

First Presbyterian Church News

17 Royal Road South, Portage la Prairie, MB



John Zondag, Minister

September 2021

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Sunday Worship at 10:30 a.m.

We acknowledge that we are in Treaty 1 territory, and that the land is the traditional lands of the Anishinabe and Dakota Nations, and the homeland of the Métis Nation

FROM THE MINISTER

In the spring of 2020, I was hopeful that the COVID-19 pandemic would have run its course by the fall, and that life would return pretty much back to normal by then. Well, that didn't happen, of course. Now it's a year later, and the pandemic is still very much with us. We still need to wear masks, and to keep two meters away from others. But there is one significant difference: we now have the vaccines that we were waiting for a year ago; and the vaccines are having the desired effect.

The past year has been a roller-coaster ride, as we went through first the second wave of the pandemic and then the third, which hit us here in Manitoba particularly hard. Now a fourth wave is upon us, and it's still unclear as to how severe it will be. One thing that is clear, though, is that jurisdictions that let down their guard too quickly are now being hit hard by the fourth wave.

The 2020-21 year has been difficult for our congregation. We had only two brief periods in which we were able to have in-person services — a few weeks in October and November, and a few weeks in March and April. Meetings took place mainly by Zoom, and a number of activities continued to be suspended, including the meetings of the WMS group, the Men's Breakfasts, and the Meal-in-a-Bowl suppers.

One very positive development was the financial assistance we received from the federal and provincial governments. Without it, we might have been in dire financial straits by now - and I'm very grateful that we're not.

As we begin the 2021-22 year, we are once again able to hold our Sunday services in person, although not without restrictions. Even if we can't yet interact with each other in quite the same way as before, we can at least see each other, and be present in the same physical space.



Personally, I hope that things will only get better in that respect as we make our way through the year, and that we won't have to go back to holding our services by Zoom. Another positive development is that the Soup Kitchen was finally able to resume operation in mid-July. Precautions need to be taken, and protocols need to be followed, but at least this important ministry to low-income people in the community is once again being undertaken.

This whole experience underlines for us the importance of community, and of the relationships that connect us with each other. The church is first and foremost a community, and the Christian faith is communal in nature - as is clear from what is said in the Old and New Testaments. Perhaps this time of forced isolation has increased our appreciation for the feeling of community that we may have taken for granted previously.

Another lesson the pandemic has been teaching us is the importance of patience. In our day and age, we have come to expect things to happen quickly; but, as we have seen, the way out of this pandemic is frustratingly slow, and setbacks are bound to take place. Jurisdictions that, back in the spring, were eager to eliminate restrictions and get back to normal as soon as possible are now facing high numbers of COVID cases, and severe strains to the health care system. Let us not lose patience, then, and let us be willing to live with these frustrating restrictions for as long as it takes to get the pandemic under control.

As we approach Thanksgiving, we have much to be grateful to God for. Let us not lose sight of that as we deal with the frustrations of living under pandemic conditions. Let us be grateful for the work of doctors, nurses, and others in the health care system who care for those who have become ill with COVID. Let us be grateful for the work of researchers who have developed effective vaccines, and for the work of those who produce them and those who administer them. Let us be grateful for the guidance given by public health officials such as Dr. Theresa Tam and Dr. Brent Roussin. Let us be grateful for financial assistance provided by the federal and provincial governments. Let us be grateful for those who face increased risk of infection in order to provide the various services that we all depend on. And let us be grateful that, in spite of setbacks, it appears that we are gradually making progress in the fight against the COVID-19 virus.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

Unfortunately, a number of our congregational activities and events remain suspended indefinitely, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some meetings/activities continue, however.

a) Regularly scheduled events:

- Bible study - Tuesday evenings at 7:00 p.m., by Zoom
- Finance and Maintenance Committee meetings - the 2nd Wednesday of the month, at 6:30 p.m., by Zoom
- Session meetings - the 4th Thursday of the month, at 7:00 p.m., by Zoom

b) One-time events:

- Sunday, 10 Oct. - HARVEST (THANKSGIVING) SUNDAY
- Sunday, 17 Oct. - ENDOWMENT FUND SUNDAY
- Sunday, 31 Oct. - REFORMATION DAY
- Sunday, 7 Nov. - REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY; Daylight Saving Time ends
- Sunday, 14 Nov. - SOUP KITCHEN SUNDAY
- Sunday, 21 Nov. - Deadline for submissions for the December Newsletter
- Sunday, 28 Nov. - FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
- Sunday, 12 Dec. - COMMUNION SUNDAY

COMMUNION

The Session has decided that we will try having a Communion service on the first Sunday in October (the 3rd). This will be the first Communion service we'll have had since December of 2019! The protocols for serving Communion are being figured out, and will be announced on Sunday, 26 September.



IN-PERSON SERVICES

We returned to having our Sunday services in person on the Labor Day weekend, and Church School resumed the following Sunday. We are continuing following the protocols we followed in our in-person services last fall and this past spring, however. They are as follows:

- Wear a mask. Those participating in leading the service may remove their masks when they are speaking, so that they may be more easily understood.
- Maintain physical distance (2 meters) from others (except members of your own household).
- Use hand sanitizer when entering the sanctuary.
- An offering plate has been set out at the back of the sanctuary.
- Remain seated throughout the service, including for the hymns.
- Bring your own cushion and/or Bible each week, if desired.
- Prefer that washrooms not be used.
- There will be no coffee/fellowship hour.
- Refrain from shaking hands, etc.
- The names of attenders will be recorded each Sunday, so that we have a record of who attended on which Sunday, in case contact tracing should need to be done later.

However, we are no longer sanitizing surfaces in the sanctuary following each service, since the sanctuary is not used between Sundays, and we no longer require one-way traffic in the sanctuary.

We hope that we will be able to continue having our services in person from now on, and that, in the coming months; circumstances will allow us eventually to eliminate these protocols.

NEW BEGINNINGS

Last year at this time, we were getting ready for an Assessment Visit with the Rev. Mark Lewis. That visit took place by Zoom on the 30th of September 2020. Mark subsequently wrote an Assessment Report based on that visit, as well as on relevant statistical information on our community.

Unfortunately, however, due to the pandemic, the New Beginnings process has stalled at that point.

The next phase in the process is the “Introduction to Transformational Ministry” weekend, to be led by our New Beginnings coach, the Rev. Ian Fraser, who lives in Montréal. The Session had considered holding that weekend in January 2021, but Ian Fraser wouldn’t have been able to come in person. We would’ve had to hold the weekend by Zoom, then, which would have been far from ideal, since it would exclude those who don’t have internet access. Ongoing uncertainty about the pandemic, coupled with scheduling challenges, caused the Session in August to decide to wait until January 2022 before proceeding.

The Introduction to Transformational Ministry weekend is to be followed by a series of four small-group meetings, to be held every other week, over a period of eight weeks. Among other things, the small group meetings will discuss Mark Lewis’ Assessment Report, as well as the possible scenarios for the congregation’s future that he has created.

It’s extremely frustrating that the New Beginnings process has been stalled for so long, but it’s essential that as many people in the congregation as possible have the opportunity to participate in the process — so we have no choice but to wait awhile longer.

CONGRATULATIONS!

NEW GRANDCHILDREN!

Bruce and Lisa Sneesby have a new granddaughter, **Jack Shelly Heenan Sneesby**, daughter of Sheldon and Lindsey. She was born on the 29th of June, and she and her parents live in Banff, Alta.

Brian Yeo’s first grandchild - a boy - was born on the 7th of August. His name is **Grant Heath Pilling**, and his parents are Kirk and Holly; they live in California.

We celebrate these births with the happy grandparents!

THANKSGIVING OFFERING

For those who receive a printed copy of the Newsletter, the annual **Thanksgiving Offering** envelope is enclosed with it; for those who receive their Newsletter by e-mail, the Thanksgiving envelope is being mailed out separately. **Many thanks** to those who contributed to the annual Easter Offering (which totaled \$2,000)! A Summer Offering envelope was not sent out this year.

FALL VACATION

John Zondag has one week of vacation time left, which he will take from the 18th to the 24th of October. **Ruth Magnuson**, the Executive Director of Winnipeg Inner City Missions, has agreed to come and lead our service on Sunday, 24 October. It will give us an opportunity to meet her in person, and be reminded of the important work done by WICM in the “north end” of Winnipeg.

LAY PASTORAL VISITORS

A reminder that **Charlie Clifford** and **Terry Rempel** are Lay Pastoral Visitors in our congregation. As such, they assist the minister and elders in providing pastoral care. Unfortunately, the pandemic has largely prevented them from doing in-person visits in the past year-and-a-half, and has forced them to do their visits mainly by phone. Charlie can be reached by phone at 857-6497, and Terry at 871-2148.

FINANCE & MAINTENANCE

The Drywall repairs in the South entrance will be done this fall. We are having the boiler and furnace inspected to ensure they are ready for the upcoming winter season.

Thank you to everyone for their contributions to the church. As was expected, givings have been down during the COVID pandemic. However, with subsidies we have received from the government, we have managed to stay afloat.

Thank you to those who contributed to the cutting of the lawn this past summer.

Please continue to pray for our church and community at large as we continue to deal with COVID. May God bless you all.

CONGRATULATIONS!

We extend our congratulations and best wishes to **Rob & Cheryl McPherson**, who celebrated their 15th Wedding Anniversary on the 9th of September!

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION CALLS TO ACTION –

Last newsletter's article turned out (unfortunately) to be very timely with the discovery of a number of unmarked graves where residential schools had stood. One of the suggestions to help deal with this sad truth is to educate yourselves by reading the 94 calls to action. If you have been following these articles, to date you have read 84 of the calls.

79 - DEVELOP A RECONCILIATION FRAMEWORK FOR CANADIAN HERITAGE AND COMMEMORATION - in progress - projects underway.

In September 2020, two former schools, one of which is in Portage, were designated as national historic sites. In July 2021, two more schools, in Saskatchewan and Ontario, were also designated as national historic sites.

There has not yet been an amendment to the Historic Sites and Monuments Act.

80 - ESTABLISH A NATIONAL DAY FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION AS A STATUTORY HOLIDAY - complete

On June 3 2021, a bill to establish September 30 as a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation statutory holiday received royal assent after being fast tracked through the legislature. Since then, Manitoba has declared schools will closed on that day.

81 - COMMISSION AND INSTALL A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS NATIONAL MONUMENT IN OTTAWA - in progress - projects proposed

The government has not yet commissioned a Residential Schools National Monument in Ottawa and at this time has only pledged to set aside the needed funds.

82 - COMMISSION AND INSTALL A RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS MONUMENT IN EACH CAPITAL CITY - in progress - projects proposed

No provincial or territorial government has commissioned or installed a monument although some have announced plans to do so. Winnipeg and Whitehorse have installed monuments, neither of which was commissioned by the government. The one in Winnipeg was a gift from a member of St. Paul's Anglican Church.

AS OF SEPTEMBER 9, 2021

NOT STARTED	20
IN PROGRESS, PROJECTS PROPOSED	32
IN PROGRESS, PROJECTS STARTED	29
COMPLETE	13

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ENDOWMENT
FINANCIAL STATEMENT – August 31, 2021**

REVENUE:	MONTH	Y-T-D
High Interest Saving Account – Stride CU	1.21	11.87
Investment Interest – Stride CU		361.93
Share Dividend – Stride CU		13.86
Investment Redeemed – Stride CU		
Memorial Gifts		5.00
Honour Gifts		
Offering Envelopes		<u>55.00</u>
TOTAL REVENUE		447.66

EXPENSES:

Bank Charges – Stride CU
Investment Purchase
Finance & Maintenance
Miscellaneous
TOTAL EXPENSES

BANK: STRIDE CREDIT UNION (SCU) (Chequing Account)

Opening Balance: January 1, 2021	\$ 2,820.58
Total Revenue – Year to Date	73.86
Total Expenses – Year to Date	
Closing Balance: August 31, 2021	\$ 2,894.44

BANK: STRIDE CREDIT UNION (High Interest Saving Account) – Included Below **

Opening Balance: January 1, 2021	\$ 5,706.81
Total Revenue – Year to Date	11.87
Total Expenses – Year to Date	
Closing Balance: August 31, 2021	\$ 5,718.68 - Included below **

INVESTMENTS:

DATE	BANK	INVESTMENT AMOUNT
PURCHASED		
April/19	SCU High Interest Saving Account**	\$ 5,718.67 **
Oct 14/15	SCU TD Due Oct 14/21 @2.650% 307879	33,450.22
May 25/18	SCU TD Due May 25/22 @1.00% 370687	23,020.06 ****
Oct 31/17	Westbourne Due Oct 31/23 @1.50% 400450	1,500.00
Sept 24/20	SCU TD Due Sept 24/21 @1.70% 620792	<u>5,000.00</u>
	TOTAL INVESTMENTS	\$68,688.96

TD – Term Deposit

FINANCES:

FINANCES:**JAN – AUGUST 2021**

INCOME RECEIVED:	\$70,386.66
EXPENSES PAID:	<u>\$59,113.71</u>
SURPLUS (DEFICIT):	<u>\$11,272.95</u>

Included in the above income is \$15,000.00 from the Manitoba Bridge Grant and \$17,143.51 from the Canada Employment Wage Subsidy (CEWS)

If our Church had not received the Manitoba and Federal Government Grants (\$32,143.51) our Y-T-D deficit would have been \$20,870.56.

PRESBYTERIANS SHARING – Total Allocation for 2021 is \$3,200.00

DONATIONS RECEIVED:	<u>\$1,305.00</u>
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FUNDRAISING:

INCOME:	\$3,701.60
EXPENSES:	<u>\$ 793.10</u>
SURPLUS:	<u>\$2,908.50</u>

The summary of the surplus from the following events:

Spring Dinner \$2,908.50

Our Virtual donations received for June, July & August was \$1,660.00. Thank you for your continued generosity.

APPEAL FOR BIRDTAIL

We received in late August an appeal from **Yvonne Bearbull**, Director of the Kenora Fellowship Center, in behalf of her home community, the **Birdtail Dakota Nation**, which is north of Virden, and within the bounds of our Presbytery. We once had a Presbyterian congregation there, but it was dissolved at some point in the 1980s or 90s. However, for the past few years, ministers in our Presbytery (including Henry Hildebrandt, Glenn Ball, and Laura Hargrove) have been holding a Sunday afternoon service there once per month. Yvonne's note reads, in part:

I am very saddened to advise that the state of many in the community is in dire need. The poverty many experience in the community and compounded with COVID and the impact of the mental health crisis. Families have been hit hard, and many have been separated. Some have been reunited, and are in need of furniture and household items. So many things that we take for granted and the comforts of life are so far out of reach for many. It feels awful typing this, knowing the need is so great. There are a few families who we know who have very little in the way of household furnishings, and you can imagine the level of depression and worry this brings. ...

So the consideration is to put out a request to congregation members, or even in congregations more rural and close to the community, and if anyone is willing to donate items: household items, kitchen items (pots and pans, dishes, cutlery, etc.), towels, bedding, furniture (tables, chairs, couches, etc.). ...

My heart goes out to the moms who are struggling to keep their kids, and have so little. It would be such an encouragement to them to know someone cares and wants to offer you (this).. out of love and care.

Thanks to those who have already donated some items! If anyone else has items to donate that can be transported by car, please bring them to the church; and John will deliver them to Glenn Ball in Brandon, who will look after transporting them the rest of the way to Birdtail.