

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

Psalm 100 Voices United page 820

More Marvelous Music!

On November 1, the church was almost full for “Another Evening of Marvelous Music” - the seventh pop concert put on by members of the congregation, coordinated by Marv Severson. The concert was free, but donations were appreciated and we made just under \$2000 for the church. There were 14 musicians including a string quartet, a horn trio, 2 flutes and a steel pan. The musicians were:

Owain Bamforth – Drums, Vocals
 Connor Bowhay – Upright & Electric Bass
 Sheryl Bowhay – Viola, Flute
 Lukas Bucerius – Cello, Tenor Sax
 Joel Fleck – Guitar, Drums, Vocals
 George Irwin – Vocals, Guitar
 Joanne Little - Vocals
 Randy Nelson – Piano
 Ayanna Rocke – Steel Pan
 Annika Schoenhardt – Violin, Flute, Vocals
 Nathan Schoenhardt – Trombone
 Emily Severson – Vocals
 Marv Severson – Trumpet, Electric Bass
 Doug Spaner – Vocals



Special thanks to Rob Beghin who worked the sound board and Ray Hawrelak on video.

Music Notes!

It will be a joyous Christmas season at RUC this year, with all three of our music groups: choir, ensemble, and handbells sharing both well-known and new music for our Advent and Christmas services, and for our December 14th Carol Sing.

All three groups will come together for the Carol Sing on December 14th at 4:00 p.m., featuring a special highlight: a beautiful presentation of the traditional “African Noel”, enhanced by an original handbell accompaniment written by Alison Grant-Préville. We are excited to sing with and “for” you... And I won’t forget to bring my jingle bells!

Looking ahead:

Great news! By popular demand, our Pop-Up Choir is returning on **February 15th (with just ONE rehearsal on Thursday, Feb. 12)**. No auditions, no long-term

commitment—just come ready to sing! All voices are welcome.

And looking ahead to our traditional “Hymn Sing” to wrap up the choir season, we’re doing something special this year: a “Show Tune Sing” featuring beloved movie and Broadway numbers with religious/spiritual themes. Think songs like **“Climb Every Mountain”** from *The Sound of Music*, **“Bless the Beasts and Children”** from the film of the same name, or **“When You Believe”** from *The Prince of Egypt*, or **“You’ll Never Walk Alone”** from *Carousel*. What’s YOUR favourite show tune with a spiritual message? Please share your suggestions with me so we can include them in our lineup. More details will follow in the new year!

Wishing you music and joy this Christmas season!

Paula Roberts
 RUC Music Director

Gathering the Threads: Responding to the dialogue on National Truth and Reconciliation Day



Hello, everyone!

I'm Sage, and I have the pleasure of serving as the Administrative Assistant here at Riverbend United Church.

This year's observance of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation was particularly moving for me. Walking into the church on Orange Shirt Day and seeing our display - those little cut-out shirts, hands, and leaves - all covered in your thoughtful comments was truly inspiring.

To see such an outpouring of heartfelt engagement from our congregation, and a genuine desire to learn about Indigenous cultures, histories, and stories, truly brightened my spirit. It confirmed that the journey of reconciliation is being taken seriously within our church family.

As I went through the display, I spent time reading every single comment. It was a beautiful, honest snapshot of where we are collectively on this path. Because I was so moved by your willingness to engage, I felt inspired to offer some personal suggestions on a few common themes I noticed in your comments. My hope is that these ideas will help us all deepen our understanding and move from reflection to truly meaningful action.

Music:

- Halluci Nation (Formally A Tribe Called Red): Ottawa, ON
- Fawn Wood: St. Paul, AB
- Tanya Tagaq: Cambridge Bay, Nunavut
- Adrian Sutherland: Attawapiskat First Nation, ON
- Kashtin: Malietenam Reserve, QC
- Shawnee Kish: Edmonton, AB

(article continued on page 8)



- *Beans*
- *Smoke Signals*
- *Dance me Outside*
- *We were Children*
- *Rumble: The Indians who Rocked the World*
- *Jordan River Anderson, the Messenger*

- Richard Wagamese: *Embers, Indian Horse, One Drum*
- Thomas King: *The Inconvenient Indian, The Night Wanderer*
- Eden Robinson: *Monkey Beach*
- Cherie Dimaline: *The Marrow Thieves*
- Marilyn Dumont

- *Walking together*, Elder Dr. Albert D. Marshall
- *We are Water Protectors*, Carole Lindstrom
- *Today is Orange Shirt Day*, Phyllis Webstad
- *Stand Like a Cedar*, Nicola Campbell

- Yellowhead Tribal College Land Back Course
- University of Alberta [Indigenous Canada Course](#)
- <https://native-land.ca/>
- <https://pinnguaq.com/stories/ininiw-acakosuk-the-cree-stars/>
- <https://www.reconciliationeducation.ca/what-are-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-94-calls-to-action>
- Fort Edmonton Park
- Fort Heritage Precinct, Fort Saskatchewan



The journey toward Truth and Reconciliation is a marathon, not a sprint. It is woven into our faith's call for justice and compassion. I look forward to continuing this important work with all of you.

Sage Giroux

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Amiskwacîwâskahikan

Treaty Six Territory

Outreach Committee - Winter Outreach Projects

With the support of RUC, the Outreach Committee has been busy supporting the community through The Food Pantry. When donation suggestions for "Spaghetti" items were made, the response was overwhelming. Food items requested for the remainder of the year are items of protein: peanut butter, beans, canned fish/meat, lentils etc.



The annual call for winter clothing has also provided critical warm items for those in need. Three deliveries have been made to The Mustard Seed, where they have been well received. When you continue to get ready for winter any "extra" items you may have can be donated in the box in the Narthex.

This Christmas, on behalf of the congregation, the Outreach Committee will be supporting Operation Friendship. Operation Friendship is a program supporting 55+ seniors in need within Edmonton. They have 5 housing facilities and collect items for seniors with less means. They have requested that monies collected be used to purchase sweatpants/joggers, long underwear and toiletries. Riverbend United Church has been supporting people in need in the inner city through RUC's Christmas project for well over 18 years. It makes a huge difference in people's lives at Christmas.

February will see the return of the now annual "Sock Toss". This appears to be popular among the congregation as folks are already inquiring if it will take place. Although a date has not yet been decided upon, it will return in February so feel free to start purchasing socks for men, women and children. Last year 654 pairs of socks were donated.

Thank you to all!

Erin James
Outreach Committee

Views From the Rear Pew

Readers of our church newsletters in years past may recall humorous columns written by Brent Skinner, titled 'A View From the Rear Pew', printed in each edition of The Front Pew newsletter.

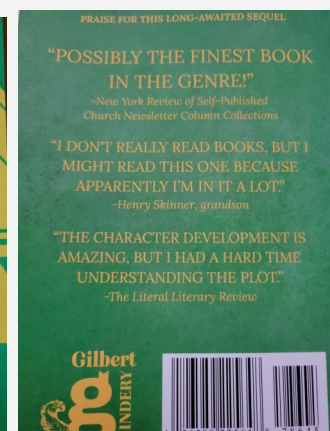
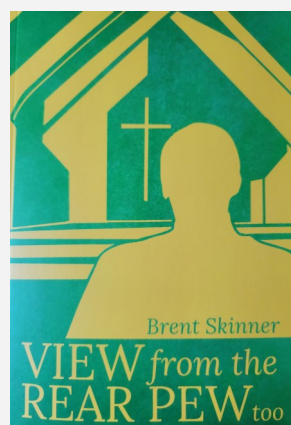
There are also those among us who recall a slim book with a collection of some of Brent's earlier columns, printed in 2011, and made available to his fans, friends and family.

(Unfortunately, we do not have extra copies of this volume, but hope some 'fans' from the past may find copies and share them to the church library.)



Now, thanks to the dedicated work of Brent's daughter, Kathleen, there is a limited printing of a new book, *View From the Rear Pew too*. Brent's family will place a few copies in our church library for those who wish to borrow or read this new collection. Many heartfelt thanks go to Kathleen (Skinner) Luyk for her hours of locating, formatting and typesetting all of Brent's newsletter articles from 2011 through 2020.

You will find an excerpt from this new book, where else but the back page! – The Front Pew Team.



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

January

Alzheimer's Awareness Month

World Braille Day: January 4

Weedless Wednesday: January 21

February

Heart Health Month

World Cancer Day: February 4

Pink Shirt Day: February 25

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 Sunday, December 21 at 8:03 a.m. when Edmonton will only receive 7 hours, 27 minutes, and 39 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 lines from familiar poems and songs capture these two concepts flawlessly.

From the poems ...

Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night

"Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

~Dylan Thomas

Sonnet 19

"When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more
bent..."

~John Milton

From the songs...

Here Comes the Sun

Here comes the sun, doo-doo-doo

Here comes the sun

And I say, "It's all right"

~The Beatles

The Longest Night

"Dear father

Do you think it's gonna be alright?

Tell me teacher

Do you think we'll see the light?

Tell me brother

You think we'll have to stand and fight?

Tell me sister

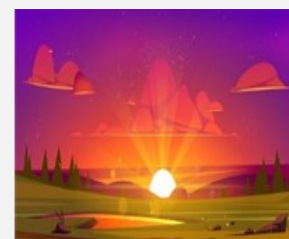
Will we make it through?

Make it through the longest night..."

~ Men at Work

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

Peace,
Dawn



Our Church Sign

Do you ever look at the church sign as you drive past? Do you read the messages posted and wonder why they were selected? Do you wonder what goes into changing the sign? Carolyn Miller is our resident sign changer, so we approached her to get the answers.

We asked Carolyn “what is the purpose of the church sign, and are there any challenges to changing it?” This was Carolyn’s response:

There are many ways the church sign is used:

- ♦ First and foremost, it is an invitation to the wider community to join us in worship and know they will be welcome.
- ♦ Secondly, it is a great way to publicize events happening at RUC, such as the Garage Sale, Marvelous Music, Community Christmas Carol Sing and previously the Cookie Walk.
- ♦ Thirdly, it can be used for messages of support to the marginalized and during COVID, it was used to encourage folks to get the jab.
- ♦ Finally, it recognizes major events in the Liturgical calendar such as Advent, Lent and Easter. And in 2025 was used to welcome the Northern Spirit Region Delegates to our church.

The main challenge to changing the sign is the weather!! In the winter, it can be difficult to change if the temperature drops below about -15 as the letters are very cold (*Carolyn is too!*) and the plastic runners can become brittle, so have to be handled very gently. Also, people should be aware that 5 runners can hold 15-18 letters (I’s are narrower than W’s), so the message must fit on the sign. Sometimes it needs to be changed slightly based on that, and the fact that there are finite numbers of each letter and number.

So, remember, if you have an event happening at RUC that you want the community to know about, then you can submit a request to the church office for a message to be put on our sign, giving as much notice as possible. *Have a look at the photos, showing some of the messages on our sign-the FP team*



Did You Know?

Did you know that for many years, RUC held an annual golf tournament where foursome teams competed for the Holgate Cup? The cup was named after our late dear friend Ron Holgate, who was an avid golfer and responsible for organizing the tournament in the early years of its existence.

Held at a local golf course in September, the teams would play in the morning and then return to the church for lunch supplied and served by our United Church Women, which included Ron's wife, LaVon.

During the golf game, there would be mini competitions such as golfing while wearing a heavy winter glove, with prizes galore. A wonderful day of fellowship, laced with just a bit of competitive spirit! See if you can spot the cup in the narthex the next time you are in church.



Excerpt from *View from the Rear Pew too* 2019 Handyman

I have been called many names in my life— some nice and others quite nasty. One name that I have never been called is “handyman.”

It's difficult to explain, but when I try to build or repair something, I usually have a clear sense of what needs to be done, the paper instructions pinned to the floor with tomato soup tins, and the tools laid out like a heart surgeon about to undertake a triple bypass operation. Then I start the project with a happy conviction that this is the time I will show the world that I too have the manly skills of building and fixing.....

Want to know more about what happens when Brent tries out his handyman skills? Then have a look for the book when it becomes available in the church library.



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

Next deadline: 6 February 2026