

**FIRST THINGS FIRST
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, REGINA
DECEMBER 2022**

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

“God defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.”
(Deuteronomy 10:18-19)

The second chapter of our Advent Book Study “Making Room: Sharing the Love of Christmas” begins with this quote from Deuteronomy. Although the instruction from God to love foreigners and welcome strangers is not included in the Ten Commandments, it is an imperative that is repeated again and again through the Scriptures.

The author of “Making Room,” Ed Robb, invites readers to ponder the Christmas Story and pay attention to the welcome and hospitality that is shared. Someone (perhaps an innkeeper) makes room for Mary and Joseph in the warm room where the animals stayed. Then after the birth of Jesus, the couple manage to welcome a strange visit from the local shepherds, and later an even more surprising visit from a group of foreign astrologers.

Not long after the crowds have dispersed from the Holy Family’s temporary home, they are forced to flee from Joseph’s hometown. A jealous king is threatening to kill all the young children in the area to protect himself from a possible future overthrow of his reign. Jesus and all the little ones are in danger, and the family become refugees, travelling quickly to Egypt in the hope of safety.

Ed Robb invites us to imagine what that was like for them – showing up in a place with a different language, different customs, different religion, and relying on the kindness of strangers to survive. I wonder who took them in that time, who helped them to make another temporary home until it was safe to return to Nazareth.

Writing from an American context, Ed Robb notes that “Immigration is a hot-button issue these days. As Christians we can and do differ about the right approach to this vexing problem, with some supporting strong borders and others advocating for a more open approach. It’s not easy to discern the best governmental policy, but we cannot allow this national debate to blind us to our mandate as Christians. No matter what our political affiliation may be, when it comes to immigration and border enforcement, one principle on which Christians can agree is that every person is a child of God and worthy in God’s sight. We can agree that our love should know no boundaries.”

Here in Canada, we struggle also – to make room for those who choose to come and live among us, and for those who wished to stay in their home communities but were forced to flee from war, persecution, or the disastrous effects of climate change. It may be helpful to remember that our ancestors were once foreigners in this land too, welcomed by the First Peoples and assisted in settling and making homes here. Leviticus 19:33-34 says *“When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.”*

This month, we are delighted that the Mathiang-Thiey Family will be arriving in Regina from Sudan. They have been living in uncertainty and danger for many years, and we finally have the opportunity to welcome them to a safe place, to treat them well, and to share God’s love with them. May God guide and help us as we seek to make room for them in our community this Christmas and in the months and years ahead.

Rev. Amanda Currie

SESSION

On January 15, the Fellowship Committee will be hosting a Souper Sunday lunch after church. At the same time, we will have a Meet your Elder event. There were some changes made in elders' list this year and we want to give you a chance to meet with your elders and the others in your district and enjoy a bowl of soup and some conversation!

We are excited about the imminent arrival of the Mathiang family in Regina! After almost six years and lots of paperwork and waiting... Nyatot and Peter, Nyachangkuoth and Nyabgwa, and Lieb will all arrive at the Regina airport on Air Canada flight 1921, at 3:37 pm on Thursday, December 15. We encourage anyone who is able and willing to come out to the airport to celebrate their arrival. Please be sure to check the arrival time online before you head out. We have the house at 1435 Rupert St. all set up and ready and are currently buying groceries and making last minute arrangements.

Our Blue Christmas service will be held December 13 at 7:00 pm and it is open to anyone. We will have a Christmas Eve service on Dec. 24 at 7:00 pm. Christmas Day and New Year's Day both fall on Sundays this year and we will have services both days - however, we won't have coffee after church on those two days. Communion in January will be celebrated on Sunday, January 8.

Blessings to all of you and your families during this Christmas season. Enjoy the holidays as we celebrate the birth of Jesus and welcome a new year!

Jo Szostak
Clerk of Session

BOARD OF MANAGERS

We have hired a new caretaker. Bill Klock has been working for a week now. If you are in the church during the week and see Bill, please welcome him to First! We are thankful to Bob Dempsey for his dedicated service for more than twenty years and we look forward to working with Bill.

A MILESTONE CELEBRATION

On Tuesday, November 15th, the Freedom 55ers were delighted to celebrate Marion Baller's 100th birthday with a luncheon. Some of Marion's family were able to attend with her. We enjoyed cake, singing happy birthday, and hearing Marion's reflections on her life. Part of her advice to her younger listeners was, "Take care of your body. You're going to need it later on."



Marion and Great Granddaughter Viela

MISSION & OUTREACH COMMITTEE

Christmas In Memoriam Project You still have time to participate in this special "Mitts, Gloves and Socks" project for our neighbours. There are two options to take part:

- 1) Mittens, gloves and socks are in high demand by marginalized Regina citizens in the winter. During the four Sundays of Advent you can help meet this need by bringing warm socks, mitts or gloves (new please) to the church,



or

- 2) by making a cash donation for purchase of the items. Your gifts in memory of a loved one will be distributed to people in need by White Pony Lodge, a volunteer community care organization in North Central, and by the Ecumenical Saturday Lunch program, run by Regina churches.

No matter how you participate, be sure to fill in a *In Memoriam form* to acknowledge your loved ones. Put your completed form in the offering plate on Sunday or e-mail your information to the church office. Deadline is December 15th. An insert with the names will be in the December 18th bulletin.

Mary Jesse
Mission & Outreach Convener

WELCOME AND INCLUSION COMMITTEE

The Welcome and Inclusion Team was established by the Session in December of 2021 with the mandate to assist the congregation in becoming more openly and intentionally inclusive to members of the LGBTQI+ community.

As you likely know, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has been on a journey of growing inclusion over the last several years. In 2021, the General Assembly affirmed two parallel definitions of marriage, making space for theological diversity within the church. And the Rainbow Communion led the church in exploring the experience of LGBTQI+ people in the church and calling all congregations to repent of past exclusion and explore ways to become more welcoming for all.

Members of the Welcome and Inclusion Team at First Church are Donna Wilkinson (Convener), Jessica Bonish, Tammy MacDonald, Paula Weber, Graeme Mitchell, and Matthew Yakemchuk. We have been thinking and sharing about how we can grow in our welcome at First Church.

On Sunday, December 3, 2021, Amanda talked about the confession of the PCC to the LGBTQI community. A copy of it follows below.

Donna Wilkinson
Convener

The Presbyterian Church in Canada

The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Confession to God and LGBTQI People Adopted on June 6, 2022. The 2022 General Assembly adopted a confession to God and LGBTQI people, confessing the harm caused by homophobia, transphobia, heterosexism and hypocrisy in The Presbyterian Church in

Canada, and committing the church to a true change of heart and behaviour. The whole church is called to live out this confession as individuals and communities of faith so that harm does not continue.

THE MEANING OF CONFESSION

This confession is addressed to God and to each other in the presence of the whole community of believers. It presupposes the existence of a breach, or a falling short, that runs contrary to God's desire for how people live with and treat each other. It calls the church: to acknowledge harms done; to seek forgiveness from God and those who have been harmed; to stop causing harm; to repent of wrongdoing; and to begin a new journey of reparation, restoration, and reconciliation within the community of believers.

OUR CONFESSION TO GOD AND LGBTQI PEOPLE

All: Let us pray.

One: In response to the Holy Spirit's action in its midst The Presbyterian Church in Canada comes before God in the presence of one another to confess its sins to God, and to LGBTQI people. The church has wounded many through its practices of exclusion and hurtful treatment. The church seeks your forgiveness, O God, and the forgiveness of all whom we have harmed.

All: We offer this confession in humility, desiring to go a new way.

One: Creating and Covenanting God, you created us in your own image. In Christ, you call us to be a welcoming and nurturing community, to love one another as Christ has loved us. Yet we have ostracized and excluded LGBTQI people from full life within the body of Christ. We have often turned the courts of the church into places where those who are not straight or cisgender are attacked, shunned and belittled. We confess that we have failed to love one another as Christ commanded us and we have disrupted our covenantal relationship with you.

All: For these wrongful and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness.

One: The church has enacted policies and adopted customs that have dehumanized and harmed LGBTQI people. In doing so the church has led many people to believe they have to choose between embracing their sexuality and gender identity or being a part of the church.

All: For these wrongful and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness.

One: The church has often perpetuated harmful lies that LGBTQI people are dangerous and abusive. The resulting stigma fosters an environment where gifted people are discouraged and excluded from providing leadership in the church. The church's prejudice contributes to hatred and neglect of LGBTQI people making them targets for physical, spiritual and emotional violence.

All: For these unloving and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness.

One: The church has no higher calling than to offer the worship that belongs to God. In worship, we find strength and hope for proclaiming God's reign in the world. Yet often our language in worship is not inclusive and renders many people and their families invisible. This makes worship a wounding and alienating experience.

All: For these unloving and unjust actions, the church asks forgiveness.

One: The church has been dismissive of and indifferent to LGBTQI people when they have named the harm the church has caused to their mental, physical and spiritual well-being.

All: For these unloving and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness.

One: O God of justice and mercy, you have called us to love and nurture the vulnerable among us, yet we have not been loving and supportive role models to young LGBTQI people. We have failed to listen to their cries for healthy pastoral support. Our actions have abandoned them to a future that often includes internalized homophobia, self-loathing, depression, substance abuse, self-harm, homelessness, and suicide.

All: For these unloving and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness

One: In this church called home, some LGBTQI people still long for the love and security of home. In this church called home, some of us have witnessed demeaning conversations and attitudes that belittle LGBTQI people. Yet we choose to be silent in the face of such injustices, becoming complicit in the resulting oppression.

All: For these unloving and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness.

One: Creating God, your creation bears witness to the vastness of your diversity. In carrying out the mission entrusted to it, the church has embraced ideologies and narratives that have normalized the exclusion of those it deems different.

All: For these unloving and unjust actions, we ask forgiveness.

One: To those of you whom we have harmed by our unloving and unjust actions, we confess that we have failed you. We acknowledge that the church has wounded you deeply.

All: In humility and with sorrow, we ask for your forgiveness.

One: Come Holy Spirit come. Be present in this time of silence. (Hold a moment of silence)

One: God of justice and mercy, we praise you for the presence of the Holy Spirit prompting us to work purposefully and compassionately, to find new and just ways of living out that larger story of loving God and neighbour. Help us to overcome the pride that covers up wrongdoings, the indifference that stands in the way of feeling, and the fear that stalls change.

All: God of justice and mercy, we turn to you. Only you can help us to do this hard work of repairing, restoring, reconciling, and healing. Fill us with courage and hope as we commit to working for the restoration of your church and our relationship with one another, and for the collective flourishing of all people for your glory. Amen.

AN ADVENT REFLECTION FROM THE MODERATOR

What Are We Waiting For?

All Earth is waiting to see the Promised One,
and open furrows await the seed of God.
All the world, bound and struggling, seeks true
liberty;
it cries out for justice and searches for the truth.
(Hymn #109 in the Book of Praise)

We don't like to wait.
We want instant solutions and next hour
deliveries at our doors.
Waiting seems somehow to be an insult
we are not important enough if we have to wait.

We say we love Advent but do we really?
Advent is all about waiting. And not knowing.
Perhaps because we think we know what
we are waiting for
we think we are really not waiting.

Christmas appears all around us
just after Thanksgiving.
Advent becomes superfluous,
a forgotten season except for overpriced
calendars.

But in our churches
we still light the candles:
Hope, joy, peace, love.
Our certainty has some cracks, we wonder

Is there something more?
Is there something more than what we have
come to expect?
Why do those ancient words from Isaiah
continue to stir us?
What could we be waiting for?

You are invited to join a conversation about
what we are waiting for, with me, the Rev. Dr.
Bob Faris, together with the Primate of The
Anglican Church of Canada, the Most Rev.
Linda Nicholls, the National Bishop of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada, the
Rev. Susan Johnson, and the Moderator of the
United Church of Canada, the Rt. Rev. Dr.
Carmen Lansdowne. Don't let the titles put you
off. We are waiting, with all of you, to know
where the Spirit is leading the Canadian

churches in these changing and challenging
times. For more, view the first of the meditation
videos.

The Rev. Dr. Bob Faris
Moderator of the 2022 General Assembly



Ballot for Moderator of the 2023 General Assembly

I am pleased to announce that the following
names will appear on the ballot for Moderator of
the 2023 General Assembly.

- Mr. John I.F. Barrett, Elder, Zion Presbyterian Church in Charlottetown, PEI
- The Rev. Mary Fontaine, Director, Hummingbird Ministries in Vancouver, BC
- The Rev. Paul D. Johnston, Minister, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Arnprior, ON

The General Assembly authorized the
facilitation of online voting for the nominee for
Moderator of the 2023 General Assembly.
Instructions for voting will be shared with
presbyteries. The Committee to Advise with the
Moderator will confirm the nomination of the
Moderator on April 3, 2023. The 2023 General
Assembly will commence on June 4, 2023, at a
location within the bounds of the Presbytery of
Halifax & Lunenburg in Nova Scotia.

Full profile information is coming soon.

The Rev. Victor Kim
Principal Clerk

December Calendar

Dec. 11	10:30 am	Worship (In Person & Online) 3 rd Sunday of Advent Guest Preacher: Bryan Tudor 11:45 am Coffee Hour (gym)
Dec. 12	7:00 pm	Advent Book Study (Zoom)
Dec. 13	7:00 pm	Blue Christmas Service (In Person)
Dec. 14	12:00 pm	Bible Study (Zoom)
Dec. 15	3:37 pm	Mathiang Family Arrival at Airport
	7:00 pm	Choir
Dec. 16	10:00 am	Pastoral Care Cmt (Morris Room)
Dec. 18	10:30 am	Worship (In Person & Online) 4 th Sunday of Advent Scholarship Presentations 11:45 am Coffee Hour (gym)
Dec. 19	7:00 pm	Advent Book Study (Zoom)
Dec. 24	7:00 pm	Christmas Eve Worship (In Person & Online)
Dec. 25	10:30 am	Christmas Day Worship (In Person & Online) (No coffee hour today.)
Jan. 1	10:30 am	New Year's Day Worship (In Person & Online) (No coffee hour today.)
Jan. 8	10:30 am	Worship with Holy Communion (In Person & Online) Coffee Hour (gym)
Jan. 8	1:00 pm	Welcome & Inclusion Team (Zoom)
Jan. 9	7:00 pm	Mission & Outreach Cmt (Zoom)
Jan. 11	7:00 pm	Session Meeting (Zoom)
Jan. 12	7:00 pm	Choir
Jan. 13	10:00 am	Synod Meeting (Zoom)
Jan. 15	10:30 am	Worship (In Person & Online) 11:45 am "Souper Sunday": Stay for Lunch and Meet Your Elder

SPECIAL SERVICES FOR CHRISTMAS



Our Annual Blue Christmas Service will be Tuesday, Dec. 13th at 7:00 pm. This will be a quiet and reflective service especially for those who may be finding this season difficult due to grief, loss, or loneliness. It will include an opportunity to light a candle in memory of a loved one, and to pray together in the midst of the realities of our lives that are not always easy.



The Christmas Eve Service will be Saturday, Dec. 24th at 7:00 pm. This will be a joyful event with lessons, carols, candles, and a great celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ our Saviour!



Christmas Day is a Sunday this year, so you're invited to begin this most special day of the year with an informal and fun morning worship at 10:30 am. Begin your Christmas Day this year with your church family!



merry
Christmas