

CONNECTIONS

Stories of being church today in Oxford County

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LAMENT - GATEWAY TO COMPASSION

'May you always have compassion' my father used to say to me. But at times, I wished that my heart wasn't so tender. Now, even though it 'hurts', I'm learning to be grateful that I can still feel sad, angry, or shocked when I see someone homeless; read about the people killed and homes burned recently in Nigeria; or hear about the negligent bombing of a girls' school in Iran. Grateful that I have not lost the capacity to lament/mourn 'what is to me the senseless' loss of vibrant lives and loved although humble homes. **For lament is part of the wholeness of what makes us each human. To deny lament as part of life is to bury our feeling of helplessness. It risks slipping into normalizing atrocities with words like "that's just the way of life, today".** It encourages despair which can shut down any sense of agency. For when despair cripples my feelings there is no hope, no energy to resist, remake, or repair.

But **to lament, to cry out to God, to be heard is to be strengthened** to do what I can where I can with what I am. **In short to express compassion for that which is around me.**

In preparation for this issue, stories came to us from across the globe. **Reaching out to each other to share food, music or chat, we not only learn but we are inspired.** This Lent, as we not only read/hear and pray about these positive stories about people who are immigrants, Indigenous, Nigerians preparing the World Day of Prayer or practicing non-violent resistance to authoritarianism in Minneapolis **let us also take prayerful actions.**

Last fall, we were glad that we'd attended the **special service in Norwich United to hear Jean Claude Munyezamu**, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide. Some years ago, he came to Calgary as a refugee

with his family. As a stay-at-home dad, when he took his children to the park he was astounded at the number of children playing amidst drug needles on the playground. A proficient soccer player himself, he pitched possibilities to the kids and soon taught/coached them to play soccer and eventually developed the unique [Umoja Community Mosaic](#) (Page 6 has Jeff Tribe's article on the Transformative Power of Sports).

Prayers Go Up and Blessings Come Down is on the wooden plaque in the sanctuary at **Grand River United Church at Six Nations of the Grand**. We attended their Chili Supper on February 27. *(An aside: This is the church that **Bill Sams** of the former Central UC in Woodstock helped rebuild in 1993 after the church burned down. Bill's picture is prominently framed on the wall of their Dining Room. Bill was also the first Chair of The Meeting Place/Operation Sharing in Woodstock.)* **We were entertained with excellent Bluegrass Music** which featured a dozen musicians playing guitars, banjos, mandolins, a steel cone guitar, fiddles, a string base AND spoons! Each musician sang their favourite song with other voices adding harmony. I recognized 'Precious Memories'! **Their passion for music fed both their souls and ours.** The main organizer, John McNaughton, is the grandson of Grandma Licker of Six Nations, who taught all her children and grandchildren to love music. John Licker, Maria Polillo and Susie also assisted in organizing players from both inside and outside of Six Nations.



The women of Nigeria wrote the materials for the World Day of Prayer this year choosing the scripture **"I Will**

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Give You Rest: Come”.

The faith stories of women whose everyday lives are challenging touched us deeply. In this painting, the artist,

Gift Amarachi Ottah, depicts the daily reality of rural Nigerian women who walk treacherous paths with toddlers strapped to their back, heavy burdens on their head as well as managing other children underfoot. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with 250 ethnic groups. Increasingly, the Shia Muslims (a small portion of the population) are attacking remote communities forcing their stringent beliefs on them. For those interested, the videos of WDP are [here](#). I attended Norwich UC and just like in the Nigerian churches, we also **joyfully danced our offering to the front**. What a deep sense of God’s grace our bodies released as we danced!

The citizens of Minneapolis pushed back against the January onslaught of 3000 ICE agents on their city. Among their resistance measures, some citizens wore whistles around their neck to blow when they saw ICE agents attempting to apprehend someone of colour inappropriately. **The Baptist church** which proudly displayed this church sign is



in the epicentre of where the murders of Renee Good and Alex

Pretti, innocent citizens, took place. (**The sign has gone viral**.) In February, I was privileged to hear Rev. John Pentland of Hillhurst UC, Calgary, interview Rev. Travis Norwell. Norwell and many other cyclists ride beside someone as they commute to work. Minneapolis’ resistance has become a beacon of **‘how to’ resist authoritarianism**. **The people of Milan, Italy (Olympics) even asked for the rudiments of how to organize similar resistance**. Simple and effective non-violent resistance.

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Ways to Spread the word

- **Post on your congregation’s Facebook Page and [Antler River Watershed Facebook](#).**
- **Email neighbouring churches**
- **Current list of UC in Oxford [here](#)**
- **Post on [Oxford United Ministries Facebook page](#). Ensure you follow our Facebook page.**

The penultimate issue of CONNECTIONS late spring 2026.

Request for articles/events will be sent to church contacts, 2 weeks before publishing deadline.

The last issue of CONNECTIONS in the fall of 2026.

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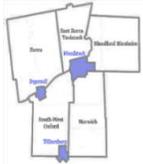
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PRAYER CYCLES - OXFORD + ARW REGION

We offer the Prayer Cycles for Oxford County ([here](#)) and ARW Region ([here](#)). You may choose to remember Retired Ministers or Lay Worship Leaders during the respective Prayer Cycle.



OXFORD UNITED CHURCHES

Websites/contact information for Oxford congregations' **worship times are listed [here](#)** + on Facebook.

GOD IS DOING A NEW THING

SHARING our stories and prayers with our neighbouring communities of faith.

MOVING TO SEARCH PROCESS
Otterville UC.

GRATEFUL We are pleased to report that **Pastor Lori Minler** (Mt Elgin UC and Newark UC) has recovered and is at work! She deeply appreciated our prayers.

PRAYING for minister and congregations while their minister is on **Parental Leave**: Rev. Jennifer Canning (Peace UC, Plattsville).

SYMPTATHY EXTENDED



to the family and friends of **Olga McKellar**. Skilled in many things, Olga was a cherished friend, a valued colleague and a faithful contributor to Connections. She was the

contact for the Prayer Chain, wrote Book Reviews as well as a popular column featuring her homespun wisdom from growing up in England during the war, her teen years here in Oxford and her ministry across Canada. Olga sometimes served with her husband Rev. Peter McKellar (d 2014). Her obit is [here](#).

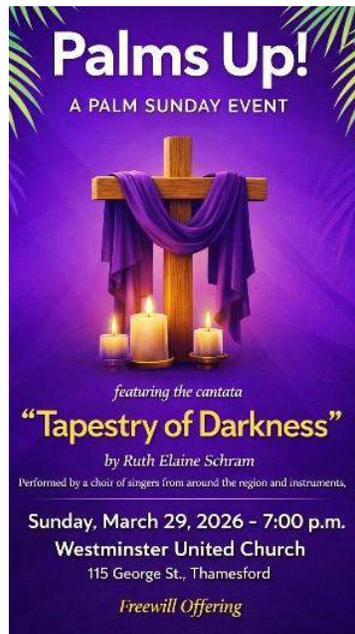
On Saturday, May 23, there will be a Drop in (2-4 pm) with Words of Remembrance 2:30 pm. at **St. David's United Church, Kirk Hall**, Woodstock. A light lunch provided.

OXFORD EVENTS

Mt Elgin UC

March 18 Invite friends and come for **Soup & Sandwich Lunch**, cost \$12. Served from 11:00am - 1:00pm

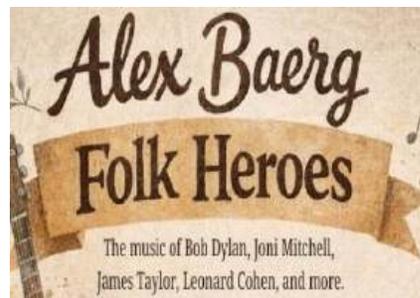
WESTMINSTER UC, THAMESFORD



During Holy Week, March 29, at 7:00 pm, Westminster UC hosts 22 singers (from seven communities of faith) along with various instruments.

Once again, the gifted duo the Rev. Mark and Cheryl Marshall lead the cantata. Music that feeds our souls along with a Tenebrae

service and possibly communion. Freewill offering.



Westminster UC
Saturday, April 11, at 7:00 pm.
Tickets \$30

Mt Elgin UC

KC AND THE SUNSHINE GIRLS

Coming to **Mt Elgin Community Centre Sunday, May 3, 2-4pm**. Put on your Boogie Shoes for an afternoon of dance hits of the 70's & 80's. **This Tribute Show is being hosted by Mt Elgin United Church.**

For Tickets
call Joanne 519-425-1988 or
Dawne 519-421-6836. \$30

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LOCAL OUTREACH

Avondale UC, Tillsonburg

Avondale United at 60 Harvey St, has opened its doors as a **Warming Center** for shelter out of the weather. Lunch refreshments and a caring community are provided. The hours are Monday to Friday 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. for the months of March and April.

The INN-Tillsonburg continues to operate at Avondale UC, 7 days a week from November 1st-May1st 7pm-8am

Knox UC, Embro

RAPID RESPONSE TO A REAL NEED –

From a post on social media to a refrigerator delivered, plugged in and loaded with people's food! Here is how it happened: Lara saw an Operation Sharing post on social media that they were in need of a refrigerator for people who shelter with them. Lara contacted the Mission and Outreach committee, received full support, then confirmed with Finance the amount of funds in the M and O account (proceeds from our Christmas bake sale). Walt volunteered to shop a standard fridge and confirmed they run around \$1400 - \$1500 plus taxes. He checked with Lara, they agreed to **"shop local"** and by the afternoon of the same day, a full-sized fridge was purchased at Anderson's of Ingersoll. They delivered it the next day! So, it is within 30 hours from social media post to a refrigerator up and running. Not bad! Actually, very good. **Doing the work that Christ called us to do – care for our fellow people, help when we can, where we can.**

Submitted by Walt Thurtell on behalf of the Mission and Outreach Committee, in service to the congregation of Knox United Church

ST. PAUL'S COMMUNITY KITCHEN,

Tillsonburg, Every SATURDAY 10:30 coffee, and 11:30-12:30 lunch

Oxford United Refugee Support (OURS) –

WESTMINSTER UNITED, Thamesford



Since 2022 when the Hamoudi's, (the Syrian family of 5, single mother + 4 children) sought refuge in Lebanon along the Lebanon/Israel border from bombing in Syria, they have been waiting patiently. Recently, everyone was so relieved to learn that it might soon be possible to get a flight date from Lebanon (maybe even in the next 7-12 weeks)! **But the war in Iran has shattered any relief.** Reportedly **Israel wants to empty the south of Lebanon for 'safety'.** This means that the family could well be on the move again in the dangerous war zone! **Prayers for the Hamoudi's greatly appreciated.**



Fundraising continues as costs have risen. **To contribute, please write "Refugee Sponsorship" in the memo line of cheques. Westminster UC, 115 George St. Thamesford, ON, N0M 2M0.**

THE LIGHT FROM OTHERS



"Where two or three are gathered, there I am also". Gathering is especially important around those who are hurting **to offer the Light of Presence.**

Using our capacity to relight the spark of life in another. The Light of being alive - part of our very being. **"Sharing the Light that we are participating with and in."** ([Scott Erikson](#), Substack Mar 9 2026)

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OPERATION SHARING



+ supplies.

Please visit their [website](#) or [Facebook](#)

[page](#), call 519-320-1372 ext. 4 or email info@operationsharing.ca

JUST NEXT DOOR FIVE OAKS CENTRE



See their [webpage](#) + [Facebook](#) for their latest programs.

Donations gratefully accepted (see here).

GRANDMOTHERS' TEA

Have fun sharing stories with our Indigenous neighbours!



March 25, 2026

Fifty United Church
1455 Highway #8
Winona, ON L8E 5K9

Contact: Karen Toogood Segrave
@ 1-905-573-8136

TIME: 12:00- 2:00 pm

Join us for potluck lunch. Bring your favourite dish (and recipe) to share AND *your own plate, cup and cutlery.* Email Marg Murray to share a ride!



STICH SUPPER CLUB, Trinity UC, Ingersoll [Facebook page here](#), [website here](#)

Each Thursday 4:30-6:00 pm

Volunteers needed. Sign up here:

www.stichsupperclub.ca/volunteer-sign-up

CARING HEARTS SUPPORT NETWORK

Colouring Through Grief

3rd Wed. every month,

6:00-7:30 pm

St. David's United Church



To register, call 519-536-3370 or email info@caringheartssupportnetwork.com
website: www.caringheartssupportnetwork.com

Try a relaxing mandala colouring session and discuss topics related to grief. Connect with others



Camp Tanner Dissolution of the Camp is underway - **Secretary of Camp Tanner Inc.**, Gail Kavelman,

gkavelman@gmail.com .



Sat. April 25

ReuseApalooza at Brownsville Community Centre

292240 Culloden Road, Brownsville

8:00 am to 12 pm

Give your old stuff a second chance!

This **FREE Swap meet** is a fun way to reduce, reuse or recycle. **Details here:** <https://www.reuseapaloozaha.ca/>

Various groups who make our community a better place have displays! Be sure to listen to the catchy tune posted on the website with meaningful lyrics and fascinating beat. See you at the **Reuseapaloozaha!**

FAIR TRADE OLIVE OIL PALESTINE

email Dave Schell davidwschell@gmail.com

Zatoun 750 ml \$30.00.

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THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF SPORT –

**special BY JEFF TRIBE ABOUT JEAN
CLAUDE MUNYEZAMU**

Rwandan genocide against the Tutsi survivor Jean Claude Munyezamu is a true Christian walking humbly in Jesus' path, balancing survivor's guilt through constructive, meaningful action, choosing and continuing to choose reconciliation over revenge, building a brighter future rather than living in a dark past.

The primary source for an article on the transformative power of sport, **Jean Claude arrived in Canada as a refugee, leveraging his love for soccer as a tool to create belonging and opportunity for at-risk youth in his Calgary public housing neighbourhood.**

Soccer attracted kids and parents wanting to see their offspring thrive while understanding other kinds of teams - criminal gangs - were also recruiting in their neighbourhoods.

What began as a sports-based organization with a strong educational component leading to 100 per cent high school graduation rate grew and **evolved into Umoja Community Mosaic (<https://umojamosaic.org>)**. It added community-defined food support, after school programs, leadership development, post-secondary education opportunities through employment and scholarship, and popular community-building sewing and social groups.

Jean Claude also returns to his home Rwandan village on a personal mission of reconstruction and reconciliation. Once again **using sport (soccer and basketball) as tools to encourage education and personal development** he has brought clean water, electricity and hope to a disadvantaged rural municipality. He also personally funds students for life-changing post-secondary education,

offering a route for others who wish to similarly contribute.

Accepting Jean Claude's invitation to 'come to Rwanda' and thence Calgary, I optimistically thought of **filming a 'small d' documentary around his journey.** Bucket list kind of thing, no budget, film, sound or lighting crew, just Jeff and his cameras. Christian principles-based effort to give something back in recognition of undeniable Canadian birthplace privilege.



It would be me who would be humbled, educated to look at refugees as a resource through innovative integration and opportunity rather than the burden often portrayed in mainstream and social media. Disrupted communities rebuilt through a sense of belonging, progress through possibility and contribution. Skilled trades, engineering, computer science and rocket scientist students, productive and contributing members of society in training hailing from communities where post-secondary education was previously considered a miracle.

The takeaway became people are people are people whether from a farm near Burgessville, urban Calgary or rural Rwanda, most of us trying to get by and build a better life for our kids.

'Grace' or 'Refugee' (working titles) explores my original question: **'How does one who has experienced unimaginable horror choose transformative action over anger and revenge** not only in one's adopted community, but the very location your

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JEAN CLAUDE MUNYEZAMU

(Cont'd)

family was murdered?’ **Secondly, what can the power of that choice mean in an increasingly divisive and polarized Canadian society?**

Film editing - more and longer than anticipated - is ongoing amidst ruminating on those salient points. And the challenge of considering choices lying before each and every one of us, large and small, and their individual and cumulative impact remains a work very much in worthwhile progress.

(editor's note: I could sense the movement of the Spirit in Jean Claude's faith filled message of resourcefulness and resilience at Norwich UC on November 9, 2025. When I approached Jeff to tell us how he came to know Jean Claude, he graciously agreed. It has been an amazing learning for me to recognize the Spirit using sports! Jeff is a seasoned sports writer for the Simcoe Advocate. His July 31, 2025 article is [here](#). An earlier article about the value of diversity in an Feb 8, 2024 article in Future of Good is [here](#).)

UNITED CHURCH RURAL MINISTRY NETWORK

The March 2026 ENews of the UCRMN is [here](#) (or at UCRMN.ca and sign up for your own copy!):

Topics reported on the Workshop "Lay-Led Leadership Worship" (February 19) and possible training for 'Sacramental Elder' plus lots of questions to support and train lay-led leadership when ordered ministry is not as available as in the past.

An extremely useful section is the [Tech Resource Page](#) with Martin Dawson and Peter Chynoweh who know about 'Open-Source Software' and used computers!

ONTARIO HEALTH COALITION CONTINUED ACTION ALERT

Privatizing Health Care is against the law in Canada. Alberta and Ontario increasingly turn to private profit-making solutions.

Health care shouldn't depend on how rich you are. But defund our Provincial Health Care only to privatize to provide service is costly. Send letters, sign petitions, check out the facts OHC's [Briefing Note](#) as well as this [Fact Sheet](#) or the online videos [here](#).

Drop by the table of the [Oxford Coalition for Social Justice](#). at Woodstock Farmer's Market Saturday mornings to sign petitions.

KITCHEN CONVERSATIONS WITH THE MODERATOR (incl hot link)

A fascinating series exploring food, faith and being in relationship with each other as we invite, cook and eat. Our Moderator, Kimblery Heath cooks and chats with colleagues while they make yummy food (apple pie, Coptic chickpeas etc). They talk about their work, their faith and how it all comes together in the food they prepare together. The cooks have contributed to the Lenten Devotional 'Bless Break Share: Recipes for Faithful Living' edited by Alydia Smith and available [here](#).



To stay in touch, **subscribe** [here](#) to the newsletter of Antler River Watershed Regional Council. See archives [here](#). Contact [Michele Petick](#) **Valuable info: see: [Facebook page](#) + [webpage](#)** ARWRC & HFRC (Bi-Regional meeting) - June 26 & 27 & 28, 2026 at the Lamplighter Inn, London, Ontario

Deep Memory

Exuberant Hope

A Faithful Life:

Without Memory, Hope Is Naïve.

Without Hope, Memory Is Dead

Walter Brueggeman

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LENT as Peace Work – Glen Wright



The church year's Epiphany, **the season of light, ends abruptly when Jesus and his disciples**

descend from their high mountain to **find someone waiting to be healed.**

With Jesus, Galilee was his Epiphany. The Lenten journey begins when Jesus decides they must go south to Jerusalem in Judea.

Lent invites us to join Jesus on that journey, to feel God's pain for a broken world. When Jesus saw, near the journey's end, the city of Jerusalem, **Jesus wept** because Jerusalem **"did not know the way of peace"**. **Peace (shalom) meant wholeness, restoration, for the poor the end of poverty (Deut. 15).**

We don't have to look far to encounter brokenness.

It was on a grocery shopping morning that we noticed between Foodland and Dollarama, **a man holding a sign that read HUNGRY and HOMELESS.** We picked out some food items to share. When I walked over to give him the items, I noticed a container at his feet already filling up with groceries. **What does a homeless person do with a bushel of groceries?** I expect he will take it to the drop-in centre at College Ave. U.C. and share it with his community. "The gifts of God for the people of God."

Grocery shoppers had looked into the face of poverty. Gospel author Matthew would say (Matthew, 25) that it was also the face of Jesus. It's enough to bring one to tears, and to a token act of generosity.

Daily evidence of the hungry and homeless on our streets may have helped raise a record of over \$184,000 in the Coldest Night Walk, Feb. 28th in Woodstock.

Eco-theologian, the Rev. Dr. Jessica Heatherington, suggests that it is **time to lament. Peace (shalom) in nature**

means restoration to wholeness. The environmental crises increase with more signs of global warming. This winter the extreme cold weather is blamed on damage to the polar vortex. There will be more extremes to come. **Is there enough lament, enough pain for us to change?** The answer is "no" when we hear talk of more oil pipelines. Although the news is not all bad. One example. In 2018 Premier Ford cancelled all the (Liberal) contracts to build wind turbines, costing taxpayers \$31 million in compensation. The plan now is to add an additional 5000 MW of power by 2035, with a portion of that power generated by wind turbines.

An avalanche of grief swept over us with the tragedy at Tumbler Ridge. I spoke to a member of our extended family who said he cried all the way through the televised memorial service. **Lament fosters change.** Already the examination of what went so wrong has begun. It started with what AI knew. The lack of mental health services has been identified. Hopefully the study will include what pressures gay, lesbian and trans teenagers face. The peace of Tumbler Ridge was shattered. **The tears shed led to what can be done in that community and in all communities, so that such things do not happen again.**

So, is there hope on the horizon? **The tide of lament is rising.** We are up to our necks in grief. God's earth has "not yet known the way of peace". **However, I believe that hope is embedded in creation.** I trust a saying by abolitionist, Theodore Parker in 1853, a word, I would argue, is supported by scripture:

"The arc of moral history is long, but it bends toward justice". How rapidly and how much it bends depends on us.

Shalom,

Editor Emeritus - Glen Wright

