

THE FRONT PEW

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

Fall 2026 – Volume 24 Number 3

Community Connect Picnic

Mark your calendars and save Sunday, **September 27th** for a fun FREE family and community event. This event is a new venture for Riverbend, and it promises to be a lot of fun!

Envisioned and inspired by Valerie, a team of volunteers emerged and have been working over the summer to make this happen — huge thanks to Jackie Hunt and Holly Ruryk for taking the lead.

Help us spread the word throughout the community, and bring some friends to join us! There will be free hot dogs (Halal and Veggie options are available), a bouncy castle, some games and races for the kids and MORE.

If you are able to help us out on the day, there are sign-up sheets in the narthex. Looking forward to spending an afternoon with all who can join us!

Submitted by Sherry Steele

(you can read more about the exciting new role Sherry has taken on here at RUC on page 6 of this issue)



Welcome Back, Valerie!

On September 8th we welcomed Valerie back from her leave of absence, with her return to worship leadership set for Sunday, September 13th. On page 2 of this issue she shares a beautiful reverie about working on jigsaw puzzles with her mom but it goes so much deeper than that. We are grateful that Valerie was able to spend the summer with her mom, and grateful that she has returned safely to us. We look forward to the wisdom she will share with us in the coming months.



Valerie's Reveries

Jigsaw Mind and a Wee Little Baby

I am deeply grateful to Riverbend United Church for giving me the gift of time this summer, precious time to spend with my mom in Colorado.

We sat many evenings over jigsaw puzzles, my 88-year-old mom and I, through the summer. We would pick up our pieces and try to figure out where they go in the whole puzzle, sometimes talking, sometimes working in silence.

Day by day, her mental fragmentation has grown, as if her mind were a puzzle moving in reverse—turning into pieces. And yet, through the gaps, she remains remarkably present. It's as if her life has become a string of very real, present moments, but without the string—a prayer flag around a temple, with the flags floating freely in the breeze.

We were sitting together one evening putting together our puzzle, both of us concentrating in silence. She had a piece in her hand and was looking over the whole board for where it belonged. Without looking up, she spoke into the silence in a hushed tone, with a stunning clarity:

“I’ve been playing with you since you were a wee little baby.”

The march of time seemed to stop for me too. This particular present moment suddenly opened the past poignantly, and everything all at once was right there between us. I could see my mom sitting on the floor with me as a baby rolling around, her a mere 27 years old, her skin young and smooth, so much of her life ahead of her.

She would have no way of knowing, as she sat on the floor playing with me when I was a wee little baby, that she would one day publish 12 books, climb a “14-er,” travel the globe to every continent, or help my dad lead the global United Methodist Church. No way of knowing that 61 years later, she would still be sitting with that wee little baby now grown, playing over a jigsaw puzzle.

We never know which ordinary moments we move through will become precious to us. Neither I as a baby nor she as a young woman could have known we would

still be playing together this summer, decades later. It might have been otherwise, in a million other iterations of life.

As it happens, that was our last gentle jigsaw evening in her apartment. A few days later, she fell and, after a short hospital stay, went into rehab in a nursing home to heal from a broken kneecap. I was grateful to be there to help her.

I think of Jesus saying, “I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly.” The abundance in my mom’s life has been marked by gratitude—a practice she sought to maintain even in difficult, thin times. Now her present moments tend toward that same gratitude, one beat at a time, rooted somewhere deeper than memory.

I was reminded daily while with her this summer to live fully while I can, to live out of grace and love, to practice gratitude each moment. And when I fall in this endeavour, to get up gently and start again. Those qualities are what might remain when our own puzzle dismantles, as will naturally occur in one way or another with all of us, with all living things.

Mom has now returned to her assisted living apartment to continue her healing. Stubbornly determined to graduate from wheelchair to walker, she rolls through the halls as a prayer flag floating freely in the breeze, mostly grateful, mostly kind, mostly grace-filled. “Mostly” is a win at this point in her life.

However the rest of her journey unfolds, I will hang my hat on that mystical, beautiful comment:

“I’ve been playing with you since you were a wee little baby.”

I’m pretty sure that’s what God is saying to us every day.



Thank You, Summer Worship Leaders

During Valerie's time away from us we were blessed to have some amazing leaders who offered a wide variety of worship. All the services are available on our YouTube channel (or St. Paul's channel for July worship), and we recommend taking a look at any you missed (or may want to watch again.) These are just a few of the many highlights.

On June 21st Jennifer Tupper and Jill Spaner led a thought-provoking service celebrating National Indigenous Peoples Day. The highlight was being led by guest Karin Weeks-West in a round dance in the sanctuary, something that will stay with all of us who participated for a long time.

June 28th brought the now annual RUC choir "sing along" but with a twist. Songs from musicals, with a spiritual theme, were offered by the choir and thoroughly enjoyed by everyone who attended.

For the month of July, we worshipped at St. Paul's, our birthing congregation, and had the opportunity to renew friendships and deepen connections.

August 2nd saw Dawn Power reach into her Newfoundland background and build her service around the story of five loaves and two fish, asking us to consider if we have ever had a "five loaves and two fish moment."

On August 9th Annika Schoenhardt stepped up to lead worship and did a fabulous job. She selected her scripture from the Old Testament book of Esther and built her reflection around her.

Annika was so enthusiastic about Esther that we are sure many of you went home, grabbed a Bible, and read more about this remarkable girl.

August 16th saw us celebrate, not Christmas in July, but rather Easter in August. Under Matthew Schoendardt's guidance we returned to the story of Thomas and the doubts that we all have. There was something very uplifting about singing "Thine Be the Glory" as the summer sun streamed through the windows.

August 23rd saw us welcoming Rev. Hugh MacGregor, who had been in ministry leadership with Valerie at Grace United many years ago. Hugh did a sterling job with his reflection leading us through the history of Christianity, all in 15 mins!

On August 30th Rev. Dr. Catherine MacLean, a familiar face to both our community of faith and St. Paul's, led us in worship. Her reflection titled "a love letter to evil" was powerful, and singing the Lord's Prayer in French was a highlight.

Sept 7th saw Rev. Dr. Catherine MacLean return to lead us in the final worship service before Valerie's return. In her reflection Catherine reminded us of the Mizpah blessing found in Genesis 31. There is something beautiful about the words "May God watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other."

Thank you all for sharing your time and talents with us over the summer months and leading us as we continue our spiritual journey together.

How Does Your Garden Grow?

Frequently, at Sunday morning worship, you will hear our worship leader give thanks for the time and talents our people offer to this community of faith. One example of this is the flower bed at the front of the church. Diane Trenn, who has extraordinary green fingers, gives her time purchasing and planting a variety of different flowers, and then uses her gardening talent to maintain the flower bed throughout the summer season. It is always a thrill returning to RUC in August, after spending July worshipping with St. Paul's, to be met with a wall of colour and flowers in full bloom. Thank you, Diane, for creating this beautiful display, which we all enjoy.



First Marathon!

All of you who attended, or tuned in, to the August 9th worship service may remember that Annika Schoenhardt shared with us that she was going to be running her first marathon the following weekend. Perhaps, like the *FP team*, you were curious to hear of Annika's experience, so we reached out to her, and this is what she shared with us. We are sure you will agree that her infectious energy is a blessing to this community of faith.

"In all honesty, the marathon didn't go as I wanted it to, but I wouldn't trade the experience for anything. You don't realize how big the difference between a half-marathon



and a full marathon is until you're at kilometre 35, struggling to hold your usual easy pace as the sun grows hotter on your skin. It feels like a lot more than just twice the distance! Even though I'd run lots in the 25-32km range, that last stretch pushed me to my limits, not to mention the mismeasuring of the course. Officially, the course was almost 700m long, and with my poor following through of the tangent line, my GPS caught 44km instead of the expected 42.2km. Despite that, I achieved my B-goal of a sub-4 hour marathon (official time 3:54!), which, with humility I'll admit, wasn't anywhere near my goal of 3:30. I loved the energy of the course and seeing so many funny signs, as well as hearing my mom ring the cowbell she got for her birthday as I ran by. It was beautiful to see so many people giving their all, as runners and as supporters! Another victory of this race was the \$1739 I raised for MS Canada, crushing my initial goal of \$500. I don't talk much about my own MS diagnosis because I don't want it to define me and my limits, but I did this race to prove the illness wrong and to raise money for research. When times got tough on the course, I kept in mind why I was racing, as well as saying a brief prayer for my legs. The marathon may have humbled me a little, but that humility will help me prepare for what's next in life, in running, in school, in faith and in all that I do. It'll also help teach me what I can do differently next time, which might be at Calgary's marathon in May... hopefully Calgary is better at measuring the course!"

Affirming News



The Edmonton Pride Festival took place on the weekend of 22-24 August 2026, with the kick off being a pride parade through downtown.

Northern Spirit Region had space for 100 people under its "umbrella" and the local



Affirming congregations were invited to register participants. Eight of us from RUC marched in the parade and it was a wonderful experience. For those of us who were "first timers", one of the things that really struck us was how accepting and welcoming our fellow marchers and the crowds watching were. There was a bit of trepidation about our reception, as we know not everyone has had positive experiences in faith communities. We needn't have worried; there were smiles and cheers all along the route as we proudly carried the church sign and waved our pride flags. We felt very privileged to be able to walk with some wonderful people and organisations. After the parade some of us went into the festival and some went out onto the parade route to add our voices to the cheering crowd.









2028

Call for Calendar Photos

Visit united-church.ca and search "Submit Your Photos" for details.

Music Ministry Update

September always feels like my "new year" — more, honestly, than January 1st ever has.

It's the time I get to dig through the new choral releases from my favourite arrangers, and see what new composers are offering through the online shops that specialize in church and school music. I recognize that browsing sheet music for fun is a fairly niche hobby.

I also love plotting how to excite, motivate, challenge, and occasionally entertain the singers and players I'll be standing in front of for another season. Finding the "perfect" anthem for an occasion, or finding — or adapting — a piece where the choir can team up with the RUC Handbells, our ensemble, or one of our instrumentalists — that's the fun part of my job!

At rehearsal, I'm always hunting for new ways to help people not just learn their notes, but understand their own voices and how to blend them with everyone else's. Which also means I get to repeat myself, yet again, on vowels, articulation, phrasing, and breath control. Some things never change, and neither does my nagging about them — but we still manage to have a good time!

I realize all of this might sound fairly technical, or even a little dry, from the outside. But there's something genuinely satisfying — dare I say fun — about watching the music nearly sing itself once the work pays off on a Sunday morning.

Alison Grant-Préville (our handbell director), Sherry Steele (our pianist extraordinaire), and I have already started plotting some choir/bells/ensemble collaborations for the season, and we've landed on something we're excited about for the Carol Sing.

As always, we'd love to welcome new voices to the choir, new ringers to the handbells (no experience required — we'll teach you), and if you play an instrument and think you have something to bring to the ensemble, we want to hear from you.

It's shaping up to be another great year of music-making at RUC.

Paula Roberts
RUC Music Director

Care Team Update

The Care Team continued to stay connected with our church members throughout the summer months. We are always checking in, offering support and conversation. We also take care of any additional requests that occur and continue to send cards as the occasion arises, letting our members know they are remembered and cared for.

Our next care team meeting will be Sunday September 20, 2026 at 9:30 a.m. in the church boardroom. We warmly welcome you to join us!

Our Welcome Back Café will take place on Sunday, September 13, 2026 in the chapel following worship. It will be a wonderful opportunity to reconnect after the summer break, share



your summer adventures while enjoying some goodies and refreshments. Everyone is welcome and we would love to see you there!

As always, please feel free to contact Valerie or myself with any questions, concerns or requests.

With warm thoughts,

Holly Ruryk
Care Team Coordinator

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!

Maintenance Department Update

Wow – back in the May Front Pew issue we had described several projects planned for the summer. Hard to believe it is already September! The following is a list of projects that we have completed since the May issue:

- Replaced control electrical circuit in downstairs kitchen convection oven
- Cleaned, waxed and polished basement floor, youth room, front stairwell and Chancel area of the Sanctuary
- Cleaned carpet in Narthex, Sanctuary and main floor kitchen
- Painted Sanctuary, main floor kitchen area, Chapel, Library, Family Room, Music Room and hallway. This was a lot of work as everything against or attached to walls had to be removed and all the furniture moved into the centre of the room and then replaced accordingly.
- Replaced two power line cables to two of the A/C units at the back of the church that had been cut and stolen. Best guess is that these were cut and stolen to sell the copper used in the power line.
- Replaced all the castors on the table storage carts with heavier duty castors. The original ones were getting worn and causing damage to the floor when pushed across the floor with all the weight of the tables on the cart.
- Replaced 19 concrete curbs in parking lot as these curbs were either damaged or broken. None of these curbs had been replaced following the original installation.
- We had 4 cubic yards of bark mulch delivered and spread across the front and west side of the church. Over the years the bark mulch in these beds had settled down or been displaced and this area was looking very neglected.
- Replaced tap in the basement kitchen that was damaged.

The last 3 months have been busy, but we were able to complete a number of projects to maintain the facility.

Respectfully yours,
Don Trenn, Maintenance Director

Welcome Sherry Steele to a new role: Church and Community Connector!

In the spring the church board proposed the concept of a new church staff position focussed on community engagement, both within the church and beyond. This summer the Ministry and Personnel Committee established a job description and completed a recruitment and we are pleased to announce that Sherry Steele will now wear two staff hats at RUC! Sherry will continue to serve us exceedingly well as our accompanist but will also use some of her other skills of organization and hospitality in the new role of **Church and Community Connector**. In this position Sherry will coordinate activities that strengthen our congregation and build bridges to our local neighbourhood. The first big event will be the Community Connect Picnic on Sunday September 27th. Look for details and stay tuned for other upcoming events.

Christine Ens
Chair, Ministry and Personnel Committee

Save the Date - Saturday Nov 7 for Another Evening of Marvelous Music

Please reserve Saturday November 7 at 7:30 p.m. for a free concert of marvelous music.

The band features about 15 musicians of all ages from RUC and includes 3 flutes, 2 horns and a steel pan! As always, we will be playing favorite pop tunes from the 50's to today (but mostly from the 70's). We will include songs by: Paul

McCartney, Michael Jackson, Bob Marley, Paul Simon, Dolly Parton and many others. As always, the concert is free and no tickets are required, but donations are accepted and much appreciated.

Hope to see you and your friends there!

Cheers,
Marv Severson



Fall Health Corner

Welcome back everyone to a new season of the Health Corner. Fall is a season of change...leaves change colour and fall from the trees, children go back to school, people are back from their summer vacations and start to settle into the rhythm of the workplace again, and it is the start of another new hockey, football, and basketball season.

In terms of health promotion days, the season of Fall is perhaps one of the busiest...

September

Arthritis Awareness Month

Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month

Prostate Cancer Awareness Month

World Suicide Prevention Day: September 10

Terry Fox Run: September 20

Autumn Equinox 2026 begins at 6:05pm on Tuesday, September 22

National Day for Truth & Reconciliation/Orange Shirt Day: September 30

Terry Fox is a hero to many Canadians, including myself. Terry's cancer diagnosis put in motion a run that changed the world. He dipped his artificial leg in the Atlantic Ocean in St. John's, Newfoundland on April 12th, 1980, and proceeded to unite Canadians in a way like never before: to run across Canada to raise funds for cancer research. The only thing that could have stopped Terry from reaching the Pacific Ocean did.

Cancer returned in his lungs, and he was forced to stop in Thunder Bay, Ontario on September 1st, 1980, after having run 5,373 kilometres. Before his death on June 28, 1981, Terry had achieved his once unimaginable goal of \$1 from every Canadian. More importantly, he had set in motion the framework for an event, The Terry Fox Run, which would ignite cancer research in Canada, raising more than one billion dollars since 1980, and bring hope and health to millions of Canadians. This year, the Terry Fox Run is scheduled for Sunday, September 20 at Kinsmen Park starting at 11:00am. For more information on the run, please visit <https://terryfox.org>

The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is a day that honours the children who never returned home and the survivors of residential schools, as well as their families, and communities.

Public commemoration of the tragic and painful history and ongoing impacts of residential schools is a vital component of the reconciliation process. Both the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and Orange Shirt Day take place on September 30.

Orange Shirt Day is an Indigenous-led, grassroots commemorative day intended to raise awareness of the individual, family, and community inter-generational impacts of residential schools, and to promote the concept of "Every Child Matters." The orange shirt is a symbol of the stripping away of culture, freedom, and self-esteem experienced by Indigenous children over generations. On September 30, Canadians are encouraged to wear orange to honour the thousands of survivors of residential schools.



October

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

World Mental Health Day: October 10

World Sight Day: October 10

Alberta Referendum: October 19

World Psoriasis Day: October 29

Halloween: October 31



The Alberta government has deemed it necessary to have a referendum on Monday, October 19 regarding federal-provincial relations, including immigration, and constitutional matters. The referendum questions 1 through 5 will focus on provincial immigration controls, access to provincially funded services, residency requirements, and proof of citizenship to vote. Referendum questions 6 through 9 will relate to constitutional changes and federal-provincial jurisdictions. Finally, question 10 is a multiple choice question asking whether Alberta should remain a province in Canada or start the legal process for a binding separation referendum.

(continued on page 8)



Fall Health Corner

(continued from page 7) Please exercise your right to vote in October as this election is an important one for our entire province and will have a ripple effect for our future.

November

Osteoporosis Month

Movember

Fall Prevention Month

Remembrance Day: November 11

World Diabetes Day: November 14

International Day for the Elimination of Violence

Against Women: November 25

Usually at this juncture, I tell you when to set your clocks back putting an end to Daylight Saving Time...well, not this year. Our government has eliminated the practice of semi-annual clock changes and adopted permanent Alberta Time, previously known as Mountain Daylight Time. Beginning in November 2026, clocks will no longer reset to Mountain Standard Time, and Alberta will remain on Alberta Time year-round.

The Alberta government said it will monitor the transition to permanent Alberta Time closely and will



gather feedback after the first full year of operating on permanent Alberta Daylight Time to ensure the change is functioning as intended.

Remembrance Day falls on Wednesday, November 11 this year. Remembrance Day has been observed since the end of the First World War to remember armed forces members who have died in the line of duty. In most countries, Remembrance Day is commemorated on 11 November to recall the end of First World War hostilities that formally ended in 1918 "at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month." Here at Riverbend United Church, we have an annual, poignant service close to November 11 where we pause to reflect on the price of our freedom and the lives lost in doing so.



*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them...*

~For the Fallen, a poem by Laurence Binyon

Peace,
Dawn

Thank you from Riverbend ROCKS

Riverbend ROCKS is so thankful to have a wonderfully rich partnership with RUC! This relationship started over ten years ago when we collaborated on our first community dinner - a combined effort between some of the women of the RR community and our own turkey team. This summer the organization benefited from free use of the kitchen to prepare food for the July and August summer celebration meals served in the greenspace of the complex. For the July meal, the turkey team assisted with food preparation and provided the ingredients for a huge caesar salad. Then in August, the congregation made generous contributions of school supplies and funds to the school supply drive launched by our MLA Rakhi Pancholi. Church members filled a large box with binders, scribblers and backpacks, and also donated close to \$350 that was used to purchase additional items needed to equip all the students. It was truly a joyous time to participate in the distribution of much needed supplies just a few days before school started. On behalf of Riverbend ROCKS, please accept a very warm thank you for all of this generosity!



Christine Ens

Board Chair, Riverbend ROCKS

The Legacy Fund – Project ideas needed!

When Joanne and I moved to Canada in 1981, which was just for one year at the time, we appreciated how much the United Church of Canada was involved in the ministry of the community and the world back in the 1980's. It was the primary reason we joined the United Church. These days, however, we hear less of these community and worldwide ministry activities. I know they are still happening, but I just don't think about them with the same intensity as in the past. Perhaps I am not reading enough or looking in the right places. Perhaps you may feel as I do.

Whatever the case may be with the national church and its involvement in communities, I want to say that we here at Riverbend United are in a very fortunate position in that we can continue to minister to our community in a way that many congregations cannot. This is due to the Legacy Fund which was made possible by the seminal gift from Lesley Berezowski and the gifts of others who are also contributing to it. Already the fund has been used by David James to establish a Men's Shed that will hold its open house here in our Gathering Area on October 7th starting at 6pm. Please look for that and attend; it's going to be exciting. The Legacy Fund also supported the purchase of play equipment for babies and youth under Sheila Luther's leadership.

Currently, I'm asking you more for your time and talents than your treasures. We have had only one other project proposal submitted since these two were received early in 2025. The interest earned on the invested principal of the Legacy Fund through the United Church of Canada Foundation is building up, and we must spend it.

I am asking you to come up with more project ideas. Our committee will be happy to work with you to develop your idea to the point where it will be a solid proposal that will be approved by the committee and by the Official Board. For those of you who have a great idea but do not have the time or energy to lead a project, please share this idea with us anyway. We can help by finding a champion to lead it.

I know I said I was interested in appealing to your time and talents, but I cannot help but also reflect on treasures. For those of you thinking about how best to use your treasures to support the church in service to our community over the long term, please consider the Legacy Fund in your wills. Joanne and I recently modified our wills so that a portion of our estate will go to the fund. You might consider doing something similar and thereby help support a worthy community ministry project. Thank you in advance!

Dr David Olson
Chair of the Legacy Fund Committee.

Revitalized Library

The Library team has been working hard over the past few months on creating a new and improved library for us all. The plan is for a fall launch of the revitalized library, so make sure to keep your eyes open for updates and announcements. You can reach the Library Team at library@riverbendunited.org, if you have any questions or suggestions. Thanks to the library team for your efforts in providing this exciting resource to RUC.

The Front Pew - Redesign?

On October 1st, Microsoft is "retiring" its Publisher software program. How might that effect our *Front Pew* design, we hear you ask? Well, the *Front Pew* is created using the Publisher program and an alternative is currently being researched by Carolyn Miller, who looks after publication design. As she told Christine Ens, our editor "I am not exactly sure what program I will be using (there will be lots of experimenting, and I suspect lots of swearing at the computer!), however my aim is to be moderately proficient in a new program by the next submission date." Good luck, Carolyn!

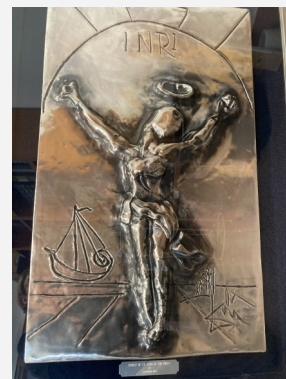
Fall Feast

Good news! The Fall Feast, so ably provided by the Turkey Team, will take place again this year. Mark your calendars for Sunday, October 25th. Still in the planning stage, full details will be in the announcements, so please make sure to keep checking them.



Did You Know?

Did you know that RUC is in possession of a Bas Relief in Silver of one of Salvador Dali's most famous art works? Dali created both a painting and a wax sculpture named "Christ of St John of the Cross". The famous painting resides in Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow, Scotland. Our relief, which is a replication of the wax original, hung for many years in the narthex. It was taken down from the wall when the narthex was painted, and it now proudly hangs in the office of our office manager.



Riverbend Men's Shed - Fall 2026

Just a reminder that the Riverbend Men's Shed will commence in Fall 2026. Run out of RUC, this project is one of the first to be funded through the RUC Legacy fund.

The goal of the Men's Shed is to connect men through activities and common interests to build friendships. It is hoped that through the Men's Shed, connection, camaraderie, and community are built. What a wonderful opportunity for Riverbend United Church to reach out to the community.

For further information or inquiries contact David James through the church office. You will also find an informative article, announcing the program, in the Summer 2026 issue of the *Front Pew*.

Don't Forget....

Our weekly Friday email lets you know what is happening on the upcoming Sunday and the week ahead. Contact the Church office to be added to the mailing list.



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

Next deadline: 20 November 2026