

CONNECTIONS

News and Views of Oxford County United Churches

Vol 5 Issue 1

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EPIPHANY – LOVE MAKES IT THROUGH

BLASTing off to Bethlehem!

What a wonderful Advent experience the children of the Zorra United Churches enjoyed this season! As a result of the collaborative ministries initiative between Chalmers United in Kintore, Knox United in Embro and Westminster United in Thamesford, called **BLAST (Bible Learning Adventure Station Time)** the



leadership team together planned an incredibly rewarding event for their little ones. Close to 60 children made the journey back to

Bethlehem in period costumes with their travel passports, currency and luggage in hand. They heard of Jesus' birth, built wooden houses, wove woolen baskets, sculpted clay bowls and enjoyed a meal together within the town square. The program was hosted in all three communities on sequential Sunday mornings, allowing for sharing of décor and materials.

BLAST originated in Embro a number of years ago and after numerous conversations among the three churches in



Zorra related to ways ministry could be done together, children's ministry seemed to be a natural place to start. All three churches share a rich history in providing quality programming for children in their communities. By

joining forces with regard to planning and sharing of resources, all three churches have benefitted from the collaboration in ways they couldn't have imagined.

Many thanks to the former Oxford Presbytery for the grant recently awarded to this collaborative group for curriculum, technology and supplies. This gift is so very much appreciated and will go a long way as monthly programming is developed for 2023.

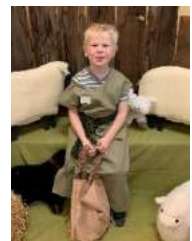
As a side note: Folks at Westminster started investigating the concept of collaborative ministry a year ago with the hope and prayer they could partner with other communities of faith within their area. They felt that by dreaming big, actively inviting other communities of faith to join in the conversation and finding new and creative ways to do ministry they may just succeed in rekindling excitement and commitment for the life and work of the church.

Opportunities around a rural and urban partnership were sought after as well as collaboration with fellow communities of faith within Zorra township.

Collaboration between the Zorra churches continues in other ways as well. **We look forward to a Star-Studded Games Night on January 6th.** A short worship service at Westminster focused on Epiphany will be followed by a time of fellowship, refreshments and board games.

As 2023 rolls on, the three united churches in Zorra will be exploring what it means to become affirming congregations. We all look forward to what the future holds for us.

Feature article by Wendy Brown, member of Westminster UC, Thamesford + member of the United Churches in Zorra Initiative.



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Submissions no greater than 250 words will be considered and due by Noon Friday, Feb. 3, 2023

Publication Date Wed. Feb. 8, 2023

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CONNECTIONS website

oxfordunitedministries.ca

Oxford United Ministries Facebook page

<https://www.facebook.com/OxfordUCMinistries/>

EDITORIAL

In our stories of faith in this issue, Epiphany - Love Makes it Through, we have the sense of what difference we've made in the real world. For our real world in Oxford includes varied work from Camp Tanner, to Ukrainian Pot Luck Supper, to World Day of Prayer, to a new grief support network, to the unique needs of rural churches even as we plan conversations and actions to further reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours. And then we work as well to meet the necessary provisions and deadlines of our Regional Council and secular authorities. Of course, Love shines on the work to be done. We are not alone. We live in God's world.



OXFORD United Churches—COMINGS AND GOINGS

**CALLS/Appointments to
a COMMUNITY OF FAITH.**

Rev Susan McIlveen has been called to Avondale – Otterville.

Nancy Vandenberghe, Candidate, FT appointed to **College Avenue UC**.

CONGREGATIONS IN SEARCH MODE

- **Hebron UC**
- **Dundas St UC**
- **Kintore + Brooksdale UC**

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CAMP TANNER

PLANS ARE UNDERWAY FOR CAMP THIS SUMMER!

Camp Tanner Co-ordinator

Applications are being accepted for the position of Camp Tanner Co-ordinator. The successful applicant would be responsible for the planning of the 2023 camps, assisting with the hiring of staff, promotion of the camp, and training of staff. For a complete job description, please refer to the [Camp Tanner website](#) Resumes with two letters of reference may be submitted to camptannerstaffing@gmail.com.

Contact information for **Treasurer Kim Slager** is 515375 11th Line, Woodstock, N4S 8G1, (519 539 8777)

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OXFORD COUNTY OF ONTARIO HELPS UKRAINE

Volunteer hosts needed to temporarily provide shelter for families arriving Jan/Feb. Counseling from the Settlement Services team at [Community Employment Services Oxford \(hotlink\)](#) or email hmatheson@cesoxford.ca

ALSO NEEDED support systems – rides to work etc..

New Warehouse at 126 Graham St (old Hydro One) is open to Ukrainian families and refugees from other countries. Contact Irene Tiegs (519-536-5554)

Want to find out more about how you can help?

Join their [Facebook page](#) or ask Karen + David Murray, and Larisa Zhukova (an eye surgeon) to speak to groups. Contact oxfordhelpsukraine@gmail.com.

OR

Bring your favorite dish to share
SATURDAY, 28 JANUARY 2023

at 17:30 pm

Ukrainian Potluck Dinner

675369 16th Line, Innerkip, Ontario

For Details, contact

[David Murray](#) or [email](#)

Public- Anyone on or off Facebook

Thank you to all who have helped.

All help is deeply appreciated!

CALENDARS

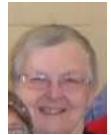
'Catch a fallen star and put it in your pocket, never let it fade away.'

Now let us remember that next winter we could collect 2024 calendars with illustrations.

Free for you to collect, to send to our prisoners in our penitentiaries. Such are the free things prisoners can use to mark off their terms, to remember their people and their families and their coming freedom. To them such a calendar is indeed a fallen star, a ray of hope, an

answer to prayer. Piles of colored calendars are mailed to prisons and given out by Church people and Rotarians at year's end. In Woodstock, for example, calendars collected by St. David's United Church and by the Woodstock Rotary Club, help redecorate a cell; and renew hope.

Reach out in love to those who are prisoners
Olga McKellar

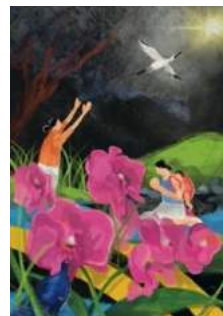


WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

Informed Prayer and Prayerful Action



Friday, March 3, 2023.



The women of Taiwan wrote this year's program bringing hope to women touched by injustice.

This intriguing artwork by Hui-Wen HSAIO of Taiwan expresses how the Christian faith brings them

peace and a new vision. She describes her artwork [here](#).

The background paper about Taiwan is [here](#).

The theme is:

**"I have heard about your faith"
based on Ephesians 1:15-19.** Find the Bible Study [here](#).

Virtual Oxford

A group of us in Oxford are once again planning a **virtual gathering** to share in the video worship service prepared by the Women's Interchurch Council of Canada (WICC). If you choose, this virtual gathering could supplement historical in person gatherings with other denominations. **We are looking for a host church which has reliable internet.** Virtual details will be available in February.

The planning group welcomes your help in extending the invitation to people of all denominations or faiths.

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CHURCH EVENTS

ST. PAUL'S UC, TILLSONBURG,

COMMUNITY KITCHEN LUNCHEON

Every Saturday from October 15- April 29/23, 11:30 am-12:30 pm. A hot meal will be provided. All are welcome. Please use the ramp entrance to the church.

HEBRON UNITED CHURCH SOUPER BOWL FUNDRAISER

Sat, Feb 11, pickup between 4-7 pm.

Potato Ham Chowder or Beef Barley, pretzel bun, sweet marie bar, Apple

Advance Sales Only
Order by Sun. Jan 29

Brenda Junker 519.462.2736 or
gnbjunker@gmail.com

Sandra Stock 519.462.2643



The Caring Hearts Support Network, in partnership with St. David's United Church, is pleased to provide caring support to individuals in our community coming to end-of-life, as well as those who are bereaved. [Nicole Bruder](#), [Faye Brekelmans](#), and [Joanne Stienstra](#) are skilled professionals, who would be honored to help anyone who may be navigating an end-of-life journey or grieving the death of a loved one.

The Caring Hearts Support Network received a grant from [Embracing the Spirit](#), through the United Church of Canada, for this mission offering: end-of-life support, grief support, community education initiatives, and the establishment of a volunteer network. This will include offering grief support groups throughout the year as well as one-on-one grief support.

In addition, two new activities are being launched now (note the hot links below).

Wednesday, January 18th, "[Food for the Grieving Heart](#)", a monthly grief support activity. Cost is \$10.00. Please register by January 13 as space is limited.

Saturday, January 21st, "[Courageous Kitchen Conversations](#)" will be offered, providing a forum for discussion around final plans, final wish processes, and more. No cost. Please register by January 19.

To register, to get more information **or** have a presentation to your church group, please call 519-536-3370 or email info@caringheartssupportnetwork.com.

FARMER WELLNESS INITIATIVE

Accessible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, in English and French, farmers needing immediate support can call 1-866-267-6255 to speak to a mental health professional.

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PRAYERS

We bring our whole selves – body, mind and soul - into our ministry as we learn more about self care. We pray for all leaders with life changing or life altering diagnoses as well as those whose illness is beyond our medical technology, drugs etc. We remember that we are all mortal – that life comes from God and returns to God.



OPERATION SHARING

On going need for non-taxable items such as personal hygiene products, etc.. Call 519-320-1372. Operation Sharing's [website](#) notes that they are accepting spring clothing.

See their informative [website](#) for ongoing needs and volunteer opportunities. For details, email info@operationsharing.ca, or call 519-320-1372 ext. 4.

Food For Friends



Blessings for giving a Dollar at the till for others to make nutritious choices so

they can shop with dignity.

Donations - on their [website](#) or mail Treasurer of Operation Sharing, P.O. Box 20081, Woodstock, Ontario, N4S 8X8



STITCH SUPPER CLUB

[Facebook](#)

[page here](#), [website here](#)

Supper Club is each Thursday at Trinity UC in Ingersoll. 4:30-6 pm.

SAVE THE DATE (and your stuff!)

Re-Use-A Palooza

**April 22 – Earth Day
Sweaburg Pavilion**

OXFORD WORSHIP SERVICES

Check with individual churches re in-person worship, streaming or conference call services.

Churches in blue have websites.

Check for Facebook Pages or email address.

Avondale UC, T'burg avondaleuc@gmail.com

Burgessville UC, 10:30 am

College Ave UC

Dundas St. UC

Hebron UC - rsstock@execulink.com

Innerkip UC

Kintore/Brooksdale UC

Knox UC, Embro

Mt Elgin UC

Norwich UC

Peace UC, Plattsville

peaceplattsecretary@outlook.com

Richwood UC – 9:30 am

St. David's UC, Woodstock

St. Paul's UC, Tillsonburg

Sweaburg, sweaburguc@gmail.com

West Oxford, currieb@sympatico.ca

Foldens, kirbymk02@gmail.com

Trinity UC, Ingersoll

Westminster UC, Thamesford

Willis UC, Drumbo open for in person service and conference call.

drumbocharge@hotmail.com

OXFORD PRAYER CYCLE



Together we pray for each other in our ministry in the world.

For Oxford United Churches: Full list is [here](#). Pastoral Charge Supervisors are noted for congregations with a vacancy. Apologies for not including Pat Cook VAM at St Paul's UC (T'burg) for Jan. 1 2023.

Jan 15 Lori Minler, Newark

Jan 22 [Licensed Lay Worship Leaders](#)

Jan 29 Trinity UC, Ingersoll, Judy Campbell, PCS + VAM

Feb 5 Mark Marshall, Westminster, Thamesford, Gerard Hamoen CDM

Feb 12 Hickson

Feb 19 Hebron, Jane Van Patter PCS

Feb 26 Janice Pow, DLM

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FOR CHILDREN OF ALL AGES.

The Leatherback Sea Turtle.

The Leatherback Turtle is the largest of seven different kinds of Sea Turtles. They measure about two meters from head to tail and weigh about 1000 pounds or 453.59 Kilos and are found mostly in tropical waters.



The only time they are on land is when they hatch and again

20 years later when female turtles go back to the sandy beach where they were born to lay their eggs. The turtle digs out a "nest", lays from 60 to 100 eggs and covers it with sand. When the babies hatch, they dig their way out and scramble as fast as they can to the ocean water.

The gender of the turtle is determined by the temperature of the sand. Hot sand results in a girl turtle and cool sand makes a boy turtle.

These may be the only creatures where the babies may never see their mothers and the mothers may never see their babies.

Sea Turtles are endangered even though they may live to be 100 years. Only about one in one thousand reach maturity. Birds and fish love to eat baby turtles. In some countries turtle eggs are a delicacy for humans. Beaches become crowded and there isn't room for an undisturbed nesting place. We humans are their number one enemy.

During the Covid Pandemic, the Sea Turtle population increased because there was less activity on beaches.

We need more signs on beaches that read, "Sea Turtles Only". After all, they were here first. We took their beaches without permission or apology. Their future depends on us.

GW

OXFORD UNITED REFUGEE SUPPORT COMMITTEE (OURS)

Sponsorship donations always appreciated. Please write "Refugee Sponsorship" in the memo line of cheques. **Knox UC**, PO Box 59, Embro ON N0J 1J0; and **Westminster UC**, 115 George St. Thamesford, ON N0M 2M0. **Marj Martin (Chair of OURS)**

UNITED CHURCH RURAL MINISTRY NETWORK



Rural ministry is unique. It can be valuable to share experiences, concerns or possibilities. Recommended by Eric Skillings – formerly of Oxford Presbytery.

ZOOM WORKSHOP

January 19 @ 1:00 pm

"Checking in with the Rural Church"

Cost \$5

[Register for this event here.](#)

Facilitated by Rev. Dr. Peter Bartlett,
Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional
Council

More details in the **ENews #22 November 2022** [here](#).

CLOSE TO OXFORD



Explore current
Programs + Possibilities.

[webpage](#) [facebook](#)

Five Oaks is a sacred place for peoples of all faiths as well as spiritual seekers to gather in community to live, work, learn, pray, play, heal and act for justice.

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SHARING CIRCLE VIA ZOOM

Monday, January 30, 1:30 – 3:30 pm,
Led by Rhonda Johns.

To join contact

nations.uniting@gmail.com

Grandmothers Tea

January 25, 2023



Hosting Community of Faith:
For the New Year of
2023 month of January

St. Thomas Anglican Church
110 Francis St. Cambridge, ON
N1S 2A1
Contact: 1-519-623-5400

Time: Noon - 2:00 pm

Hello Everyone,
Come to a potluck lunch
Bring your favorite dish.
For the time of
Friendship and Sharing

MODERATOR CARMEN LANDSDOWNE

In her [Facebook account](#), our Moderator invites us to follow Kimberly Murray and review her [Progress Update Report](#). Murray is the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites associated with Indian Residential Schools, November 2022. The Report was submitted to The Honourable David Lametti, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada.

Murray has written a serious report with sensitivity and candour. That the work is sacred is obvious as is the truth that there are gaps in legal protections for possible burial sites. My heart was warmed as I read in her guiding principles that both the bodies and Spirits of missing Indigenous children must be treated with honour,

respect and dignity. A blanketed Empty Chair is always present in the room where they gather. The search for unmarked burials and the recovery of missing Indigenous children is to be governed by Indigenous Laws as well as United Nations Conventions. The 4 National Gatherings are being held throughout the 2-year Mandate. Recordings of these will be available on the Interlocutor's website.

MM



[ARWRC webpage](#)

[Facebook page](#)

Subscribe [here](#) to the newsletter of Antler River Watershed. See their most recent newsletter [here](#).

Ensure that your Community of Faith is listed on your Churchhub account.

Contact the ARW Region for assistance:
<https://arwrucc.ca/contact-us/>

Reminder: New Mission and Service Transfer Deadline is Sunday, January 15, 2023. All 2022 Community of Faith Mission and Service donations need to be transferred by January 15, 2023. Transfers received after January 15, 2023, will be designated for 2023.

ARW Region: PRAYER CYCLE

<https://www.prayercycles.ca/antlerriverwatershed>

Jan 15 [First, St. Thomas](#)

Jan 22 [Villages United](#)

Jan 29 [Princeton/Etonia](#)

Feb 5 [Dunlop Central, Sarnia](#)

Feb 12 [Thorndale](#)

Feb 19 [Leamington](#)

Feb 26 [Ivan](#)

GRAND RIVER BOOKSTORE

To order call 1-888-668 0871; email

sales@grandriverbooks.com; online

<https://www.grandriverbooks.ca/>

Mail delivery \$5.00.

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FOOD FOR THE SOUL

A work in Progress

"Silent night, Holy night,
All is calm, all is bright."

Those words sung in a quiet church in the gentle glow of candle light are indeed food for the soul. That meditative moment in music followed by silence gives us a glimpse of what the prophet Isaiah envisioned, a world of peace, justice, and loving relationships. We need that image in a world that seems to be coming apart at the seams.

Now, in the cold reality of January we face what we call the "real world".

Sometimes we forget stories of Jesus's birth are stories of hope set in the midst of a world, a culture and a family under extreme stress.

Mary and Joseph were ordered by Rome to leave the safety of Nazareth to register for Rome's inevitable taxation. Mary was far from her family, friends and the village midwife. With not even a spare room in the Bethlehem Inn available. Joseph, in spite of what he thought the angel had said to him in a dream, knew that Mary's son was not his. Marriage would not be a problem, nor would adoption but would he have questions?

The first visitors to welcome the baby were shepherds from the fields. Shepherds were marginalised people, the riffraff of society. To speak of a "Good Shepherd" was almost as unheard of as speaking of a "Good Samaritan."

While gospel writer Luke has the family returning to Nazareth after a week in Jerusalem. Matthew has the family fleeing to Egypt because their baby is not safe anywhere in Judea or Israel. In Egypt they live as refugees to wait for the death of King Herod.

The "good news of great joy" is that Herod did not win. In her book "The Window Sonnets, Robyn Marie Butt writes,

**"Christ's joy cannot be snuffed.
Love made it through."**

Robyn uses this to sum up the Easter story of Emmaus, but it could apply to Jesus's birth.

It is love that motivates the resistance to evil. Love in the political world means a passion for justice. Here are some examples.

It is the love of democratic governance that has rallied the Ukrainian people and most of the western world to act. That courage sends a clear message to Mr. Putin and all would-be oligarchs, that the age of taking what is not yours is over.

Faced with a Pandemic, we love one another and ourselves enough to have created vaccines. With masks and distancing we are able to control the viruses that plague us.

The courageous protests against the treatment of women and girls in Iran and Afghanistan will continue.

The compensation package for Indigenous people being negotiated will finally become a reality in '23.

The Conferences on Climate Change in Egypt and Montreal have suggested if we follow through with action, that we actually love the planet that gives us life.

In Jan. of '23 all is not calm and all is not bright, but "Love made it through." It's a work in progress. Or as the gospel of John states. **"Light has come into the world and darkness has not overcome it."** That too is part of the "real world." Thank God.



Epiphany Blessings, *Glen Wright, co-editor*