



COVID-19 UPDATE FROM THE BOARD

Worship services will be held on Zoom alone until at least the end of January to give the new rules time to flatten the curve. We will reconsider opening only when it is safe. In the meantime, we will make every effort to stay in touch, especially with those people who do not have access to the internet.

The Board would like to thank everyone who attended in person and followed all the safety guidelines. You did a great job of helping to keep services open but as we all know the situation is deteriorating and we have to move with the times.

The church office personnel, Diane and Rev. Julia, have been deemed essential by the Board for the operation of the church and the office will remain open from 9 – 2, Monday to Friday. Please call or email the church if you need to chat or you have a specific need. You are welcome to drop by as long as you wear a mask and observe all the usual precautions.

We regret having to make this difficult decision but we are not alone. Many churches and many families and friends are having to make similarly difficult choices during these strange times. We will be together again and what a wonderful reunion that will be!

Merry Christmas from our church family to your home. Stay safe, be well, be blessed.

Please Pray For:



- Sunnybrook United Church
- Those making difficult decisions
- Leaders in government
- Those who are facing financial uncertainty
- People working and living in long term care facilities

DeWinton Christmas Concert

As you know, we have planned a virtual Christmas Concert for this coming Sunday at 7:00 p.m. As Dave from the Vinyl Café might say, “It’s not professional, but it’s amateur.” Nevertheless, it was put together with love and features some very gracious performers who gave of their time and talent.

As you know, we didn’t sell tickets (or Zoom links) this year. Instead we are inviting people to contribute to the Veteran’s Food Bank through Okotoks United Church. This can be done any number of ways. You can stop by with a cheque or cash as the Okotoks’ office between 9-2 on weekdays. You can send a cheque to the church (Okotoks United Church, Box 507, Okotoks, AB T1S 1A7). or you can do an e-transfer through e-mail from your bank account. All of the money received should be designated for the Veteran’s Food Bank. Okotoks will collect the money and send a cheque to Mel for the full amount received. Get in touch with Diane at the office before 2:00 tomorrow or Julia at okjulia@telus.net to let us know if you’d like to join this virtual Christmas Concert.

1st Annual Ugly Christmas Sweater Contest



Don you now, your ugly sweater, fa la la la la, la la la la. Please join us for an ugly Christmas sweater contest on Sunday, December 13, 2020 after the service. Join us through Zoom to show your Ugly Christmas Sweater.



Remember, the uglier the better!

You can win a prize of a food or gas card donated in your name to the 2020 White Gift donations.





Right vs. Rights

There is a lot of talk these days about exercising our rights. Do we have the right to defy authorities when they ask us not to congregate, to wear masks, to limit people in our homes? Since I am not a legal expert, I will not weight in on the legalities of what the government can and cannot do.

My sermon on Sunday focused on the story of Joseph and his right not to follow through on his commitment to Mary. According to the law he followed in his day, Jewish Law, he not only had the right to reject Mary, he had an obligation to do so to protect his reputation and the honour of his family. No one would have blamed him if he had publicly shamed Mary and walked away from her, leaving her open to shame, rejection and perhaps even death.

Joseph did decide to send Mary on her way with a certificate of divorce. Until God intervened. In a dream, an angel from God told Joseph to follow through on the marriage to Mary and take the child to be born as his own. He had every right not to according to the law, but it was not the right thing to do.

Rights and do the right thing are not the same thing.

The bible does not tell us that we have “rights.” It does speak of our responsibility. Apparently God is not as concerned about our rights as God is concerned about how we treat others. Our responsibility is to care for the vulnerable, weak, hungry and the lonely. If doing the right thing means that we have to forego our rights, then that is what is expected.

If by wearing a mask, or staying home, or keeping our distance or not meeting socially is going to protect anyone, then that is our responsibility.

As Christians, our calling is to a higher standard: doing the right thing, the compassionate thing, the loving thing. It is disturbing these days, to see anybody being rude, disrespectful or aggressive toward others in our communities who are simply asking people to do the right thing. Nobody signed up for the pandemic and no one expected to have to ask others to follow protocols set by governments, institutions or corporations.

Someone recently told me of an incident at a coffee shop where their granddaughter works. When a patron was asked to wear a mask, they not only got belligerent, they have since hired a lawyer to follow through on their supposed abrogation of rights. This is NOT right. This young woman was simply doing what she had been told to do.

Grace, compassion, respect and love for the other compels us to go the extra mile to do what is right if it will protect, care for or encourage another. It is not that rights don't matter. It's just that in extraordinary circumstances, it is more important to do what is good and right.

Advent is a time of waiting. Waiting means we have to be patient. We truly are in this together. Let's treat others the way we would like to be treated because it's the right thing to do.

Enjoy Some Quiet Time

As we have done for Christmas each year, we have decorated the sanctuary for Advent and Christmas (thanks to some very industrious angels). We want you to enjoy the beauty of the sanctuary and the peace it offers.

You are welcome to come and sit in the sanctuary for prayer, meditation and reflection, or simply to sit and enjoy, even cry if you need to. Masked and physically distanced of course.



The sanctuary will be available for your use from **Monday – Friday from 9:30 – 1:00 each day until December 23rd**. We ask that you call (403-938-4357) to let us know you're coming so we have a list of attendees and we can “light up” the sanctuary. You are free to stay as long as you want. Please enter via the office doors where you will be “checked in.” Bring your own mask. We have sanitizer on the front table.

Please take time to experience the light of Christ in whatever way is meaningful and comfortable for you. You are welcome as often as you like. Blessings in this Advent Season.



White Gifts This Christmas

As we are all aware, this year has been challenging and while we have hope for the possibility of a vaccine for the coming year, we don't know when this will be and what challenges people will face in 2021.

In the past we have had a White Gift Sunday, usually Pageant Sunday, where we offered gift cards for the Benevolent Fund. We are going to continue that tradition this year but ask that you drop your gift cards off at the church office, mail them in or drop them in the offering if you attend Sunday worship in person.

The gift cards will go to the Benevolent Fund to distribute as needed. The cards most used are grocery and gas cards. Please make sure you note your name and envelope number (if you have one) on the envelope. Or, just use a regular offering envelope for the cards. **Also, please make sure that the gift cards are clearly marked with the dollar amount as the donation will be noted on your tax receipts for 2020.**

We will be taking gift cards up until the end of December. Thank you in advance for your contribution. You are a generous community. I hear it all the time from the wider community.



ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH HAPPENINGS *Written by P. Marie Wedderburn*



Birthday Drive-Bys

Yes, another birthday drive-by occurred! Birthdays happen all months of the year and we want to remember in a special way those who celebrate their special day. On Sunday afternoon, fourteen vehicles gathered at St. Andrew's United Church to celebrate two December birthdays. As one of the birthday celebrants lives in Calgary (and we have not done drive-bys in Calgary), we gathered at the church this time. As the birthday celebrants stood on the church steps, the church bell rang as well as several small bells people held. We sang happy birthday (at a distance) and thus extended our greetings to the birthday celebrants. Each of our drive-bys has been special since we began them in the middle of June and we look forward to celebrating more birthday drive-bys in 2021 until we can safely gather together again and share cake seated in the church.

Christmas Concert

We hope to see you all via Zoom on Sunday at 7 p.m. for our annual Christmas concert. Many of the same musicians that we have heard in the past will perform as well as some surprises! Please join us for this special event.

(As stated in previous newsletters any money raised through donations for the concert will support the Veterans' Association Food Bank of Calgary. Thank you to all who contributed.)

See you on Sunday at 7 p.m. via Zoom!

Mitten Tree

What do you get when you've got lots of mittens left over from this year's Jacket Racket, a tree or two and some clothes pegs? Well, I (Diane) got to thinking one day and came up with the idea to make a mitten tree by hanging the mittens on the trees out in the front yard and anyone who needs a pair can take a pair. So far we've helped out a few people who needed to keep warm.





Lament, Praise, Hope: Exploring the Psalms in a Time of Exile

Over the last few months, Matthew Heesing and the United Church in the Valley have journeyed through a series called ***"Lament, Praise, Hope: Exploring the Psalms in a Time of Exile."*** How might the Psalms relate to our lives today? What meaning might these ancient, sacred songs hold for us? How are our own present-day emotions and experiences mirrored in these holy, human words?

Now, **you** can join in the journey too! For just **\$15** (the cost of printing), you can order a printed collection of all of the Psalms, Sunday Sermons, and corresponding short "Friday Reflections" from this series! If you are interested, please **place an order** with the Okotoks United Church office. Books will be available starting mid-December. (P.S.: It might even make a meaningful Christmas gift!). Please see sample below.

Friday Reflection: *Psalm 13*

When I was starting out as a student minister, a mentor of mine showed me a little exercise called the ***"Circles of Control."***

Imagine a bullseye with three circles—
a small inner circle,
a medium middle circle,
and a large outer circle.

The small inner circle, as my mentor taught me, represents those things in life that are *directly in your control*.

The medium middle circle represents those things in life that *you can try to influence*.

Finally, the larger outer circle represents those things in life that *are completely outside of your control*.

The size of the circle matters, my mentor explained, because the vast majority of things in life are completely *outside* of our control; likewise, there are only a small number of things that are directly *in* our control.

Even our own *emotions* exist in the larger outer circle: after all, we can't control how we feel. What we **can** control is how we act and react, how we address, exhibit and express such emotions.

In many ways, my mentor concluded, ***anxiety*** comes from **focusing on the wrong circle**. Are you focused on what's out of your control? Or are you focused on the small number of things that you *can* control in any given situation? Now, you might be wondering what any of this has to do with our Psalm for this week.

But the fascinating thing is that the three stanzas—the three paragraphs—of *Psalm 13* actually correspond to the three "Circles of Control."

Psalm 13 opens with anxious lament, because the Psalmist is utterly focused on all of the things that are completely **outside of their control**:
*"How long, O God, how long?...
How long will I be left all alone,
with pain in my soul
and sorrow filling my heart?...
How long will my enemy be exalted over me?"* (13:1-2).

In the second stanza, the Psalmist focuses on what they might be able to **influence**:
*"Consider my plea, and respond, O God:
Restore sight to my eyes;
light up my life!"* (13:3).



Finally, in the third stanza, the Psalmist shifts their focus to the things that **are in their control**:
*"But I do trust in your steadfast love, O God.
My heart shall rejoice in your saving grace.
Yes, I will sing to you,
because you bestow abundance on me"* (13:5-6).

In the end, even in the midst of many difficult situations completely outside of their control—
loneliness, pain, sorrow, defeat—the Psalmist makes an intentional choice *to trust, to rejoice, to sing, to practice gratitude*.

By shifting their focus from the "larger outer circle" to the "smaller inner circle,"

the Psalmist finds a sense of purpose, agency, and inner peace.

Friends, what "circle of control" are you focused on, these days? How might *Psalm 13* help us faithfully shift our energy and attention?

Until next week,

Matthew

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Lessons from Exile:

How a Past Natural Disaster
Shaped One Church's Leadership in a Pandemic



"Lessons from Exile: How a Past Natural Disaster Shaped One Church's Leadership in a Pandemic":

As part of his Masters of Divinity program, Matthew Heesing had to undertake a comprehensive research process on a unique topic of his choosing. He chose to examine the concept of "congregational exile": in particular, how a past natural disaster influenced ministerial leadership during the

ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

This process involved conducting detailed interviews with clergy and lay congregation members, along with analyzing many written materials. What Matthew found were five *"lessons from exile"*: lessons that can give all of us direction as we navigate through the territory of this "unprecedented" period.

You can find Matthew's webinar presentation on these "lessons" at:

<https://youtu.be/wyC7wcoUul>

Poinsettias for Sale

We have 7 decorative poinsettias of various colours for sale for \$20 each. They are currently hung on the windows in the foyer. If you are interested in purchasing one please get in touch with the office at 403-938-4357 or by email at okunited@telus.net.

Kid's Korner:

We will be having Zoom-only Sunday School following our morning worship service. Youth group will meet every Friday by Zoom until the Christmas break and we will reevaluate in the New Year. Also, a reminder that the nursery is closed during this time. Any questions, please contact Candice at cnedcsutton@gmail.com.



Okotoks United Church Office - We're here for you!

The office continues to remain open at this time Monday to Friday 9:00 - 2:00. Please contact Diane at okunited@telus.net or 403-938-4357 for church related news.

Please contact Julia at okjulia@telus.net or 403-702-2249 (cell) at any time.

Congregational Care Team invites you to reach out for confidential spiritual and compassionate care by email at: okcongregationalcare@telus.net