

ST. DAVIDS-QUEENSTON UNITED CHURCH - LIVING FAITH STORY

Updated April 21, 2021

Mission Statement:

Welcoming all to:

Gather in God's Grace,
Grow in Christian Faith and
Go in Community Service.

INTRODUCTION

Our church family is a one-point charge made up of St. Davids United Church and the former Queenston United Church. The St. Davids congregation was established in 1788 through Christian Warner's Meeting House; Queenston was established in 1786 and flourished until 1996 when it amalgamated with St. Davids to form the St. Davids-Queenston United Church. While our congregation is over 225 years old, our thinking is not. Throughout our history we have experienced wars, sickness, economic depression and uncertainty, and transition from a rural to an urban community. We have survived and thrived. Most recently, we have welcomed members from other area United Churches that have unfortunately closed.

Our compassionate and caring church is nestled against the backdrop of the Niagara Escarpment, amongst fertile vineyards and tender fruit orchards in the Village of St. Davids on the southern edge of the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. We welcome everyone to our handicap accessible church to celebrate God's love for us through traditional worship, song and fellowship in Jesus' name.

Our Journey of Faith – The History of St. Davids-Queenston United Church

<https://stdavids-queenstonuc.ca/About-Us/History>

Major David Secord, after whom the village of St. Davids is named, donated land at the base of the escarpment for a church and cemetery in 1813. As you walk through the cemetery of St. Davids-Queenston United Church, you get a glimpse into the history of this congregation. Two hundred and thirty-one years of family history. The oldest dated stone is for Solomon Quick, who died in 1823. History tells us, however that many early settlers in the St. Davids – Queenston area were buried here before that date, as St. Davids had a mill in 1782 and the village was burned by the Americans in the summer of 1814 during the War of 1812 (war broke out Jun 1812; hostilities ended Jun 1815).

The original cemetery is now closed and a newer cemetery has been established at the rear of the church. The property consists of two and one-half acres and contains approximately 2,000 grave lots. Today, the St. Davids-Queenston United Church Cemetery is an active graveyard available for both members of the congregation and non-members.

St. Davids-Queenston United Church Cemetery History

<https://stdavids-queenstonuc.ca/About-Us/Cemetery/Cemetery-History>

Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL) is in the north-east corner of the Niagara Peninsula in Southern Ontario. NOTL was the capital of Upper Canada from 1792 to 1796 and was originally known as Newark. The municipality of Niagara-on-the-Lake is in a picturesque location bounded on the east by the Niagara River and the border with the USA, on the north by Lake Ontario, on the west by the Welland Canal and the city of St. Catharines, and on the south by the Niagara Escarpment and the city of Niagara Falls. St. Davids is one of five settlement areas in the Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake. The other settlement areas are Queenston, Glendale, Virgil and Old Town. Housing development in Niagara is robust as retirees from the Greater Toronto Area seek to downsize and find a better quality of life in a charming community while transportation and commuter links improve. According to *Niagara Region's Growth Plan, post 2031*, the Region is expected to experience relatively strong population and employment growth through 2041. Based on recent residential development trends, market potential and the supply of opportunities (intensification and greenfield development), St. Davids is expected to accommodate the largest share of urban residential growth to 2041 in Niagara-on-the-Lake, accounting for approximately 40% of future housing development.

Buffalo, NY is about a 40-minute drive down the Queen Elizabeth Way to the south. Toronto is about an hour and half drive via the QEW/Gardiner Expressway. There is currently a 15-minute air link between Niagara District Airport and Toronto's Billy Bishop Airport. There is also daily GO Train service year-round as well as hourly GO Bus services from Niagara College, Niagara Falls and St. Catharines.

WORSHIP

St. Davids-Queenston United Church enjoys a traditional worship service. Our services include Hymns that are led by a robust and talented choir. Lay readers assist the Minister in various aspects of the service. Some of the cherished parts of our service include Children's Time, Sharing of Joys and Concerns the weekly Anthem by the Choir, reciting the Lord's Prayer and the singing of Vespers at the conclusion of the service. A typical Sunday Worship Service is about one hour in length followed by coffee and fellowship in the Christian Education Hall.

Our community of faith is enhanced with humour, is very accepting of all people and is blessed with the pre-service banter that makes our church family open and welcoming to all. We have a very active Senior Choir with an accredited music leader, providing an inspiration to all who attend our services. Our Minister's Sermon is delivered in a caring, inclusive, powerful and uplifting way. All components of our worship and fellowship including the sermon, are designed to help us honour our faith, as reflected in the United Church New Creed with relevance to our daily lives.

Music is a key element of Sunday Worship. Our Choir Director and Organist leads an 18-member strong Senior Choir. We have a number of soloists to enhance our service

and while Hymns are traditionally accompanied by an organ or piano, on occasion a violin, and even a French Horn will accompany the Choir. Voices United is used for Hymns. Twice yearly, at Easter and at Christmas, the Senior Choir performs a Cantata to mark those occasions. These theme-based lively musical performances are eagerly anticipated by both congregation members and the community.

We currently have 141 members on the roll and a typical Sunday will see an average attendance of 85. Congregation members come from both rural and urban settings bounded by St. Catharines, Niagara Falls and Niagara-on-the-Lake. The vast majority are in the 51 to 71+ age grouping making us an aging congregation. The majority are retired from a professional life, some with a farming background. Currently, the majority grew up in the area, but we are seeing an increase in members from the Greater Toronto Area retiring to Niagara and seeking a church with a traditional service.

Our sound system has a multitude of speakers in the Sanctuary with the capability to broadcast our service into the Christian Education Hall, lower level and kitchen. We have weekly Worship Bulletins with the order of service and announcements. These are distributed by Greeters who give all attendees a warm welcome. For those who are visually impaired, we provide large print bulletins.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we established a weekly online worship service from our Sanctuary that is recorded on Wednesday then uploaded to our YouTube channel where the congregation is invited to tune in together on Sunday morning while apart. We are planning for a weekly live-stream where our Sunday service will be offered online as well as in our Christian Education Hall. As the pandemic subsides, this will allow in-person worship services to resume with the congregation split between the Sanctuary and the CE Hall allowing for better physical distancing, and for those who wish to, participate in our Sunday service from home. Funding for this capability was through a generous bequest.

We do not have a formal stewardship campaign but recognize that we need to strengthen that area for future sustainability, especially considering our heavy reliance on the income provided by an aging congregation. We are very successful in raising funds for special projects. We are very transparent about our financial needs and continually share where we are in our budget cycle. Our church continues to thrive and grow through our regular offerings with no outside sources of income or ongoing funding which, thankfully, means there are no influences from outside the congregation. We are solely responsible for our own destiny and future. During the pandemic, participation in PAR has increased.

LEADERSHIP

St. Davids-Queenston United Church needs a Minister who, through example and quiet diplomacy, shares stories of God's love for all. Our Minister is the spiritual leader of our church. Our Minister should be a gentle leader who shows caring and compassion

towards the members of the congregation. Many members of our congregation enjoy giving and receiving hugs!

The Church Board at St. Davids-Queenston United Church is an active group of 14 leaders who are very involved in the church. We look to the Board to be the administrators of the church while looking to our Minister to be our spiritual leader. We currently have 9 members of the congregation who are lay readers. They participate in the weekly worship service alongside our Minister. There are also several members who assist our Minister during Children's Time in the worship service. Members of the Worship and Faith Life Committee also assist our Minister in serving communion. We have no specific training for these leaders. St. Davids-Queenston United Church is blessed to have two retired Ministers as part of our Congregation as well as a licensed lay minister and a member with a Ph.D in theology who are available to preach when requested.

Our Senior Choir of 18 members is led by our Choir Director and Organist, who holds a Bachelor and two Masters of Music degrees in voice and music/choral education and has been the recipient of many voice awards and scholarships. She performed in the ensemble of the Toronto production of *The Phantom of the Opera* for over six years before coming to Niagara. Our Organist/Choir Director arranges and prepares the choir for 2 cantatas each year – one for Christmas and the other for Easter. Our Organist/Choir Director is a paid position. The recent purchase of a Baby Grand piano for our Sanctuary has enhanced the music options for our services.

Our Sunday School Teacher is a lifelong member of St. Davids-Queenston United. She became the Sunday School teacher in 2005 and is an active member of the Christian Education Committee. Our Sunday School Teacher is a paid position.

We look to our Ministry and Personnel Committee to provide a level of conflict resolution when necessary. Ideally, each member of this committee is responsible for one paid staff member. They are responsible for being a liaison between the staff member and the congregation. We also have several retired professionals in the congregation with formal conflict resolution training who can be relied upon on an informal basis.

PASTORAL CARE

We do not currently offer any formal pastoral care other than through our Minister. We recognize that we need to do a better job of this, knowing that this is not only the job of the Minister, but also requires the support of properly trained lay leaders.

The Worship and Faith Life Committee maintains a "phone tree" wherein our Minister or Administrative Assistant contacts the lead to provide important and immediate information to congregation members as issue arise. Our Administration Assistant also maintains an email distribution list containing approximately 100 email addresses.

Under our current governance structure, Friendly Visitors is a sub-committee of the Worship and Faith Life Committee that is responsible for sending cards, making phone calls and visiting homebound members of the congregation.

There is support and interest in the need for a formal Pastoral Care committee of the Board. This is an initiative that is becoming very important with an aging congregation. We feel it important that our Minister be an active participant in our church life attending social and other church activities as a form of pastoral care.

ADMINISTRATION

St. Davids-Queenston United Church is governed through a Church Board model. The Church Board is made up of 14 members that include our Minister, Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Regional Council Representative, Chairs of the 4 Standing Committees (Worship and Faith Life (2), Finance, Ministry and Personnel and Property), 2 “at large” members, and a UCW and Trustees representative. There are also five Chairs of our Sub-Committees (Christian Education, Mission and Outreach, Friendly Visitors, Activities and Flowers) who are invited non-voting members. These Sub-committees report to the Church Board through the Worship and Faith Life Committee. The Church Board recently completed a Constitution for our church that received Regional Council approval in July 2019 and was approved by the Congregation in February 2020. Our Church Board is a very active Board that is very involved in the leadership of the church.

Administrative support to our Minister and the congregation is provided by a paid part-time Church Administrative Assistant who works in the church approximately 13 hours per week. The Admin Assistant is also the bookkeeper providing support to the Treasurer and Finance Committee. The Admin Assistant works closely with the Minister in preparing for Sunday worship including preparing the weekly Worship Bulletin, printing large print versions of the hymns, various announcements and notices, printing copies of hymns for the Choir. The Admin Assistant administers PAR; supports the M&S Fund, the Benevolent and Memorial Funds; compiles the Annual Report; provides year-end tax receipts; completes all banking transactions; handles calls to the church; purchases office supplies; and, completes statistical reports and returns to the United Church of Canada. The Admin Assistant also volunteers as Church Board secretary. The church also has a paid Organist/Choir Director, Sunday School Teacher and Janitor.

The church is connected to higher-speed internet and is fully Wi-Fi accessible. Both the Admin Assistant and Minister have desktop computers. There is a networked printer in the Admin Assistant’s office that is also a photocopier and scanner. The church has an active website (<https://stdavids-queenstonuc.ca/>) as well as a Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/St-Davids-Queenston-United-Church/>) During the pandemic, we are conducting an online worship service that is recorded on Wednesdays then shared with the congregation for viewing on Sundays. We are looking forward to

moving back to a weekly Sunday service and reintroducing in-person worshipping when we will introduce a live-stream broadcast of our service on the Internet, once pandemic restrictions are lifted.

Our current financial situation is healthy with abundant reserves and a generous congregation. Our financial situation is reviewed monthly with a detailed report provided by the Treasurer to the Church Board. Over the past 9 years, we have finished the year with a healthy surplus 5 times, with only small deficits in 3 and balanced in one year. This, while accomplishing major renovations and system replacements and upgrades to our church. During the pandemic and subsequent church shutdown in 2020, revenues have slipped slightly while our expenses have also been reduced. We strive to accomplish a balanced budget through periodic updates and communiques to the congregation. Our budget is balanced through a combination of weekly givings, rentals and fund-raising activities. We have a goal to have financial records third-party audited on a regular basis.

FAITH FORMATION AND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

St. Davids-Queenston United Church has an active Christian Education Committee that focuses much of their attention on the Sunday School and youth. Sunday School runs from September to June with a paid teacher who organizes classes and runs a number of youth activities. Children's Time is an integral part of Sunday morning worship. During this time, our Minister or one of several volunteers will call the children forward and talk with the children and lead them in prayer before the children go to Sunday School. Our Minister organizes and conducts adult Christian education classes during the year. When numbers warrant it, Confirmation classes are conducted for teenagers in our church.

The United Church Women (UCW) meet at the church on the second Wednesday of every month from September to June. The UCW annually participate in "World Day of Prayer, held in a different church in Niagara each year. In April, the UCW graciously hosts a delicious luncheon for members of our congregation who are 80 years or older. The UCW is involved in a number of fund-raising activities for the church. From September to April, meat pies are made and sold on the last Friday of the month. In November, the UCW hosts the Annual Bazaar where visitors can purchase baked goods, preserves, crafts and a large number of attic treasures and enjoy a soup and sandwich lunch. Annually, the UCW donates funds to the church to cover the cost of insurance and for various projects at the church, which they continued to fund in 2020 despite their lack of fundraising abilities. During the pandemic, the UCW's ability to fund raise has been severely impacted. In 2012, the UCW celebrated its 50th anniversary. At the time, a UCW member from our congregation wrote a song: "United Church Women", which was chosen by the United Church National Executive to become the "signature" song of the UCW.

We have a number of goals related to our faith formation and Christian education including filling the gap between children and adults. We need to find ways for our children to transition from attending Sunday School to staying and becoming active members of our congregation. We need to devote time and resources to giving opportunities to Members seeking out and participating in outside studies and skills development. There is interest in conducting adult Christian education in other than work hours so that the otherwise employed congregation members can also participate. We have budget allocated for our Minister to update skills, but no current budget for our lay leaders.

We have a variety of (retired) professionals in the congregation who are able to provide expertise in their areas, as needed.

SELF-CARE

The congregation is abundantly supportive of each other! Sunday worship is as much a social gathering as it is a worship service. The sanctuary is a buzz of conversation involving all attendees before worship starts. We celebrate members' birthdays with a monthly birthday cake supplied by the UCW. We genuinely have fun together.

The Sharing of Joys and Concerns during worship service brings the congregation together as we celebrate with and grieve together for each other. Following the church service, congregants actively support and shows compassion to those who have identified joys or concerns. Together we have built a strong sense of belonging within our community of faith.

Coffee Hour following the worship service is critical to the social well being of our church family. This is a time of fellowship and conversation with the added bonus of a good cup of coffee and goodies - supplied by many different people - on a weekly basis. This is a time for our Minister to engage in one-on-one informal conversations with members of the congregation.

It is very important that our Minister has an open and strong relationship with the Ministry and Personnel representative and the Church Board Chair, which is key in achieving a good work/life balance. A friendly and supportive relationship between the two is imperative.

There are two retired ministers in our congregation who had a healthy, supportive relationship with the previous Minister and who are willing and available to offer the same support to our new Minister. These ministers are also available to preach on a Sunday, when necessary.

We support our Minister's vacation and study leaves and strive to ensure they are supporting their own health and wellness.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

St. Davids-Queenston United Church has a long history within the community of St. Davids and Queenston dating back into the late 1700s. Through our Facility Use Policy, we encourage the use of our facility, without charge, by local community groups, clubs and organizations with beliefs similar to those of the United Church of Canada and our congregation. Our facility is used by the Scouts, Cubs and Beavers of 1st St. Davids from September to June. The local Friends of St. Davids use our facility for their Mahjong group. We also welcome the Niagara Star Singers youth group as well as the Queenston Ladies Choir for their practices. As a result, our facility is in use every day/evening of the week from September to June. For other users, we simply ask for a non-receipted donation to the work of our church rather than charge rental fees. During the pandemic, all these activities have been cancelled.

St. Davids-Queenston United Church is a very generous and compassionate church collecting funds and doing fund raising activities for many local charity organizations as part of our social justice and outreach efforts. The first Sunday of every month is Toonie Sunday where congregation members are encouraged to put their Toonies in a box. Funds from Toonie Sunday are distributed through our Mission and Outreach Committee to a number of local charities. Through the year there are a number of social activities within the church used to raise additional funds for local charities and church projects. From September to June there is a well-attended Beef on a Bun and Games night on the second Friday of each month with many members of the community attending. Our church also participates in the Samaritan's Purse Christmas shoebox campaign. The Benevolent Fund was established by the Worship and Faith Life Committee in order to provide needed funds for local community and individual needs on an as required basis. Periodic free-will offerings during special services like the Christmas Candlelight Service are deposited in the Benevolent Fund. At Christmas, congregation members decorate a tree in the Sanctuary with mittens, scarves and hats. The children of the Sunday School retrieve these items on White Gift Sunday that are then donated to a local women's shelter. And members of the Mission and Outreach Committee purchase items and fill stockings that are donated to Project Share. These activities have been used to support local charities including Women's Place, Gillian's Place, The Soup Kitchen in Niagara Falls, Wellspring Niagara, Cave Springs Camp, the Niagara Falls Humane Society, the Brock University Chaplaincy, Project Share and the Red Roof Retreat. In 2015, after the horrors of the Syrian Refugee crisis emerged, we pledged to assist St. Andrews United Church in Niagara Falls as they worked to sponsor a family fleeing Syria. In just one month, we raised over \$12,000.00!

During the pandemic shut-down in 2020 where activities like our annual Mitten Tree were cancelled, we participated in our annual Christmas 'Mitten Tree' by joining a Town of NOTL clothing, gift and food drive. Utilizing our parking lot, we gathered and donated 6 SUVs and a minivan full of warm clothing items and food to be included in their collection and distribution. It was fun and enriching during our Advent season.

St. Davids-Queenston United Church has a small but active Mission and Outreach Committee whose primary responsibility is to ensure our church meets our annual commitment to the United Church's Mission and Service Fund. This is accomplished through periodic Minutes for Mission during weekly worship services. We usually managed to meet and exceed that financial goal. Annually we split the M&S Fund, committing the first \$10,000.00 to the United Church's Mission and Service Fund and the remainder going to a local Mission and Service Fund for use supporting social justice efforts in the Niagara region.

We recently completed a Mission Statement for our church as part of establishing a local Constitution and as part of our Minister Search activity. The last part of this mission statement is 'Go in community service'. That was done deliberately. It is our goal to provide a stronger focus for community outreach and social justice beyond our walls and would like to expand in this area within our community.

DENOMINATION AND COMMUNITIES

Within the immediate community, St. Davids-Queenston United Church is a meeting place for Scouts, Cubs and Beavers from 1st St. Davids. We also make our facility available to a local social group called Friends of St. Davids. The largest fund raiser for our church occurs in July when the ladies of our church bake homemade pies to be sold at the annual St. Davids Lions Carnival, although the Carnival was cancelled during 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions. Our church has been doing that for 57 years, which is the length of time the Lions have held their carnival. From September to June, our Activities Committee hosts a Beef-on-a-Bun and Games social night on the second Friday of the month and in November, we host a Ham Dinner, both events being open to the community and used to raise funds for the church and outreach. In November, the United Church Women host their Annual Bazaar and from September to April, meat pies are made at the end of each month and sold to local residents. Due to restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, these activities have been cancelled for 2020 after March of that year.

Prior to the change in governance within the United Church of Canada, we had 2 lay member representatives and our Minister at Presbytery. They were active members of this body with other members serving on the Extension Council and the Cave Springs Corporation. Since the change, we only have one representative at Regional Council. This is due to an aging congregation and the reluctance to travel greater distances to meetings. We will support our new Minister in meeting their obligations to both Regional Council and General Council. We continue to have a representative on the Cave Springs Corporation.

In recent years, we have shared our Good Friday Services with St. Saviours Anglican Church in Queenston. That service was cancelled in 2020 due to restrictions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. We also worked with St. Andrews United Church in Niagara Falls on their Syrian Refugee project sponsoring and welcoming a family into our community. The United Church Women annually participate in "World Day of

Prayer, held in a different church in Niagara each year. That service was cancelled in 2020 due to restrictions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. We will continue to look for opportunities to collaborate with other churches and organizations in the area and encourage and support them as they reach out for support and conversation.