

CONNECTIONS

News and Views of Oxford County United Churches

Vol 5 Issue 7

August 2, 2023

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COMMON GROUND

Summer is a time for restoration, for re-connecting, for visits with extended families and visits to familiar places. It is a time for picnics and family reunions, a time for nature. **Connecting brings new life.**

At the beginning of this season of "connecting" a request for sponsorship came to St. David's United in Woodstock. It came from a Woodstock family asking that we co-sponsor a cousin, who had escaped to Egypt from the armed conflict now raging in Sudan.

Carol Ewing and I met with the family, Luella and Yacob, the co-sponsoring couple and their two delightful children (pictured below). During the visit we asked about their first language. "It's Tigrinya", they said.



What a surprise that was for us. "That is the language of most of the refugee families we have sponsored in the last 33 years",

we replied. "We thought it was the language of Eritrea, not Sudan," we added. **"Languages reach across political boundaries," replied Yacob.**

Then we spoke of names like Zekarias, Selam, Sara, Fithawi and Naod, all names we have come to know. We could see the delight on the faces of Luella and Yacob. "The name of my cousin, the one in Egypt we wish to sponsor, is Salem," said Luella. Selam is the name of oldest daughter in the family of four who should be arriving this summer," we said. "We would be glad to be an interpreter for you when they come", said Yacob. We explained that the Zekarias family would be there to help

with that but thanked them for their kind offer.

Connections give life. We had just stumbled upon an unexpected topic that was familiar to both of us, their language.

Remember in the story of Pentecost, how excited the people of many nations became when they heard in their own language. Granted, it was not the same, but it was a reminder that **the Spirit is present when common ground is discovered.**

Although I don't know a word of Tigrinya, I see it written. For the last three years, Sara Temnewu, the mother of the family in waiting, has sent me through Facebook, biblical texts, written in Tigrinya but with English references. I am able to look them up to see what gives that family comfort and courage. It has been a source of inspiration.

St. David's has agreed to co-sponsor the family. Application forms are in the process of being filled out. It is just the beginning of a long process, (from 3 to 5 years) with Salem living in an Egyptian (continued page 2)

Save the Date!

Wed. Sept. 27

Friends of Oxford

(former Presbytery)

IS BACK!

Eat, laugh, visit, sing and LEARN!

VISIT: 5:30 pm

EAT at 6:00 pm

Where? **Still to be determined.**

**WHAT IS COLLABORATIVE
MINISTRY?**

at 7 pm, Eric Skillings of UCRMN
will help us to answer!

email murrayschell@gmail.com to help

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refugee camp with meager rations of oil, flour and lentils.

Sponsorship is both burden and blessing, hardship and hope: a not so easy journey especially for Salem, for Luella and Jacob, but a journey to a safer and better life. And that makes all the difference.

Glen Wright

EDITORIAL

Common Ground is our theme: in the language and culture that wasn't lost with the new political boundary between Eritrea and Sudan; in the faith we hold sacred as we acknowledge each other even when we don't agree nor approve; and our common actions to save the planet.

We mourn the passing of a former colleague, Pastor Maggie Plant. Together, we celebrate the 60th anniversary of Rev. and Ruth Francis, the painstaking work of the OURS committee to bring refugees here, the smiles of campers at Camp Tanner, our willingness to work on the decolonization of our church, the 35th anniversary of our church to not exclude someone from ordination based on their sexual orientation even as realizing that the work continues as was evident during Gay Pride month.

September will be constructive with the Region's Cross-Generational Discussion about YOUTH (Zoom) and Friends of Oxford's Collaborative Ministry workshop (In Person). Both will generate opportunities.

We think there is still a desire to stay connected and hear the stories of our neighbours. We appreciate your voices, words, prayers, as we discern our way forward in the coming months.

Marg Murray + Glen Wright co-editors

OXFORD WORSHIP SERVICES

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

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THE SEPTEMBER EDITION OF CONNECTIONS WILL BE PUBLISHED WED. SEPTEMBER 6, 2023.

Submissions no greater than 250 words will be considered and are due by Noon Friday, September 1, 2023.

CO-EDITORS: Marg Murray + Glen Wright

To add or remove names, email

oxfconnections@execulink.com

CONNECTIONS website

oxfordunitedministries.ca

Oxford United Ministries Facebook page

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

STITCH SUPPER CLUB [Facebook page here](#), [website here](#) Each Thursday at Trinity UC in Ingersoll. 4:30-6:00

Volunteers needed. Sign up here:

www.stichsupperclub.ca/volunteer-sign-up

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OXFORD UC COMINGS + GOINGS CONGREGATIONS IN SEARCH MODE



- **Kintore UC**
- **Brooksdale UC**

OBITUARY:

Pastor Margaret Ann "Maggie" Plant



Maggie died in April in Inverness, Nova Scotia. Maggie had served in the navy before entering ministry here in Oxford Presbytery. Bright was her first Pastoral Charge where she served from 2002-2010 after which she moved to Inverness. Our sympathy to her husband Larry and family. Her obit is [here](#).



OXFORD PRAYER CYCLE

Prayers for our ministry in the world.

Oxford United Churches, list is [here](#).
Pastoral Charge Supervisors noted for congregations with a vacancy or student.

Aug 6, Westminster (Thamesford), Mark

Marshall, Gerard Hamoen

Aug 13, Hickson, Jeff Smith PCS

Aug 20 Hebron Kathleen Welch, Jane
VanPatter (PCS),

Aug 27 Norwich, Janice Pow,

Sept 3 Princeton, Etonia, Jane Baxter, Ken
Jackson (PCS)

Sept 10 Foldens, Janine Lunn, Lynne Dunlop PCS

Sept 17 Sweaburg + West Oxford, Janine
Lunn, Mary Anne Silverthorne PCS

CARING HEARTS SUPPORT NETWORK

at St. David's UC

190 Springbank Ave, Woodstock

*For ongoing programs, see their website,
call or email: 519.536.3370, email*

info@caringheartssupportnetwork.com

www.caringheartssupportnetwork.com

60th WEDDING ANNIVERSARY Maurice + Ruth Francis

Maurice and Ruth met at Middlesex County Junior Farmers events when Maurice worked for the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture. They were married August 3, 1963, in Wesley United Church, north of London. In 1967, Maurice was ordained from Queens in Kingston and they began their journey together in service of faith communities. They were missionaries in Nepal. Upon their return to Canada, they served in south-western Ontario communities. First, at a four-point charge in **Avon, Putnam, Banner and Crampton**. They then spent 10 years in **Fullarton**, which included a **one-year exchange in New Zealand**. Followed by eight years in **Stayner**. They took up their last church community in **Tottenham / Rich Hill**. In 2002, they settled in Tillsonburg for their retirement years, where they both continue to enjoy being actively involved in the community and at St. Paul's United Church.

They have been blessed with three daughters: Cheryl and her husband Dennis (Santa Barbara, California), Barb and her husband Mark (Ottawa) and Laura (Tillsonburg). They also have three grandchildren, Wesley, Meghan and Owen.

We join their family in congratulations on 60 years of marriage.



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OXFORD UNITED REFUGEE SUPPORT COMMITTEE (OURS)

Annual General Meeting On Sunday, June 25/ 23, 10 members and 1 guest met at Trinity, Ingersoll.

Information about current Oxford United Churches sponsorships was shared by those representing the sponsoring churches.

Glen Wright of St David's in Woodstock told us that there is some encouraging news regarding a family of four who will soon be arriving in Canada from Ethiopia. **They have been living in Addis Ababa since 2018**, as refugees from Eritrea, having escaped religious persecution. They have experienced many bureaucratic setbacks that have delayed their arrival.

Good News: *We've since learned that Selam Solomon has her flight booked for mid-August. The others will follow soon after. All will be living in London with relatives.* St David's also



awaits news about two Eritrean young men (co-sponsoring with a relative) who also live in Ethiopia as refugees. As well, they have begun the process of sponsoring a Sudanese woman who has fled to Egypt, seeking refugee status.

Sharon Fraser of Knox United in Embro reported good progress in their sponsorship of an Afghan living as a refugee in Pakistan. **Good News:** *We've since learned that he is now waiting to hear of his flight arrangements!*

Cheryl Marshall of Westminster United in Thamesford let us know of the fundraising status for their sponsored family of five living in Lebanon. Changes in policy at the refugee office of the United Church of Canada now require a sponsoring church to have the total funds needed in the bank before an application can be forwarded to IRC-C (Immigration Refugee Citizenship-Canada). Regrettably, this creates a significantly longer wait for this family.

We discussed possible merits of not going through the United Church as the Sponsorship Agreement Holder and instead applying directly to IRC-C. Each sponsoring church will need to decide.

Marjorie Martin reported the news that the Iraqi family of five are adjusting well in the short time they have been here and will be moved into their own apartment on July 1st by a group of **Trinity United Church volunteers**.

Our committee is now connected to the Toronto based volunteer group, [The Private Refugee Sponsorship Network](#). Five of our members were recently at a zoom meeting with this group. They are a valuable source of networking and education some of which is in their newsletter, Connections.

We want to get the word out to our local United Churches about the supportive roll in refugee sponsorship that OURS provides. Expect to hear more from us in the future.

Our members with leadership roles will continue in their work with an anticipated change later in the fall. We continue to encourage anyone with an interest in this often life-saving work to contact any member of our committee for more information. New members are welcome.

The OURS committee members are: Marie Avey, Judy Campbell, Wendy Colcuc, Christen Currie, Carol Ewing, Sharon Fraser, Janice Landers, Cheryl Marshall, Marjorie Martin and Glen Wright.

*Submitted by **Marj Martin** (Chair of OURS)*

Donations appreciated. Income tax receipts are issued by the sponsoring church. Please write **"Refugee Sponsorship"** in the memo line of cheques. **Knox UC**, PO Box 59, Embro ON, N0J 1J0; **Trinity United Church**, 118 Church St., Ingersoll, ON, N5C 2X6; **Westminster UC**, 115 George St. Thamesford, ON, N0M 2M0.

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CAMP TANNER

Follow them on [Facebook](#). Here are some of the happy faces of campers! Fun times! Lasting memories!



2023

KEY CONTACTS:

Board Chair: Justin Murray 519-303-1995
jdwmurray6@gmail.com

Registrar: Gail Kavelman 519-709-0282
gkavelman@gmail.com

Treasurer Kim Slager, 515375 11th Line,
Woodstock, N4S8G1, 519-539-8777
Meet the rest of the [board](#).



FOR CHILDREN OF ALL AGES. THE SAND GROUSE

Being able to adapt or change in order to survive is something we think about, or should think about, frequently. Almost all living creatures have had to do this at one time or another in their history. Those who have not been able to adapt or change are no longer around.



The Sand Grouse, a bird that looks something like our quail, is found in the hottest regions of Africa, Asia and India. It is a prime example of adapting in order to survive.

How to survive as a ground nesting bird in the presence of egg hungry predators was the problem. Predators such as foxes lived within a few kms of the source of water, so why not build the nest at least 25 kms into the desert where it was safe? But that presented another problem; how to provide water. A solution was found. Birds are smart. When the eggs hatched the adult grouse, usually the male, would fly to the water hole, soak his thick breast feathers with water, then fly back to the nest where the young chicks could gobble up the water droplets from the breast feathers. It worked.

The grouse makes this 50 km round trip each day for two months until the hatchlings are able to fly.

Now isn't that just amazing?

It's all about adapting. We need to take note. Our climate is changing. We need to adapt to a new way of living. Surely if birds can adapt, we can. What do you think??
GW

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REMIT: RESTRUCTURING OF THE INDIGENOUS CHURCH:

This Remit is for every Regional Council and Pastoral Charge Council to vote on between March 15, 2023, and March 31, 2024. It changes [the Decision Making in the UCC to give the National Indigenous Organization autonomy in their decision making](#) so that they do not have to approach General Council to make change.

Decolonization Background: A complex subject. One way of understanding it is to say that we **no longer get to tell others how to make decisions or what to believe.** The British and French colonized Canada. Empires have been and are attracted to Christian theology which supports unity not diversity and triumphalism (Easter Sunday but little about Good Friday). The Christian Doctrine of Discovery (1493) decreed that unless inhabitants of a new land were Christian, the land was considered available and free. Respect was not granted to the Indigenous Peoples who had been here for 1000s of years with a well-developed spirituality and governance.



The United Church of Canada has moved from the idea of mission as 'converting' to a partnership and mutuality in mission. In 2012, we repudiated the Doctrine of Discovery (in March of this year, the Roman Catholic church repudiated it).

Granting autonomy to the Indigenous Church enriches our relationship with them as part of the United Church of Canada. Following are available resources:

National UCC Resources:

- Study guide from **General Secretary Michael Blair**
<https://generalcouncil44.ca/sites/default/files/2023-03/gc44-remit-1-study-guide-march-2023.pdf>
- General Council staff **Sara Stratton and Adele Halliday**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5KbFs8BRMw>

ARW Region Resources:

- Remit Foundations with **Rev Cathy Hird and Rev Maggie Dieter**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPrFZAy37HQ>
- Remit Foundations with **Thérèse Samuel** slide show
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xPrFZAy37HQ>
- **Cheryl-Ann Stadelbauer-Sampa** [preached on this subject from both a personal and corporate perspective](#), June 4, 2023, at Emmauel UC in Waerloo.
- On July 30, I [preached](#) about the empire perspective at Mt. Elgin UC.

MM



Explore *current* **Programs** +
Possibilities. [webpage](#) + [facebook](#)



Friday, September 29 – October 1

Derek Suderman, Tanya Dyck Steinmann and Stephanie Hill
More information, [here](#)

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COLLABORATIVE MINISTRY /aka MINISTRY SHARING

The words describing being Christian are about relationship with God, with others, with ourselves. It is with **each other that we learn, grow and love.** We're fortunate, in Oxford, that we already have a strong sense of community both rural and urban supporting one another. **We can have an even stronger United Church presence. The challenge is how we can work together.** Cookie cutters making us all the same don't respect our unique personalities and histories. Fortunately, our church structure is now more flexible about how we might work together. Happily, **Eric Skillings (DLM)**, formerly of Oxford Presbytery (he grew up at Innerkip UC), has a wide range of experience in former Chatham Kent Presbytery and his involvement with the United Church Rural Ministry Network. That is, Eric know lots of 'shared ministry' options! See [May 2023 CONNECTIONS page 7\)](#) and [August 2019 CONNECTIONS](#).

Hope is critical today. When a sense of hope is present, it is guaranteed that love shows up in different ways. Acting gives us hope. Let's gather on September 27 and meet Eric Skillings and see where the Spirit is leading us!

NATIONS UNITING – SHARING CIRCLE: *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.

Grandmother's Tea (bring your favourite potluck)

Aug 30, Noon 'till 2:00 pm.
at Grace Anglican Church, 4
Pearl St, Brantford. Please
bring utensils, cup, plate. To



share a ride email murrayschell@gmail.com



[ARWRC webpage](#) [Facebook page](#)

Subscribe [here](#) to the newsletter of Antler River Watershed.

Tuesday, September 26, 7:00 – 8:30 pm

Cross-Generational Discussion



**Calling people who are teens to
twenty-somethings!**

**Calling people who are in the 40s to
90+!**

**Are you eager to engage in dialogue
across generations with a shared
concern for youth ministry today?**

For More Information read [here!](#)

ARW Region: PRAYER CYCLE

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

Aug 6 [Riverside](#), London

Aug 13 [Cottam](#)

Aug 20 [St. Andrew's Chatham](#)

Aug 27 [Thamesford](#)

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.

"THE SHARING TABLE"

In September, we hope to have a report of their Annual Meeting which was held June 12, 2023 at College Ave. United Church.

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FOOD FOR THE SOUL

35TH ANNIVERSARY

This is the 35th anniversary of the General Council's declaration that sexual orientation alone would not exclude one from ordination in the United Church of Canada.

That decision was made in part after recognizing that being gay or lesbian was not a choice, but a given. In church language, sexual orientation is part of God's creation. This change in attitude was much needed. If you talk to gay people of my age (mid 80's) you may hear something like, "I knew I was gay by grade nine but I could not tell anyone. I hope things are different now."

We have come a long way since 1988. Even then high school students were coming out as gay or lesbian. Today a generation later, students as young as those in grade seven or eight talk openly about sexual orientation.

And yet. . .during Gay Pride month this year, three examples of LGBTQ2S intolerance made the news. The owner of a cake bakery refused to provide a wedding cake for a gay couple; six NHL hockey players refused to wear the rainbow patches on their practice jerseys and the Norwich Town Council refused to fly the flag representing the gay community during Pride Month. In each incident, "religion" was cited as the reason for their objections. That answer seemed to end the conversation. It shouldn't have. It should be the beginning of a conversation with those who support the LGBTQ2S community because of their Christian Faith.

Three reasons come to mind for supporting those of the LGBTQ2S community because of our Christian Faith.

- 1) We need to take the biblical texts seriously by understanding that while some texts have universal truth for all people for all time, others are time and place specific and reflect the best knowledge at the time. Jesus told us this when he said "You have heard of old, but I say to you." Revelation is ongoing: faith is dynamic. When we discovered that being gay was part of God's good creation, that same sex relationships are "natural" for some, the Biblical texts that condemn homosexuality no longer apply, anymore than the texts that support slavery, or the texts that say that eating pork or shellfish is an abomination.
- 2) Jesus's mandate in Luke 4:18-19 to free the oppressed is also our mandate. Members of the LGBTQ2S community have been and still are oppressed in some places. We need to be welcoming communities. Making sure our marriage policies include the LGBTQ2S members and becoming Affirming Communities of Faith is part of that.
- 3) We have a mandate to love all people. We are all part of **one** community. Jesus lived that love. All people are our neighbours, and we are to love them as much as we love ourselves.

There may be other good and better reasons from our faith to support the LGBTQ2S community, but this could be a start to continue the conversation, in faith and in love with those who disagree.

Glen Wright



Blessings, *Glen Wright, co-editor*