

# CONNECTIONS

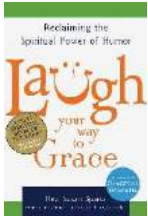
## News and Views of Oxford County United Churches

Vol 5 Issue 11.

December 13, 2023 Page 1 of 8

### Laughter, Second Chances and Letting Go

**Laugh Your Way to Grace: Reclaiming the Spiritual Power of Humor** has inspired Ruth Butt for years. I confess my hesitancy to read it – not only because of the American spelling of humour in the title. But after Ruth's presentation to the Oxford UCW, I read and found it to be **pure gold!**



The author, Susan Sparks, is an ex-lawyer turned standup comedian and Baptist minister. **"Laughter** is the GPS system for the soul," she writes. "Humor offers a revolutionary, yet simple, spiritual paradigm: If you can laugh at yourself, you can forgive yourself. And if you can forgive yourself, you can forgive others."

The book is easily accessible. As Spark recounts stories from the Bible, she reminds us of the spiritual healing aspect of humour which we have lost. Sparks shares her own experience of when she took herself too seriously and how she turned that around. Importantly, reading it encourages us to look at our own lives just as Ruth did in her

presentation. The good news is we don't have to be 95 years old to regain our sense of humour!

As Glen Wright shares in his thought-provoking Food for the Soul (Pg 8), Luke says that God has given and is giving to the world a **Second Chance** (the new covenant) in Jesus' birth, not just at his death. And laughter is in the stories of his birth – for e.g. John the Baptist in his mother's womb kick starting the new covenant, when he hears Mary's voice. Babies bring laughter into our lives. Gospel is radical. Luke uses a woman, Mary to present the Magnificat to break the new story - love not violence, redistributing power and resources. Imagine a woman, not a man, breaking the new story of a second chance.

Yes. **Letting Go** of that which hasn't served us well and constricts our response to the new covenant in our time and place.

**Laughter** leads to the grace of **Second Chances** as we practice **Letting Go** of whatever is holding us back.



### MAQSSOUD'S JOURNEY



**On Wednesday, November 15, Embro's Knox United community was excited to learn that Maqssoud, the Afghan refugee whom they were co-sponsoring, was scheduled to arrive at Pearson airport exactly one week later.** The news came after months of anxiety over his safety in Pakistan. Maqssoud was met at the airport by his sister and co-sponsor, Hanna, and her husband Fazul, along with Stephen Dow and Sharon Fraser from Knox. **Tears of joy were shed when brother and sister were reunited** and Maqssoud met Fazul for the first time. Later that evening, he would meet their five children for the first time. Because Maqssoud had worked for a company in Afghanistan making military uniforms as well as running his own shop making dresses for ladies, he was forced to flee for his life when the Taliban began searching for him. **He spent the past two years living as a refugee in Pakistan where he lived under constant threat of being put in jail or being deported back to Afghanistan.**

Thankfully, that is behind him now and he is settling into his new home with his sister and her family in Woodstock. He is eagerly waiting to start ESL classes in anticipation of finding employment. **It has been, and continues to be, a privilege and a blessing to be part of Maqssoud's journey.** Sharon Fraser, Knox United.

# CONNECTIONS

## News and Views of Oxford County United Churches

Vol 5 Issue 11.

December 13, 2023 Page 2 of 8

### EDITORIAL

There is much on which to reflect. I am deeply indebted to co-editor, Glen Wright for his prudent counsel and diverse knowledge. Glen regularly produced 'Food for the Soul' and 'For Children of All Ages' as well as consulted on themes and editorial positions. Blessed with gifts of wisdom and scholarship, Glen has in turn been a blessing both to me and to you, the readers. I've been grateful to be co-editor with him. When Glen retired from active ministry at London Conference he said, 'Yes. Ministry has been frustrating and challenging but also rewarding. In answer to 'Would you do it again?' 'Yes. In a heart beat.' Thank you, Glen. It has been fun.

**Year End Memory of this past year** - the joy on the faces of refugees or their families at finally being together in a safe place. It is a stark reminder of being Christian here in Oxford.

Some are missing Presbytery - the monthly meetings with friends. This past couple of weeks, I've met a lot of Oxford friends: at Westminster United's "It's a Wonderful Life" - the importance of one single life in the life of a town; enjoying spaghetti at Etonia United. Just saying. Each of us can get out and about and connect with other congregations, other Christians. It is important - to know each other better.

Together we brought refugees here. Together can forge new ways of being church, of living in peace on planet earth.

Just like the Paint in the Spirit at Sweaburg United, we are all different, but we are truly wonderful together!

I hope to publish 3-4 times a year.

We live in God's world.

*Marg Murray co-editor*



### CONNECTIONS – News and Views of Oxford County United Churches

**CO-EDITORS:** Marg Murray + Glen Wright

**To add or remove names, email**

[oxfconnections@execulink.com](mailto:oxfconnections@execulink.com)

**CONNECTIONS website**

[oxfordunitedministries.ca](http://oxfordunitedministries.ca)

Oxford United Ministries Facebook page

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

**CHANGE IS AFOOT: this is the last monthly newsletter.**

**4 weeks before THE NEXT EDITION OF CONNECTIONS, Marg will send a notice with deadlines.**

Marg encourages congregations to post events and news on their Facebook Page as well as [Oxford United Ministries Facebook](#) and [Antler River Watershed Facebook](#). Also congregations can be in touch with each other with emails. The email addresses for Oxford congregations is [here](#).

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

#### **Laughter, Second Chances + Letting Go OURS report Cover**

Editorial— M. Murray 2

Masthead 2

#### **OXFORD UC—Comings and Goings 3**

Otterville-Avondale's...Long distance Call 3

Rev Jeff Smith 3

Norwich – Dec 14 Choralaires 3

Camp Tanner 3

Oxford Prayer Cycle 3

Oxford Worship Services – reference 3

#### **Local Outreach 4**

Community Free Table

Operation Sharing

#### **CHURCH EVENTS -past 4-5**

#### **CHURCH EVENTS – future 5**

World Day of Prayer 5

#### **For Children of All Ages – G. Wright 5**

Caring Hearts Support Network 5

OURS Donations 6

Five Oaks 6

Sharing Circle + Grandmother's Tea 6

United Church Rural Ministry Network 6

#### **Palestine – Israel**

#### **ANTLER RIVER WATERSHED Region 7**

Remit- Restructuring - Indigenous Church 7

**FOOD FOR THE SOUL- God's Formula for Peace** G. Wright, co-editor 8

### VOICES UNITED NEEDED Oxford

Gardens chapel needs 30 Voices United (words and/or music). Rev. Liz Lemon is leading worship regularly. Email her [revmom56@gmail.com](mailto:revmom56@gmail.com). THANKS



# CONNECTIONS

## News and Views of Oxford County United Churches

Vol 5 Issue 11.

December 13, 2023

Page 3 of 8



### OXFORD UC COMINGS + GOINGS

### OTTERVILLE AVONDALE'S ANSWER TO A LONG- DISTANCE CALL

Quietly nested in Southern Oxford County are two congregations that have come together to join together for their love of their church, their church families and to endeavour to work together to enhance our knowledge of the work of the Holy Spirit.

After four years of searching, finally, the Avondale and Otterville United Church Search Committee found their Minister... she answered the call to a ministry of word, sacrament, and pastoral care in shared ministry. We are now able to come together and have shared Ministry in our community of faith, through worship, study, prayer and action.

We are so delighted to welcome Rev. Susan McIlveen back to Oxford County and we made it official on October 29<sup>th</sup> with the Covenanting Service held at Otterville United Church. Along with the congregations of both Otterville United Church and Avondale United Church, we welcomed our guest speaker, Lynne Dunlop as well as ARWRC Liaison, Mary Anne Silverthorne.

Following the Covenanting Service, we enjoyed a potluck luncheon in the lower hall and shared a few laughs and fellowship. Welcome officially Rev. Susan McIlveen. We are so happy you have joined our church families. Submitted by Carrie Lewis, Administrator, Otterville U.C. + Avondale UC.

### REV. JEFF SMITH

Blessings on new beginnings. We rejoice with Jeff as he accepts a call to Forrest United Church in Lambton County. We feel the grief of St. David's at losing a beloved pastor. Jeff will be leaving St. David's UC, February 15, 2024.



### CAMP TANNER

The Annual Meeting of Camp Tanner was held November 28 on Zoom. We hold the Board of Directors in our hearts and prayers as they take the necessary steps to close Camp Tanner. Over the years they have been very grateful for Oxford's support. For further information, the following are **2023 KEY**

#### **CONTACTS:**

**Board Chair:** Justin Murray 519-303-1995

[jdwmurray6@gmail.com](mailto:jdwmurray6@gmail.com)

**Registrar:** Gail Kavelman 519-709-0282

[gkavelman@gmail.com](mailto:gkavelman@gmail.com)

**Treasurer Kim Slager**, 515375 11th Line, Woodstock, N4S8G1, 519-539-8777

Keeping the [board](#) in our prayers.

### **NORWICH UNITED, hosts the Woodstock Choralaires in 'A Dickens of a Christmas'**

Thursday, Dec 14, at 7:00pm.

Tickets \$20 (to support the NUC Summer Camp) call church office 519-

### OXFORD PRAYER CYCLE



*Prayers for our ministry in the world.*

Dec 10 Innerkip, Karen Willis

Dec 17 Knox (Embro), Susan Cole

Dec 24 Burgessville, Janice Pow PCS

Dec 31 Mt Elgin, Lori Minler

Jan 7 St. Paul's (Tillsonburg), Karlene Brown,

Karen Hodges CDM, Maurice Francis

VAM, Bonnie Pilkey VAM, Pat Cook, VAM

Jan 14, Avondale (Tillsonburg) – Otterville,

Susan McIlveen

Jan 21, Newark – Lori Minler PCS

Jan 28 [Licensed Lay Worship leaders](#)

### OXFORD WORSHIP SERVICES

Websites/contact information for Oxford congregations are listed [here](#). Also check their Facebook pages for current services.



# CONNECTIONS

## News and Views of Oxford County United Churches

Vol 5 Issue 11.

December 13, 2023 Page 4 of 8

### *Community Free Table*

Moving from Church of Epiphany  
to INSIDE Dundas Street United "BIG RED"  
(November 11-March 30)  
Enter side door with sign

Initiated by the Woodstock Rotary Club  
**Meals prepared by Local Churches**

Church of Epiphany

Dundas St. UC

Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

St. Davids' UC

Westminster UC (Thamesford)

9:30 – 10 am Coffee & Conversation

10-12 pm meal served

11:30-12:30 Community Free Table

Plenty of food. ALL WELCOME!



### OPERATION SHARING

The need for  
supplies and  
opportunities to

volunteer continue. Please visit their  
[website](#), their [Facebook page](#), call 519-  
320-1372 ext. 4 or email  
[info@operationsharing.ca](mailto:info@operationsharing.ca)

**NEW LOCATION! The**  
**CHRISTMAS PLACE – Huron**  
**Park Baptist Church (199 Burwick**  
**St)** Details (donations needed, donation  
drop-off times, invitations and registration  
deadlines, volunteer opportunities) are on  
their Facebook page, click [here](#) or call Cathy  
Laye. volunteer coordinator at  
519.537.7185.

**The Inn has opened at Avondale UC in**  
**Tillsonburg from November 1 – May 1.**



**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](http://www.stichsupperclub.ca/volunteer-sign-up)

### ST. PAUL'S UC, 88 Bidwell, TILLSONBURG: COMMUNITY KITCHEN

**Each Sat.** until April 29/24, 11:30 am in  
the Multi-purpose room. A free hot meal  
will be provided. All are welcome.

### Westminster United, Thamesford



"It's a wonderful life: A Live Radio Play"  
was a resounding success. Lots of fun and  
music. Folks laughed, cried and rejoiced  
at the message - it really is a wonderful  
life!

**SOUTHWEST OXFORD UNITED**  
**CHURCHES** enjoyed a fun, colourful  
laughter-filled **Paint with Spirit** night  
at Sweaburg United Church. In the  
display of their work below you can see  
that they are all different and wonderful  
all together!- **new motto!**



# CONNECTIONS

## News and Views of Oxford County United Churches

Vol 5 Issue 11.

December 13, 2023

Page 5 of 8



### HEBRON UC

a successful Christmas  
Cookie Walk"  
(how many cookies  
made it home?)

## CHURCH EVENTS

### ETONIA UNITED CHURCH

#### All-you-can eat Spaghetti Suppers

101 #2 Hwy., Etonia,

**First Wednesday of every month from  
October to May (except January), 5 to  
6:30 p.m.** Cost: Adults \$20; children 12  
and under \$5; preschoolers free. Includes  
dessert, refreshments. Wheelchair  
accessible. Takeout available.

*Personal note. I, my son, 3 grandsons and  
cousin Emily Cain REALLY enjoyed the  
December spaghetti. Family atmosphere  
and there was still food left for others! MM*

## CARING HEARTS SUPPORT NETWORK

at St. David's UC

190 Springbank Ave, Woodstock

call 519.536.3370 or

email [info@caringheartssupportnetwork.com](mailto:info@caringheartssupportnetwork.com)

[www.caringheartssupportnetwork.com](http://www.caringheartssupportnetwork.com)



### World Day of Prayer 2024

Friday, March 1

**Palestinian Christians have written  
this year's topic, 'I Beg You – Bear  
One Another in Love'.** Ephesians 4:1-3.  
More important than ever to be part of  
this. Are you interested in an Oxford  
World Day of Prayer event? Maybe  
something different: Walk then pray?  
Pray then eat Palestinian food? Contact  
[Marg.](#)

## FOR CHILDREN OF ALL AGES

### The Red Crabs of Christmas Island

There are about 40 million of these cute  
little crustations living on this out of the way



Island in the Indian  
Ocean. They are  
among the bravest  
and most determined  
creatures on the  
planet. Although they

make their home in the woods, they need  
the sea to mate and lay eggs, and the sea  
is about 20 kms away.

So every year they make the journey to the  
sea shore, climbing over rocks and leaves  
and fallen trees. After mating, the females  
lay about a hundred thousand eggs each  
which they put in a special egg sack.

Now comes the dangerous part. They have  
to wait for an incoming wave, leap into it,  
get tossed around like a surfer without a  
board, and have the presence of mind  
during this tumble, to deposit their eggs.

The big problem is these crabs can't swim.  
Once the wave tumbling and the egg  
depositing is complete, they scramble back  
to shore.

The eggs hatch instantly. The tiny crab-like  
creatures swim around for a few weeks until  
they are big enough and strong enough to  
crawl out of the surf. These baby crabs, only  
about a centimeter long, dry off, learn to  
walk, then head for the woods about 20 kms  
away; woods they have never seen before.

**And, with no parent crabs around to  
show them the way. But somehow,  
they make it.**

So the next time you are faced with what  
appears to be an impossible challenge, (and  
are feeling a bit crabby) think of these, our  
evolutionary ancestors and say, **"I CAN DO  
THIS!" It's in our DNA.**

GW

# CONNECTIONS

## News and Views of Oxford County United Churches

Vol 5 Issue 11.

December 13, 2023 Page 6 of 8



### – for all rural and small town folks – lay and ministry. Zoom Workshop, **Pastoral Care to the Rural Church**

After the November 16 webinar, Kathy Douglas (Faith Formation Minister for Region) wrote **"Care and compassion is alive in our churches"**. She affirms that volunteers are valued in a Volunteer Handbook and Volunteer Job Description. Clarity about roles and responsibilities is good for everyone.

A few of the gifts to be Pastoral Care Volunteers are good listeners, caring, empathetic, able to maintain confidentiality, comfortable with their faith, willing to share themselves, emotionally able to reach out, willing to accept support and supervision, willing to give time to training and visitation.

Please email Kathy Douglas [KDouglas@united-church.ca](mailto:KDouglas@united-church.ca), for information on the resources she shared.

### **OXFORD UNITED REFUGEE SUPPORT COMMITTEE (OURS)** **Donations appreciated.**

The United Church of Canada now requires congregations to have the funds raised before an application can be made. Which means unfortunately that refugees will now spend an extra few years as refugees.

Currently, Westminister UC is raising funds to bring a family here and will issue Income tax receipts.

Please write **"Refugee Sponsorship"** in the memo line of cheques. **Westminister UC**, 115 George St. Thamesford, ON, N0M 2M0.



**Check out their** [webpage](#) + [facebook](#) for new programs offering.



*A safe place to Listen, to Learn, to Heal + to Grow,*

### **Nations Uniting**

To join this zoom event and be part of their mailing list contact Rhonda Johns [nations.uniting@gmail.com](mailto:nations.uniting@gmail.com).

### **GRANDMOTHERS' TEA**

**The Last Wednesday in the month (except December).** Bring your favourite dish for potluck lunch. Noon – 2:00 pm.

**Bring your own plate, cup and cutlery**

**Contact** Rhonda Johns [nations.uniting@gmail.com](mailto:nations.uniting@gmail.com). For location and more information.

### **WOODSTOCK PEACE PROTEST**

#### **In support of a GAZA ceasefire**



On November 25, I attended this rally to show my support here in Oxford for a peaceful march for Palestine and a ceasefire. It was held in the Woodstock Museum City Square. The speakers were articulate and passionate that they should not keep silent any longer. Even though I was in the minority (few Westerners and only 1 other Christian clergy) I felt welcomed by those lifting up our common humanity. This is what I learned about the watermelon symbol. While the Palestinian flag has become forbidden, they've creatively used those colours in the flag in the watermelon slice which says **"They tried to bury us, but they didn't know we were seeds."**

This crisis is complex. Some helpful resources: UNJPPI – [United Network for Justice and Peace in Palestine Israel](#); [Canadian Friends of Sabeel](#) – Palestinian Christians striving for peace with justice.



# CONNECTIONS

## News and Views of Oxford County United Churches

Vol 5 Issue 11.

December 13, 2023 Page 7 of 8

### ISAN – Indigenous Solidarity & Awareness Network – Oxford A night for Truth, Conversation & Reconcili-ACTION.

We are looking for passionate community members who wish to learn more about **Indigenous Solidarity and Awareness** and/or wish to help ISAN by becoming **agents of Allieship for Truth and Reconciliation in Oxford County**.

JANUARY 10, 5:30 – 7:30 pm

Ingersoll Public Library, 130 Oxford St.

Ingersoll,

For more information contact

[IISANnetwork@gmail.com](mailto:IISANnetwork@gmail.com)



Subscribe [here](#) to the newsletter of Antler River Watershed. [Facebook page, webpage](#)

**A FARE THEE WELL CELEBRATION** was held for **Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa**, Executive Minister to ARW, HF and WOW Regional Councils in Stratford on December 12. Cheryl Bolton, President of ARWR provided the following note in an email Sept 12, 2023.

*"Cheryl-Ann is currently on a three- month sabbatical, but she will be leaving us in January to begin a two-year contract offered to her by General Secretary Michael Blair. There she will become one of the staff resourcing General Council 45 and her wealth of experience and knowledge will be drawn upon in helping the wider church in its review of the new structure. We will miss her wisdom and unwavering support and care, but we know just what a valuable resource she will be in her new position at the General Council Office."*

### ARW Region: PRAYER CYCLE

As church, we pray for each other and our mission in the world. See the following weblink for the Prayer Cycle for ARWR.

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

General Council Executive approved the appointment of **the Rev. Mark Laird as Regional Council Executive Minister, Western Ontario Waterways, Horseshoe Falls, and Antler River regional councils**, at its meeting November 17–18, 2023. Mark will start March 1, 2024.

The December 7, ARWR newsletter shared the following:

Mark is a Diaconal Minister and has been serving Drayton United Pastoral Charge since 2015. He has served as President for the Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council, was a member of the General Council Boundaries Commission, and also served as interim Executive Minister for



the three regions. Mark brings his love for, and experience of, the church into his commitment to helping communities of faith engage their ministry.

We welcome Mark and pray for God's blessings on this new chapter.

### CATEGORY 3 REMIT: RESTRUCTURING OF THE INDIGENOUS CHURCH

**The pastoral charges in Oxford are truly awesome.** As of November, 8 of our pastoral charges had already voted on the remit vote and the remaining 17 were in process or have specific plans to meet the March 31, 2024, deadline. This has been important and sensitive work for every Pastoral Charge to undertake.

The material from *CONNECTIONS* Summer edition on page 6 is [here](#). ARWR provided the following answers to questions about the Remit [here](#). **There is a Q&A workshop on January 17 at 7:00 pm. Registration is on the ARWR website.**

Thank you for your discernment and vote. MM

# CONNECTIONS

## News and Views of Oxford County United Churches

Vol 5 Issue 11.

December 13, 2023 Page 8 of 8



### FOOD FOR THE SOUL

Five years ago, when I was a mere 81 years old, (a good time to start something new) I was approached by colleague Marg Murray about co-editing a monthly newsletter, CONNECTIONS. The commitment was for five years. Five years have passed so quickly. It has been a delight. Fortunately, Marg will go the second mile and continue the newsletter perhaps quarterly, featuring the most asked for and appreciated news: what is happening in United Churches in Oxford.

### And now the final "Food for the Soul".

#### God's Formula for Peace

The fourth Sunday in Advent, this year falls on Dec. 24<sup>th</sup>. What a feast for the spirit. **In morning worship**, we get to stand with Mary and Elizabeth; **in the evening** we kneel with shepherds to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

The first story begins with Zechariah, Elizabeth's husband, presiding in the temple. He was suddenly "gripped with fear" when angel Gabriel appeared with news that his wife would have a child. "We are too old," was Zechariah's response. Because of his doubts, Zechariah was silenced, for 9 months. (Now that's punishment. **He meets angel Gabriel and can't tell anyone.**)

The similarity of this story with that of Abraham and Sarah is obvious and intentional. **When Abraham is told that he and Sarah will have a child, the response is laughter.** But Sarah gave birth, Abraham was blessed, and was to be a blessing. It was part of the Covenant.

Now, in Luke's story, Mary is blessed. The story suggests that she may not have felt blessed until she heard those words of love from Elizabeth when Mary appeared at her door. These words were prompted by the

unborn child (John) who "jumped for joy" when he heard Mary's voice. There it was, that **special moment when God's presence is palpable.**

For Zechariah that moment came in the temple. For Mary and Elizabeth, that moment came when an unborn child, perhaps after a snooze, straightens his legs in his mother's womb: **that holy moment came with a kick in the womb.** Now isn't that a perfect way to begin a New Covenant? How precious! Only God would dream up such a beginning.

**But being blessed was only the first part of Covenant. The second was to be a blessing: to take part in helping God shape the world: to "let it be done on earth as it is in heaven."**

Now comes what we know as Mary's Song: "He has taken the kings from their thrones and raised up the lowly. He has fed the hungry and sent the rich empty away" says Mary.

There it is, **God's formula for peace on earth: an equitable redistribution of power and resources.** The Old Testament description of this was that one day all people will live in peace with their own vineyards and fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid. (Micah 4:4)

From Mary comes a formula for peace, for Christmas and for all time; never more timely; never more needed.

Christmas Blessings to all, with much gratitude and love.

*Glen Wright, co-editor*

