CONNECTIONS

Stories of being church today in Oxford County

Vol 8 Issue 3 November 18, 2026 Page 1 of 8

HEARTFELT THANKS

IN GRATITUDE

Back in the fall of 2019 when I was a mere 82 years old, Marg Murray phoned and said she had been thinking about starting a newsletter to be sent to United Churches in Oxford. She was asking for help. I said that it sounded like a good plan and I would do what I could.

In the **absence of Presbytery,** which was not only a venue for local governance and support, but **a monthly opportunity to connect with other church folk**, Marg was offering her time and effort to publish, edit and distribute **a monthly newsletter as a way to stay connected in a time of transition**. So, the newsletter CONNECTIONS, which seemed like an obvious title, was about to become a reality.

Now, seven years later, the transition period to Regional Governance, it might be argued, is over or should be**. We move on, with new changes and challenges.**

For me, in this last issue of CONNECTIONS it is a time to say thanks. The ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care, shapes one's life. Moving to the other side of the pulpit after more than 40 years, has its many rewards. However, it is still a shock. The weekly spiritual discipline of discerning what the Spirit is saying through both the text and the world, is no longer there, or at least not with the same urgency. CONNECTIONS gave me an opportunity to "preach" again, at least in writing; a task I soon discovered to be much more difficult than putting together a Sunday sermon.

The phone calls with Marg before each edition about themes, ideas and stories, I always found were **an exercise in discerning the push and the pull of the Spiri**t. For me, they were times of spiritual enrichment.

While I was named as Co-editor and for the last two years, Editor Emeritus, seven of the eight pages of the newsletter were the result of Marg's amazing editorial talents and countless hours of hard work.

And thanks to the readers and the stories we received. Thanks for the notes of appreciation which always gave us new energy.

We live in a time when it is difficult to "be church." **(As soon as I write this sentence, I hear Jesus say, "Did I say it would be easy?")** In such a time it was a privilege to hear and share stories of your life and work; the joys, the sorrows, the struggles and **the many fine examples of faithful wor**k. There were and are many. Somewhere along the way we hope that we contributed to the sense that in this journey of faith "you are not alone."

So here we are, with this final copy of CONNECTIONS being sent out in the church year between the seasons of Creation and Advent, both of which proclaim that **"God makes all things new."** It is a good time to say goodbye, and to say a heartfelt thanks.



Blessings, Glen Wright

INSIDE FINAL CONNECTONS

SO much for which to be grateful.

- prayer support, the joy of being ordained, Christmas music + bazaars and WOW another mass choir!
- **Local Health Care Forum, Sun Nov 22, 1-4 at Unifor Hall**

- Looking ahead to 2027, **SAVE THE DATES** for suppers, reuseapalooza, and future possibilities of sharing stories.
- We are in this together!

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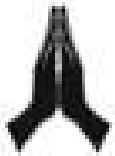
OXFORD UNITED CHURCHES

Hotlinks for websites and/or contact information and worship times for Oxford UC congregations. Also on their Facebook page.

LET OTHERS KNOW!

POST IT on your congregation's Facebook AND on Antler River Watershed Facebook.

EMAIL your neighbouring churches. Current list of UC in Oxford here.



PRAYER CYCLES - OXFORD + ARW REGION

As a church, we are called to pray for each other and our mission in the world.

Prayer Cycle for Oxford is (here) – **only until August 2027**.

Prayer Cycle for ARW Region is (here). Sponsored by Rev Wayne Irwin of CHURCHWEB GLOBAL this prayer cycle includes all congregations in Canada, the World Council of Churches Prayer Cycles as well as other Prayer Cycles and Devotionals. You can subscribe for weekly emails on the site.

Gail Kavelman (Secretary of Camp Tanner) has been caring for her husband, Rob during his illness. They appreciate our prayers and the support of East Nissouri Union Church as they navigate this unique journey. **Gail asked me to request prayers only. Details at the GoFundMe site (here).**

GOD IS DOING A NEW THING

What can we SHARE with our neighbours.

PRAYING with all congregations of faith as they discern their call.

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 to be accessible until December 2027
oxfordunitedministries.ca
Oxford United Ministries Facebook page
https://www.facebook.com/OxfordUCMinistries/
NEED someone manage this Facebook page.

OXFORD EVENTS WILLIS UC, DRUMBO

Nov. 28 10 a.m. to 2 p.m**. CHRISTMAS MARKET** – Shop local Support Small.

Local vendors, handmade gifts, baked goods, Christmas décor, coffee + hot chocolate (by donation), crafts for kids, Book Sale also open!

Full Poster is here.

NORWICH UC



"Possibly the most joyous day of my life" reflects **Rev. Janice Pow**. The picture captures her joy at being ordained at the June Regional meeting at the Lamplighter Inn, London.

Dec 08 at 7 p.m. Norwich Musical Society Band, Chloe Weir, Karl & Roxloana Toews plus special guests.

Dec 14 at 7 P.m. Blue Christmas

Dec 15 Christmas Caroling at 6:30 p.m. in parking lot

Dec 24 Christmas Eve Service. At 7 p.m.

December 25, 12:00 p.m. Share a festive meal with your community.

FULL POSTER IS here.

BURGESSVILLE U.C.

Dec 13 at 10:00 am. Thamesford Bell Choir Free will offering.

ETONIA-PRINCETON U.C.

Dec 24 at 3:00 pm Christmas Eve Service. Everyone welcome.

WESTMINSTER UC, THAMESFORD



Dec. 27, at 4:00 pm, the Sunday after Christmas, another large choir event (doors open at 3:30) at Westminster UC. The choir of **26 singers** from across the region (representing **nine congregations**!) will be performing the **Joel Raney cantata, "HOPE!"**

Freewill offering to keep making these musical worship opportunities possible. The FULL Poster is here.

SAVE THE DATES:

Etonia-Princeton United Church
101 #2 Hwy. Etonia
Takeout available. Wheelchair accessible

FEB 8 2027

Chili/Lasagna Supper
Wednesday, February 8, 2027
5:00 to 6:30 p.m.
Adults $25; children (12 and under) $6; preschoolers free
includes dessert & refreshments.

May 5, 2027

Spaghetti Supper
Wednesday, May 5, 2027
5:00 to 6:30 p.m.
Adults $20; children (12 and under) $6; preschoolers free
includes meat or meatless sauce, meatballs, garlic bread, pie, refreshments

Etonia – Princeton UC

In October, they collected hats, mitts, gloves, scarves and socks and delivered them to 2 local Elementary Schools.

Etonia Princeton Church Hall is available for rental groups.
Contact Nancy Durham at 519-458-4533

Thorndale United Church has over **20 VBS (Vacation Bible School) kits available to be borrowed for free.**

Most are from **Group Publishing**. **Please contact Pam Wilcox** for a list or to arrange a time to look them over. pamwilcox@hotmail.ca

LOCAL OUTREACH

CAMP TANNER

Secretary Gail Kavelman has advised us that **CRA is working on the final paperwork!**

The following June 19, 2026 report:

Many people have asked over the past few years how the Camp Tanner dissolution process is progressing, so we wanted to provide a brief update.

While the process has taken much longer than originally anticipated, work continues behind the scenes to bring Camp Tanner's affairs to a proper conclusion. There have been many administrative, financial, and legal steps that must be completed, and we continue to work through them carefully and responsibly.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the members of the Board of Directors, our volunteers, and everyone who has contributed their time, expertise, and patience throughout this journey. Your commitment and perseverance have been greatly appreciated.

A special thank you goes to Justin Murray for his leadership and dedication, and to all those who have continued to support this work over the past three years.

Although there is still work to be done, we are encouraged by the progress that has been made. The end is finally beginning to come into view, and we remain committed to seeing this process through to completion with integrity and care.

Camp Tanner touched the lives of countless campers, staff, volunteers, and families over the years. We remain grateful for the memories, friendships, and faith experiences that were nurtured through this ministry.

Thank you for your continued prayers, support, and encouragement as we move toward the final chapter of the Camp Tanner story.

Camp Tanner Secretary, Gail Kavelman

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

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

Oxford United Refugee Support (OURS).
For information on sponsoring refugees, please contact **OURS Chair: Judy Campbell, email judycampbell@execulink.com**

Reuse-A-PalooZaha

SAVE THE DATE!

Sat. May 8, 2027

Embro Community Centre

355644 35th Line, Embro, ON N0J 1J0

8:00 am to 12 pm

Details of this **FREE Swap meet here:** **https://www.reuseapalloozaha.ca/**

Displays of groups who enhance our communities also present.

JUST NEXT DOOR FIVE OAKS CENTRE

See their *webpage* + *Facebook* for their latest programs.

Donations gratefully accepted on website.

GRANDMOTHERS' TEA

Share stories and laughter with our Indigenous neighbours!



November 25, 2026

South Cayuga Community Church

6182 Rainham Rd. Dunnville.

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.*

Contact #905-774-5150

UNITED CHURCH RURAL MINISTRY NETWORK (UCRMN)

For all rural and small town folks – lay and ministry

The November ENews of the UCRMN is here. To subscribe**, GO TO UCRMN.ca!**

Zoom workshop Thur Nov 19 at 1:00 pm.

Rural Ministry Town Halls - Nov 25 at 2:30 pm

Tech corner with Martin Dawson and Peter Chynoweh check out how to use Open Source Software! An interesting option on getting away from it all writing out scripture!!! (check it out it) AND the recollection of having elders had lists of the congregation and made house calls! TIME TO VISIT AND PRAY TOGETHER.

ARWRC
Antler River Watershed Regional Council
Holding and Encouraging Communities of Faith

NEWSLETTER Subscribe here to the newsletter of Antler River Watershed Regional Council. Contact Michele Petick **Valuable info on their *Facebook page* + *webpage***

ARWRC FALL online Regional meeting)

November 20-31, Register here to get your zoom link.

"The prophetic tasks of the church are to tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion, grieve in a society that practices denial, and express hope in a society that lives in despair"

WALTER BRUGGEMANN

OXFORD COALTION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE presents

HEALTH CARE in Oxford County



Bring your questions on:

Long-term Care, Funding, Local Resources and Services

Get your questions answered!

Presenters:

Abby Davis, Occupational Health
Mahaila Miller, Longterm Care

Panel:

- Peter Bergmanis, London Health Coalition
- Natalie Mehra. Ontario Health Coalition
- Bryan Smith, Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF) report on Home Care.

RSVP appreciated to bryasmith@oxford.net

MARG'S MUSINGS

Years ago, at my first Presbytery meeting, I joined **Glen Wright** on the **Communications Division**. We'd both attended a Feminist Theology course at Huron College. **Ruth Skillings** and I worked together on the **Oxford Church Mouse**. **Sometimes God uses a friendly face and a mutual interest!** It was the experience gained in that monthly newsletter combined with a strong gut feeling that **geography would still be important** as we transitioned to this new regional church structure that inspired CONNECTIONS. We like to know when our neighbours were having a church supper, a special service, or being innovative.

I am grateful for Glen. I am also grateful that the folks of Oxford blessed us with their stories – and that our readership has been appreciative.

I confess that it has become more difficult to gather, edit, publish and distribute the stories. To be honest, we only considered publishing online as no one had a budget for paper publishing. We are deeply grateful for the trust and support of those who administered the Oxford Legacy Fund and Antler River Watershed Region to help us through the first 5 years.

Much as we value CONNECTIONS, each congregation can tell their story in their own way.

A unique story (March 2020) of which I am proud is of **Rev. David Fearon (1938-2023) minister at Norwich U.C. (1981-1988).** Marie Avey passed it along after corresponding with him about their 200th Church Anniversary in which **he'd announced that he'd been discovered**! **As a young seminary student in 1959, David challenged the Revised Standard Version Biblical translation team of the word 'homosexual' in 1 Corinthians 6:9.** He'd used his middle name to sign his 3-page letter. In time they admitted that they had poorly translated the 2 Greek words. **He was the only person to write them about it.** In the 10 years for the change to show up in the NRSV, the Bible became anti-gay - other **translations have not changed it**. He was in his 80s when he came out.

I am also proud to present in its entirety is a piece (unpublished) which my mentor and friend **The Rev. Dr. Doug Hall (1928-2025)** wrote in 2019 (April CONNECTIONS 2019). He told me **that he used 'all of the theology he ever learned to write that piece.'** Doug never forgot his deep roots in Oxford. He helped me uncover my own roots as one beloved and years ago warned of 'the church's proximity to empire'. **His whimsical and profound story of Creation follows.**

In this transformative time, we are reassured that God is with us in the order, disorder and re-ordering of our communities.

We are not alone. We live in God's world.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve.

Marg Murray - editor

God's dangerous experiment
Or
AND ON THE SIXTH DAY THE CREATOR TOOK A VERY LONG LUNCH-BREAK

"*Man, then, was a result of God's curiosity about Himself."*[1]

To do it or not to do it? That was the question. That morning all the lovely creatures had been made. Such a fascinating variety! They were just splendid, running about the firmament, gaping, trying out their brand new voices, sniffing one another, darting about in air and water. Separately and collectively, the brooding Spirit found them *very* good. Very good indeed! Almost perfect! And yet . . . .

'They can't talk to me,' She found herself thinking as She sat down at the high table for lunch. The morning's burst of making-things-out-of-nothing had been enormous fun, but now She realized that something was still missing: 'They *are*, but they don't *know* that they are. Are they *glad* that they are? Are they content? Do they *like* being? What are they thinking about? *Are* they thinking at all? I don't know, omniscient as I'm reputed to be! And they can't tell me.'

She wanted—what? Well, She wanted something, someone to answer when she called out, *Where art Thou?* Or at least have the sense to hide! She wanted—yes!—a thinking, speaking, acting, making, evaluating, responding creature, a being independent enough to say Yes, and to say it nicely, or at least interestingly. Well, to say *Amen* representatively, for itself and *in behalf of all the other creatures*. . ... To find inventive ways of expressing gratitude for being.

"Ah, but there's the rub," She said aloud to no-one in particular (though She did notice that one of the young angels, one of that new smart set, looked disturbingly 'interested'):-- "There's the rub: *If they could say Yes, they could also say No!"*

S*uch* a thinking animal could easily become a problem. Capital P! A problem to Her. A problem to all the other creatures. Above all, a problem to itself! A huge, unpredictable, never-ending complication! Capital C!

- **Having such freedom,** it would probably fall into silly boasts about the excellence and rectitude of its will. . . *or*, on the other hand, it might be so terrified of the choices it was called to make as to seek anonymity, hide away amongst the shrubbery . . ..
- **Capable of unbounded thought,** it might well think itself into debilitating states of anxiety, which, to avoid, it might just stop thinking altogether. Or try to. ('Hmm. I must look into the prospect of deliberate <u>un</u>-thinking. Maybe some of the plants in the Garden could be misused in such a sad quest for oblivion.') . . . ''
- **Being a 'psychosomatic' unity** (as, someday, some of its own bright Definers would excitedly announce) would it ever accommodate itself to its unheard-of duality? —like the angels

[1] Thomas Mann, *Joseph the Provider*; trans. by H.T. Lowe-Porter;New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944; p.6

imaging God yet sharing its reproductive drives and much else with the other animals? . . .

- **Conscious of its vulnerability**, it would likely vacillate between abject self-doubt and pathetic attempts at control. Sisyphus or Prometheus. Naturally, either path would lead to dismal failure and suffering. Would it then perhaps take out its frustrations on the other creatures, lording it over them, misusing them, killing for sport, manipulating natural processes, devising alternative creations? In short, mistaking stewardship for mastery? . . .
- **Confronted daily by the undeniable limits of its knowledge,** wouldn't it inevitably be driven to egocentric quests for all-knowingness, proposing great schemes and ideologies to which everyone must subscribe? . . . . Or, on the other hand, would the creature become so morbidly conscious of its ignorance and proneness to error as to seek refuge in sheer stupidity and resignation? . . .
- **Recognizing its capacity for good and evil,** it would surely be torn, wouldn't it (?), between delusions of moral grandeur and orgies of guilt; or perhaps, when it came to know that even its alleged good was tainted by self-interest, slothful inertia and feigned helplessness . . .
- **As for the creature's necessary (yes, that would of course be necessary!) <u>awareness</u> of its mortality,** the Great Spirit Herself could scarcely imagine what that would lead to! Unrelieved melancholia? Self-loathing? Endless repression? Forced and vapid Entertainment? Or worse--Heaven-bent Religion!? . . .

Clearly, there were pitfalls on every side. Was not such a creature, therefore, virtually un- do-able? Wouldn't its actualization prove truly irresponsible? Could One really combine so much mind and spirit with so much . . . (for want of a better term) '*body*?' . . . And so forth.

Forgetful of the excellent vegetarian lunch before Her, gathered fresh from the Garden that morning, the Great Spirit felt something approaching the (for Her) novel experience of Impossibility. "Omnipotence is a fine word," she said aloud (noting again the exceptional curiosity of the handsome angel on Her left), ". . . yes, *theoretically* All-powerfulness is a necessary attribute for Deity, and I suppose I have it; but the creature I'm contemplating would, I suspect, come too close to having it too, or imagining it did—which would be infinitely worse."

What a dilemma! If what She desired were indeed a thinking, speaking, deciding, evaluating, acting—well, an *almost-independent* sort of creature, a veritable *image* of Herself—then She could certainly not play the puppeteer and fashion a being who would always *do the right thing*, willy nilly. As this very luncheon meditation once again reminded Her, *even within Her triune Self* dialogue and difference and the weighing of options and changing One's mind were of the essence! So a being *in Her image* could not—*a priori*---be entirely denied all that. Were not such 'dialectics' simply inherent in *thinking*? Yet, left an almost-entirely-free agent—but without Her unique capacity for creatively blending polarities--the creature would undoubtedly, sooner or later, simply self-destruct, perhaps

bringing down the whole magnificent creation with it, *a la* that so-called G*oetterdaemerung* piece of the (easily-foreseen!) musical *Faustus,* Richard Wagner.

All through the extended noon-hour of the sixth day, the divine Spirit brooded. She had moved ponderously over the aboriginal waters *for aeons* before daring the wonders She'd already managed, ending just that morning with the creation of all those lovely creeping, flying and swimming things; but *this* –*this* needed a lot more brooding. She'd never thought so hard in all eternity! But Time, which She Herself had created earlier that week, was 'getting on;' any excusable lunch-break would have ended an hour ago! ('How is One to get used to this new business of . . . Time?!' However. . . ')

And resolutely pushing back Her chair from the table, She rose, noting, as She did so, the finely raised eyebrows of Some. Evidently enough, She had made Her decision. There was only one way of resolving the dilemma. It was a conundrum engendered, after all, by her own (if one may be so bold) unorthodox musings, so She Herself would have to answer for any consequences of acting upon them.

Whatever the details might prove to be, the fundamental stratagem would be as follows: Having done the thing, She Herself would have actively, relentlessly, to 'follow through.' She'd have to move among those odd creatures, "unstable and embarrassing" as they would likely be--move among like a wind, sometimes a cooling breeze, sometimes a regular whirlwind, constantly—*constantly!* —inspiring them to be, to become, to begin again! Without a doubt, She would be obliged to go very far—farther than ever before, absurdly far—in order to be present to them, in them, with them. With Her constant vigilance they might, at least now and then, take heart. With Her tireless encouragement they might, now and then, here and there, find the will to 'go on', the courage to *be,* despite the often-tempting preferability of not-being. Her quiet Presence, hardly-discernable as it would usually be, might sometimes inspire them to believe, evidence to the contrary, that they are not all alone in an indifferent universe. They might find the future-trust they'd need to face and to accept their nearly-impossible condition. Perhaps some of them might even learn to comprehend a little–or even to enjoy? —being . . . human!

Of course, there was a cost for Her in all that. Her creating would have to be a continuous affair. *Creatio continuo*, as, later, a few learned ones would call it. *This* creature couldn't be created all at once—by *fiat*: just a quick 'Let there be' and then instinct takes over . . .etc. No, time and again, in fact all the time, She would have to keep bringing something out of nothing, good out of evil, hope out of despair, trust out of fear, love out of indifference and hate, life out of death. She would have to continue *breathing life into that poor lump of clay* , not just to get it going but to keep it going!—to ensure that its evolving would not involve too much simultaneous *de*volving!

And who knew how far that process would lead? 'Creation', by comparison, was elementary. Re-creation, re-novation, re-formation, re-generation, re-demption, re-surrection—Well! That was something else. Clearly, there would be no Aristotelian nonchalance, no eternal

Sabbath Rest, for the Instigator of *such* a creature. . ..

For a moment, standing behind Her chair, lost in thought, no longer conscious of nor caring about the raised eyebrows, the Great Spirit hesitated. (Understandably, wouldn't you agree?) It was a huge risk. It certainly might not work. Was She prepared for Failure? Multiple failures? Radically new Beginnings? To say the least, it was a dangerous experiment. And costly! Very costly!

Then at last, with a determined nod of the Head to the alarmed onlookers, the Great Spirit abruptly walked off. Back to work! The sheer joy of having discourse with such a predictable, unpredictable being, a thinking, responding animal, would outweigh the pain that it would certainly entail for Her—and indeed for all concerned.

So, blithely ignoring the patent incredulity of the Others, and calming for the moment Her own lingering doubts, on the afternoon of the sixth day. . . God *created human beings in God's own image . . . male and female . . .. And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was* very good!

+++++

a note to skeptics:

If and insofar as, dear friend, you find my story far fetched and entirely too loaded with doctrinal preconceptions, please pause for a moment and consider a Subject nearer home:

Any father or mother who intentionally begets new life, or, after the fact finds that he or she greatly loves the begotten being, takes exactly the same risk as does the Begetter of my story. And any father or mother who truly does love his or her child, will be bound to shepherd and attend its progress or regress in exactly the same way as my 'Great Spirit' concludes.

It is called parenting. And contrary to the flippancy of some humans, it does not stop with the . . .begetting. It goes on and on. And on. It is a huge risk, and it never turns out perfectly. Never! In fact, sometimes it approaches tragedy. It never escapes the tinge of pathos.

But some of us, you know, find that it's worth the effort. And that is why parenting is the archetypal metaphor of the Bible's picture of the Deity—He who is "Our Father who art in heaven", She who like a mother hen would 'gather' us.

If, dear friend, you know of any other way in which parental love, whether human or divine, can function, please do let me know.

***Sincerely, Douglas John Hall, father of four, grandfather of eight**.*

Thank you. Merci!

Note: The author of this modest piece acknowledges the help of five or six centuries' worth of Jewish and Christian Tradition, and of the great 20th Century story-teller, Thomas Mann, whose insight about the heavenly councils and particularly the 'raised eyebrows' at the high table, has been especially suggestive.

Winter 2019

Permission granted by author to share this work with 'CONNECTIONS – News and Views of Oxford County United Churches'