

CONNECTIONS

Stories of being church today in Oxford County

Vol 8 Issue 2

June 17, 2026

Page 1 of 8

LOOK INSIDE

- United Church Rural Ministry Network - avoiding the computer graveyard
- ReUseAPalooZaha 2 locations in the fall
- 3 Book Reports
- An UNITED CHOIR!
- Last graduate of Designated Lay Minister's program
- The Spirit of Pentecost - moving beyond Ecological Grief -Marg Murray
- Pentecost An Update - Glen Wright

The POTENTIAL OF OUR STORY

The story I tell about myself tells my 'who, what, why and how'. Each family, congregation, community and nation has a story. **Stories are important because they inform how we relate to the world around us.**



Our former moderator, The Right Rev. Carmen Lansdowne, in her

Substack [Church-y Conversations](#) quotes Harold Johnson (book review is on page 5), a Cree lawyer and author from northern Saskatchewan "that **the most powerful thing human beings do is narrate**. We are story-making creatures before we are anything else. The stories we tell — about who we are, what is possible, what has happened to us and what we have done — **they build the world we live in**. It's what other Indigenous writers call world-making."

We are blessed to have Lansdowne's article "Our Words Matter" (read it [here](#)) to reflect on during the Pentecost season. (The longest season of the church year when lectionary scriptures address the stories/challenges of the early church which are similar to our own.)

Lansdowne encourages us to distinguish between **the accuracy of our story** and **the deeper truth of our story which is 'life-giving'**. Sometimes it is good to reframe how we tell our story/change it up. For example:

Story – We're dying. Rather than trying to answer the question 'how do we get back to what we were 50 years ago.' Congregations could offer as a gift 'we know how to grieve and how to continue to show up anyway in the aftermath of grief.'

Story -We can't afford to do that. We have chosen to prioritize other things right now. A choice which may need to be reconsidered.

"Choosing a different story is less like changing your mind and more like learning a new language — it takes practice, it takes community, it takes something that functions a lot like grace."

Madeline Engle in "Walking on Water" says "If our vocabulary dwindles to a few shopworn words, we are setting ourselves up for takeover by a dictator. When language becomes exhausted, our freedom dwindles—we cannot think; we do not recognize danger; injustice strikes us as no more than the way things are." MM

CANVAS LABYRINTH

This past year has been a valuable learning experience in clarifying the use of this beautiful spiritual resource (25ft square designed by Robin McGauley) and the **shared alternating custody**. Regarding



custody (and booking): [Norwich UC](#) for the remainder of June; from July 1, 2026 – July 2027, [Knox United, Embro UC](#).

Parties

(individuals, church/community groups wishing to borrow or reserve it need to contact the relevant church office (above church names are hot linked). The church with Custody will publicize that they have the Canvas; how it is to be used and returned.

May our learnings continue. May we approach with a soft heart and open mind – including using the Labyrinth. MM

CONNECTIONS

Stories of being church today in Oxford County

Vol 8 Issue 2

June 17, 2026 Page 2 of 8

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PENTECOST –	Cover
Book Report	cover
Masthead etc.	2
OXFORD UNITED CHURCHES	
Ways to Spread the Word	2
God is Doing A New Thing	2
Sympathy Extended	2
Prayer Cycles	2
OXFORD EVENTS	
Mass Choir at Thamesford	3
The Spirit of PENTECOST – moving beyond Ecological Grief	5
Local Outreach	
Canvas Labyrinth	cover
OURS – refugee sponsorship	5
Operation Sharing	5
Stich Supper Club - Trinity UC	5
BOOK REPORTS	6
JUST NEXT DOOR Five Oaks	5
OUR INDIGENOUS NEIGHBOURS	
Grandmother's Tea	5
Reuse-A-PalooZaha	5
Ontario Health Coalition- alert	7
United Church Rural Ministry Network	7
Moderator coming to ARWR	7
Antler River Watershed Region	7
Pentecost – an Update Glen Wright	7-8



OXFORD UNITED CHURCHES Websites/[contact information](#) and [worship times](#) for Oxford UC congregations **listed** or on their Facebook page.

Ways to Spread the word

- **Post on your congregation's Facebook Page and [Antler River Watershed Facebook](#).**

Email neighbouring churches
Current list of UC in Oxford [here](#)

The LAST issue of CONNECTIONS late fall 2026.

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

FAIR TRADE OLIVE OIL PALESTINE
email Dave Schell
davidwschell@gmail.com



PRAYER CYCLES - OXFORD + ARW REGION

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

If you are interested in continuing the Prayer Cycle, please contact the Editor.

GOD IS DOING A NEW THING

SHARING with our nieghbours.

MOVING TO SEARCH PROCESS
Otterville UC.

DELIGHTED to report that Rev Jennifer Canning returned on June 7, 2026, to Peace UC, Plattsville from her parental leave.

PRAYING with Hebron UC after the completion of student Kathleen Welch's placement. We are grateful for their dedication to be a learning site.

SYMPATHY EXTENDED



to the family and friends of the **Rev. Janice Aicken**, well-loved and respected minister formerly at Kintore/Brooksdale Pastoral Charge . In 2007,

Janice moved to Calgary Alberta to be closer to family. She continued to serve the church being a strong and caring pastoral presence and well-read educator in theology and literature. Among her many interests Janice loved running, painting and handwork Her obituary is [here](#).

[CONNECTIONS – Stories of Being Church Today in Oxford.](#)

EDITOR: Marg Murray

EDITOR EMERITUS: Glen Wright

Proofreader: Dave Schell

To add or remove names, email

oxfconnections@execulink.com

CONNECTIONS website

oxfordunitedministries.ca

Oxford United Ministries Facebook page

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



CONNECTIONS

Stories of being church today in Oxford County

Vol 8 Issue 2

June 17, 2026 Page 3 of 8

KATHLEEN WELCH

For the last 5-6 years, I have repeated the words of Julian of Norwich so often, I am sure that they are physically imprinted on my brain.



All will be well.

I know it's not the full quote and I doubt that it's entirely true to the original. But those are the words in my head.

When my mom was going into Long Term Care, my identity as her primary caregiver was evaporating. When my daughter and I moved to Woodstock after 14 years in Norwich – **all will be well.**

May 2022 I completed the discernment process for Designated Lay Ministry (DLM) only to discover that in July, General Council would be voting on discontinuing that stream of ministry - **all will be well.**

And all was well. The decision was deferred and I was able to enroll in what became the last class of the DLM program.

When I needed a student placement, but I wasn't willing to uproot my daughter (again) - **all will be well.**

And all was well. Hebron UC needed a minister, and they had already met the requirements for student ministry as a learning site.

When the United Church decided to eliminate the DLM stream of ministry, and the program director opted to retire 1.5 years before the last students (including me) would complete our studies – **all will be well.**

And all was well. A new director, a new collaborative approach to learning, and completion of the program.

When everything was said and done, all requirements were met and my final interview with the Candidacy Board was not my final interview – **all will be well.**

And all was well. My do-over interview the next month went much better.

When I was finally in a position to search for an appointment, but I still couldn't leave SW Ontario – **all will be well. And**

all is well. Effective July 1st, I start a ¾ time appointment at Belmont and Harrietsville-Mossley Pastoral Charge - halfway between home in Woodstock and London, where my mom is.

All will be well.

Here I am – the LAST DLM student in Canada. I will be recognized at the Antler River Waterways Regional Meeting at the end of June. There have been so many people in Oxford who have supported and encouraged me along the way. In their own unique way, telling me that **all will be well.**

And for anyone else who is standing at a crossroads, whether as an individual, a family, a church, let my story sit with you. The future is full of uncertainty, and it is also full of hope. And so we place each of our days into God's care, knowing that, as in the past, God is with us, caring for us with constant love. May you know in your heart; whatever you're facing, **all will be well.**

(Kathleen was formerly a member of Norwich UC.)

OXFORD EVENTS

WESTMINSTER UC, THAMESFORD

Choir United

After another shared choir experience on Palm Sunday, called "Palms Up!," we are hoping to sing together again. Starting in the fall, we will rehearse on Wednesday nights at 7:00 towards a Christmas event the Sunday evening after Christmas, December 27. If all goes well, we'll look to do it all again in the new year, ready for a second annual "Palms Up!"

There is a participation and music fee of \$40 per term.

Please contact Rev. Mark & Cheryl Marshall at m.c.marshall@sympatico.ca or call or text at (519) 533-8989 to express your interest. **We will need at least 20**

singers confirmed by July 15, 2026 to make the Christmas event a go.

CONNECTIONS

Stories of being church today in Oxford County

Vol 8 Issue 2

June 17, 2026 Page 4 of 8

LOCAL OUTREACH

WESTMINSTER UNITED, Thamesford Welcomes the Hammouda Family

Four years in the planning (and fundraising), Westminster's Syrian Refugee family has finally arrived. We



learned on Easter weekend that their flights had been booked for April 23, so it was a mad dash to find housing. After a week of searching, viewings, applications, and rejections, it was getting desperate. **We had to increase our housing budget and one of our committee members just parked in front of a house, wondering if it was even worth it.** Turned out the landlord was there and gave a showing. He was also once a refugee and remembered fondly his sponsors, one of whom he called his Canadian grandmother and was just recently at her 100th birthday party. Wanting to pay the kindness forward, he offered to provide some furniture and even offered a month's free rent, putting the house pretty much right back in our budget. And what a house – four bedrooms as we needed, one and a half baths, only four years old, and in the Arabic-centric neighbourhood of White Oaks in London – better than we'd ever hoped. **The Spirit was at work.**

The last couple months have been a whirlwind of activity – setting up the household, the emotional pick-up at the airport and first drive 'home,' many appointments and documents to get translated, signing up for schools, English, classes at the community centre, learning

the transit system, etc. The family is already taking on more independence and are eager to become part of Canadian society. The mother, Tahani, is really enjoying her English school, and the cooking and sewing classes at the community centre. The oldest daughter, Yaman, is hoping to be a doctor and is studying towards the first of many entrance exams, each of which also comes with a cost! (And her English is impeccable, already having spoken in a service to introduce the family to their sponsors at Westminster.) Yamen, the only son, is next and is hoping to find work right away. Salam is 16 and has already started high school, and little Yassmine (8) is loving her elementary school.

Many thanks to all those who have helped make a home in a safe country possible for a family who has fled three wars – two in Syria and one in Lebanon just before they came. A significant part of our funding actually came from donations from congregations that disbanded – making this even more a resurrection story! As needs still keep arising, not the least of which are the exam fees for Yaman, we are still accepting donations – we appreciate every cent and the family does, too. **To contribute, please write "Refugee Sponsorship" in the memo line of cheques. Westminster UC, 115 George St. Thamesford, ON, N0M 2M0.**

This Westminster UC sponsorship of the Hammouda Family is part of **Oxford United Refugee Support (OURS)**. For information on sponsoring refugees, please contact **OURS Chair: Judy Campbell, email judycampbell@execulink.com**

CONNECTIONS

Stories of being church today in Oxford County

Vol 8 Issue 2

June 17, 2026 Page 5 of 8

The Spirit of PENTECOST – moving beyond Ecological Grief

As a daughter of Zorra (East Zorra) and living in Sweaburg for almost 50 years, the springtime planting of the fields of family farms always touched something deep inside me – their brown changing to green as the plants grew; the habitat and ecosystems along the fences were homes for animals and birds. I lament the seemingly 1000-acre fields which have replaced them.

My personal grief is undeniably mild compared to the experience of others when their homes and neighbourhoods are flooded with rising ocean levels (mostly in the southern hemisphere) or to accommodate a power dam; or their livelihoods with the disappearance of caribou or other species at risk because of destruction of their habitat by development and/or climate change; or the grief of the families of the **3400 people who are dying every day in India** from current extreme heat waves as reported by [Euro News, earlier this month](#).

We live in a time of ecological crisis with increasing isolation from community, we may even be losing our ability to connect with people and nature with impacts on our own mental health and the health of our planet.

How are we going to make connections around this and find hope? We can make connections around our lament. To remind us, back in November 2022, The Rev. Dr. Jessica Hetherington presented her Discipleship for Earth Healing workshop at Trinity UC, Ingersoll. In her February. 6 2026 newsletter (see [here](#)), she continues to affirm: **If we are to find hope in the struggle, if we are to move to a place of empowerment and action in**

response to the crisis, lament is essential.

The Spirit of Pentecost encourages us in possibilities **of staying in connection or reconnecting with something precious to us.** 'Others' can be people, the land/environment, and other beings. **Glen Wright articulates extremely well the power of Pentecost in his article Pentecost – an Update found on page 8.**

Amy Romer climate journalist with [Canada's National Observer](#) is the host of **Beyond Ecological Grief**, a free 6-part podcast which uses personal stories to show how eco-grief shows up as denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. You can access The Trailer [here](#); and find the podcast [here](#)... While it started on Monday, June 15, I commend it to help us access the Spirit of Pentecost and open our hearts and minds to how the dynamics of grief which have helped so many deal with death of loved ones can help us with our ecological grief. If you want to access Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' website (see [here](#)). MM

GRANDMOTHERS' TEA

Share stories and laughter with our
Indigenous neighbours!



June 24, 2026

Mohawk Chapel

301 Mohawk Street
Brantford, ON N3S 7V1

TIME: 12:00- 2:00 pm

Join us for potluck lunch. Bring your favourite dish (and recipe) to share AND *your own plate, cup and cutlery.*

Shirley Manning @519-753-5789

CONNECTIONS

Stories of being church today in Oxford County

Vol 8 Issue 2

June 17, 2026 Page 6 of 8

BOOK REPORTS

The Townline: a novel by June Flath **2025 Barn Door Publishing**

It was the very last sentence of the Acknowledgements page that especially made me curious about this story: "Thanks... finally to Rev. Bonnie Pilkey for sharing experiences that led to the inspiration for Rev. Mina."



June's biography notes that she "writes from southern Ontario inspired by the dairy farms, corn and soybean fields that surround her. She was a staff reporter for Ontario Farmer and contributed a weekly column to the Ayr News for several years."

The book jacket offers this intro: "*Aging parishioners, a deteriorating building and a dwindling bank account is not what the young Reverend was expecting when she accepted her first placement at a small rural parish. Minati Patel was not what the congregation had in mind for a Minister either.*"

Reverend Mina is initially lost amidst the long rows of corn, the deep silence and people whose lives follow the seasons ... she finds herself slowly drawn into the community and her parishioners' stories of survival and perseverance, of love and loss and soldiering on with grace. The Townline is a story of hope, of resilience, and of the enduring power of community. It is about discovering a sense of place and the journey that leads to accepting the love and support that can be found in the most unexpected places."

I would add the descriptors humorous, poignant and entertaining. You even get references to the words of some of our favourite Voices United Hymns! One reviewer thanked June for writing a story that "tickled our rural roots."

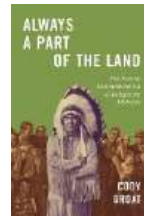
The book is available from Amazon in paperback and you can read a sample on

their website. June's [website](#) offers further info about her interests and publications.

Submitted by Lynne Dunlop

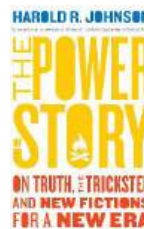
Always a Part of the Land – the Federal Commemoration of Indigenous Histories: history, indigenous studies by Cody Groat, McGill-Queen's University Press June 2026

Looking forward to meeting Cody at the **Commonplace Bookstore in Ingersoll** last Saturday, I was disappointed that it **June 20!** In the Acknowledgements, Cody thanks **his grandmother-in-law, Noreen Holbrough**, well-known Oxford Presbytery type. I called Noreen. She is extremely proud of Cody and his work – saying that **anytime someone needs an excellent speaker, Cody is outstanding!** I agree as I've heard him myself. He is a thorough researcher and well regarded at Western where he is Assistant Professor in the Department of History and the



Indigenous Studies Program. Cody documents the commemoration process for plaques and statutes etc which can be highly political at times and thus needs critical re-interpretation. How we remember our history informs how we move forward.MM

The Power of Story on Truth, the Trickster, and New Fictions for a new Era: by Harold R. Johnson, e-book, 2022



Johnson is a gifted storyteller, Cree lawyer and author from northern Saskatchewan. Chatting easily with a multi-cultural and multi-faith gathering – all people who sought him out one night around a camp fire, he tells his life story in a way to draw us together and to imagine a world where our humanity is remembered and honoured. 'We are the stories we tell and we become the stories we tell ourselves.' We can change our story and write new stories to form our future..

CONNECTIONS

Stories of being church today in Oxford County

Vol 8 Issue 2

June 17, 2026

Page 7 of 8

OPERATION SHARING



Volunteers welcome + supplies.

Visit their [website](#) or [Facebook page](#)

Call 519-320-1372 ext. 4

Email info@operationsharing.ca



**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



Camp Tanner The dissolution of the Camp is almost wrapped up.

There has been a delay as Pastor Gail Kavelman cares for her husband, Rob. They are deeply grateful for the support of the East Nissouri Union Church. **Gail asked me to request prayers only. Details at the GoFundMe site ([here](#)).**

Direct Camp Tanner questions to **Secretary of Camp Tanner Inc.,** Gail Kavelman, gakavelman@gmail.com.

JUST NEXT DOOR

FIVE OAKS CENTRE

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

Donations gratefully accepted on website.



UNITED CHURCH RURAL MINISTRY NETWORK

The May ENews of the UCRMN is [here](#). To ensure your own copy, GO TO UCRMN.ca!

Unusual but very useful section for churches is the [Tech Resource Page](#) with Martin Dawson and Peter Chynoweh who know about 'Open Source Software' AND avoiding computer graveyards!



Sat. Sept 12

Embro Community Centre

355644 35th Line, Embro, ON N0J 1J0

8:00 am to 12 pm

Saturday, September 26th

Lion's Pavilion Sweaburg

474379 Dodge Line

8:00 am to 12 pm

Details of this **FREE Swap meet here:**

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

Displays of groups who enhance our communities also present!

ONTARIO HEALTH COALITION

Editor Marg and friends of Oxford Coalition for Social Justice joined with over 8000 others of the [Ontario Health Coalition](#), walking from Union Station to Queen's Park on May 28th protesting the increasing privatization of our Ontario Health Care and Hospitals.

ACTION ALERT

Just today, OHC released [an open letter to the Health Minister to Stop the Transfer of Lab Testing by Quest/Lifelabs to U.S.](#)

Since Lifelabs was bought by Quest, an American multi-national, there has been serious reduction in service available at the labs especially in Northern Ontario. And lab tests that were previously paid for in public hospitals are now being sent to labs in the U.S.



Subscribe [here](#) to the newsletter of Antler River Watershed Regional Council. Contact [Michele Petick](#) **Valuable info: see: [Facebook page](#) + [webpage](#)** **ARWRC & HFRC (Bi-Regional meeting)**

June 26 & 27 & 28, 2026 at the

Lamplighter Inn, London, Ontario –

Theme Speaker: The Right Rev.

Kimberly Heath, Moderator of United Church of Canada. Register [here](#).

CONNECTIONS

Stories of being church today in Oxford County

Vol 8 Issue 2

June 17, 2026 Page 8 of 8



Pentecost – an Update

I began to write this on the afternoon of Pentecost Sunday. What stuck in my mind from the Pentecost reading (Acts 1:8) was *"You will be filled with power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you shall be my witnesses, first in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria and in the rest of the earth."*

The Jews were gathered to celebrate the harvest festival in Jerusalem when a wind filled the building and flames appeared to hover over the participants. Although they were from different countries and spoke different languages they heard one another in their own languages. The message is clear: Where the Spirit is present there is understanding, and harmony; differences don't matter and oneness prevails. **Today, we update the places to be a witness to this Spirit of peace and justice to read "You are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Israel, in Gaza, and in the rest of the earth."**

Pope Leo has given us a way of being a witness. In an indirect way, without naming names, he stated one of the **core values of the Christian faith, non-violence**. By inference, those who use bombs rather than diplomacy do not represent the Christian faith.

The core values of Islam are social justice and compassion. What Hamas and Hezbollah are doing is not an expression of Islam. When I think of **Judaism's core values** I think of Isaiah 61:1, **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to bring good news to the oppressed and to comfort the broken hearted."**

What Benjamine Netanyahu is doing in Gaza is not Judaism. It is imperial expansion. It is the destruction of a people. Those who attack Synagogues and

Mosques are misguided. **Jews and Muslims are our sisters and brothers. We share core values; our faith stories are historically linked.**

Just before Pentecost, my cousin sent me a report from **Doctor Amad Yousaf** who, along with a team of American Doctors spent 3 weeks in one of Gaza's hospitals. The report, not more than 5 minutes, can be accessed [here](#). While the video is almost 2 years old, destruction continues amid international aid which is thwarted.

It reminded me, both by similarity and contrast of the Spirit at Pentecost. **Both gatherings involve risk**. Jews in the Roman Empire who gathered in one place were subject to arrest. Both gatherings share a language problem. While the Doctor reporting has a Muslim sounding name, it does not mean that he speaks Arabic. **In both gatherings language problems are overcome. In the Gaza hospital love communicates through touch and tenderness, through pain and tears, through shared courage and despair in ways that words cannot describe.**

While flames danced over the heads of first century Jews, for those doctors, both resident and visiting, for medical students, nurses and support staff, **the fire is in the belly**. It burns with courage and grace and is unmistakable.

If you choose to watch and listen to Dr. Yousaf, you will sense the Spirit. **She shows up, and will continue to show up, with power**. But she needs witnesses to judge the oppressors and to bring relief to those who are oppressed.



Peace,
Editor Emeritus - Glen Wright