

## **MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER**

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Interim Minister: Rev. Dr. John G. Smith

Dear Friends,

The ministry of Grace United in Thornbury is diverse and broad, and I have been delighted to have been associated with you and the many ministries you embrace over the last couple of years.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time with you and consider your congregation a shining light for justice, eco-theology, and diversity. In truth, I felt pushed and prodded in some ways, while at the same time I tried to push and prod you as well, which created a wonderful dynamic for me. In short, I learned a lot while I was with you. Thank you for everything.

I know that as congregations age they do tend to get smaller in number. Our budgets suffer, we thin the staff complement, we trim every bit of fat off the budget we can trim. These can be disheartening to us all.

But it reminds me of the bullion I now buy in the grocery store: I can get the large 1 litre container of chicken broth, which is mostly water, or I can bring home the concentrate in the small jar, which actually goes much further. When I open it, it's potent and heady and it makes me want to cook something delicious.

So think of this when you consider the numbers game, a game we all play at some point in the church: though we have become smaller, we have become potent and heady and we really can cook up a storm when we want to!

And instead of getting locked into the numbers, get focused on the ministry that is still possible and is still as diverse and broad as ever!

My thanks to Chris and Vanessa with whom I worked each week, and also to the wonderful Board and Chairperson Mary Lou Gignac. I enjoyed every moment with you.

Please keep in touch.

Submitted by,

Rev. John G. Smith

Interim Supply Minister

## **MESSAGE FROM THE CHURCH BOARD CHAIRPERSON**

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Board Members: Orleen Anderson (Treasurer), Carol Clarke, Chris Donald, Jim Dolmer, Sandy Eagles, Phyllis Fleming (Secretary and WOW Region Council Lay Representative), Mary Lou Gignac (Chairperson), Debbie Potts, Rev. John Smith & Rev. Jane Sullivan (Pastoral Charge Supervisors)

The work of the Church Board in 2025 focused on the continued exploration and action related to three areas of development. These areas were identified by the congregation as potential

strategies to secure the sustainability of Grace United Thornbury. These areas were: using the church property or other property for affordable housing (led by Jim Dolmer); collaborating with other United churches in the area and other congregations in Thornbury (led by Phyllis Fleming); and increasing revenue from rental of all parts of the church property (led by Mary Lou Gignac).

The Housing explorations with several organizations, United Church of Canada affiliates and the municipality began with optimism. The conclusion, however, was that the timing, resources and right partners were not aligned at this time to actively proceed with a housing project. While there may be some potential for future partnerships, active planning is not proceeding.

On the collaboration front, Grace United Church and St. George's Anglican Church enjoyed collaborating over the summer months to deliver Sunday worship services. It was an enjoyable experience and laid some groundwork for potential future local collaborations. Grace United did not identify any United churches in the broader area with whom to collaborate for the hiring of a minister.

Rental income in 2025 increased by roughly \$3,000 and a potential major lessor was identified for 2026 and 2027.

The Church Board presented their explorations and financial picture to the congregation in November 2025. From this meeting, revised strategic directions were developed with a major focus on rental revenue, local collaborations and enhanced communications/marketing within the community. Grace is a special community of liberal, bold and caring people, a community that is sustained in its spiritual growth and social justice ministry. The Church Board thanks all members and adherents for their devoted attention to sustainability matters and for their insights and support to pursue new directions.

We are a vital and viable community.

In addition, over the past couple of years, the Church Board has shifted its focus to strategic vision and actions without losing its responsibility for oversight. Key actions in 2025 are directing the recruitment of a new minister, acquiring AV equipment for the sanctuary, and organizing a successful Sunday Sundaes fundraising community event. We have also welcomed Chris Donald and Debbie Potts to the Church Board. We owe a debt of gratitude to Carol Clarke who is stepping off the board after over a decade of dedicated service.

We look forward to 2026 as a year of hope and revitalization.

Submitted by,

Mary Lou Gignac  
Board Chairperson

## REGIONAL COUNCIL LAY REPRESENTATIVE REPORT

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Lay Representative: Phyllis Fleming

I was appointed to be Grace's Lay Representative to Western Ontario Waterways Regional Council (WOWRC) in March 2024, and continued this work in 2025. The Lay Congregational Representative has two tasks: the reporting of information from the Regional Council to the congregation and vice versa; and helping with the work of the wider church by serving on a committee or commission.

Throughout 2025, I read each weekly newsletter from WOWRC and brought any relevant information to the Board's attention, or requested that it be added to Grace's Eblast if appropriate. This included educational opportunities that could be of interest, and the availability of three new funds for financial support for congregations whose development had been announced the previous year.

I attended the monthly Zoom meeting for region reps whenever possible, and also attended both of the Regional Council meetings in 2025; the spring meeting on May 2 and 3 was hybrid and I attended virtually, and the fall meeting on November 7 and 8 was online only. Each meeting has an Equity Support Team, whose role is to hold the Regional Council to account, bearing in mind the commitments to becoming an Anti-Racist Church, becoming an Intercultural Church, upholding Indigenous Justice and Right Relations, and living into and upholding the Region's Affirming Ministry Vision Statement; basically, anything that would impact an individual's ability to participate in the meeting without barriers or discomfort.

I noticed a few equity issues on the first day of the Spring meeting which I passed on to the Equity Support Team by email the following morning. As a result, I was invited to provide further feedback and to contribute to the team's report for the meeting. I think it was because of this participation that I was invited to join the Equity Support Team for the Fall meeting on very short notice, after another team member had to step down unexpectedly. It was an interesting lens through which to view the meeting, and has informed some of my wording choices when preparing and leading worship services.

I began helping with the work of the wider church by serving on the Licensed Lay Worship Leader (LLWL) Resource Team for Western Ontario Waterways. This group is mandated by the Regional Council to provide oversight and support to all of the LLWLs in the Region, and includes determining if a person should be licensed or have their licence renewed. Needless to say, I will not be ruling on the renewal of my own licence which is due in 2026!

Submitted by,

Phyllis Fleming,

Lay Representative to Western Ontario Regional Council for Grace United Church Thornbury

## **LICENSED LAY WORSHIP LEADER REPORT**

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Licensed Lay Worship Leader: Phyllis Fleming

In 2025 I led worship services in six different congregations on 25 Sundays, although on 15 of these Sundays, I offered the same service twice, at two congregations who work together to hire pulpit supply; so I actually led 40 services in 2025. These included six services at Grace, and one led from home over Zoom due to bad weather. In addition to the services that I led, I wrote the Christmas Eve service for one of the congregations.

I also led six of Grace's services at Errinrung Long Term Care and Retirement Home, and wrote a service for Chris Burton, the Music Director, to lead when I could not be there.

I appreciate the ongoing support of the Board and the congregation as I continue my call to offer leadership in this way when requested.

Submitted by,

Phyllis Fleming

Licensed Lay Worship Leader from Grace United Church Thornbury

## **BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT**

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Members: Kelly Adam, Orleen Anderson, Jim Dolmer, Robert McKinlay, Jim Oliver, Rev John Smith,

Rev. Jane Sullivan, Shirley Woolner

The Board of Trustees is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the property and assets of Grace United Church are maintained in a manner that is beneficial to our Congregation.

The Trustees welcomed Rev. Jane Sullivan as Clergy representation with the ending of Rev. Smith's contract. We thank Rev. Smith for his valuable contributions to our Committee. New members and welcome additions to this Committee are Robert McKinlay and Jim Oliver.

With a change in government south of the border, and the market down by more than 5%, we divested from the Equity market, and reinvested into the money market considering the market volatility. The strategy and allocations should return 4% or better with below average risk.

The strategy to return to the Equity market was decided based on a 10% correction from the high, and later a 5% correction, would be the entry point back into conservative equities.

The Trustees agreed to honour a motion from the Church Board to release \$20,000 into the General Fund in April.

With the assistance of Rev. John Smith, this committee established an investment policy, which is available for review on request. The total Grace United Church approved Trustee investments at time of this writing (late December) is \$255,464.44, of which \$228,650.81 is from what remains from the sale of the Manse and is restricted.

Grace receives interest and dividends on a monthly basis into the General Fund from these investments as income. Our target this year as mentioned above was a 4% return, however with lowering of interest rates throughout the year, our rate of return has achieved just below 3%.

Following many years of increased Insurance premiums, UCC Protect have announced no premium increase for 2026.

Submitted by,

Jim Dolmer  
Secretary

## **FAITH FORMATION AND JUSTICE INITIATIVES**

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### **i) Affirming Ministry Leadership Group**

Committee: Caroline Araujo-Abbotts (Co-Chairperson), Mary Lou Gignac, Wendy Maloney (Co-Chairperson), Mary Poulin, Heike Reck (Secretary/Minutes)

The Affirming Ministry Leadership Group works toward providing a safer space in our Church and in the surrounding community. We do this by providing learning opportunities and having a presence at local educational seminars and other events.

This year, as in previous years, we have walked in the Thornbury Canada Day Parade and Collingwood Pride Parade proud to show Grace United Church Thornbury support for the 2SLGBRQIA+ community. We celebrated Pie Day with the congregation with a special service and lunch featuring a selection of homemade pies. The PIE represents the principles of an affirming ministry: public, intentional, and explicit.

Our work was also shared with the community during Grace's Sundae Sunday (with thanks to the Hospitality Committee) providing a table where people could ask questions about our efforts. We recognized Trans Day of Remembrance in November during a worship service and made available T-shirts with a rainbow marking the United Church's 100 Anniversary.

The Leadership Group provided learning sessions featuring Elgin Pejak on gender pronouns and two generous matriarchs (a mother and a grandmother) offering their stories of their transgender family members. Education seminars by DiversityED in Owen Sound have also been provided.

Throughout 2025, The Affirming Ministry Leadership Group continued to monitor the congregation's support of pursuing formal Affirm United designation as an Affirming Ministry. It has determined that the time is right to propose to the congregation that this be put in motion in 2026. The formal motion is being planned for the Annual Congregation Meeting on March 1.

We continue to meet almost monthly and keep abreast of upcoming issues and opportunities.

Submitted by,

Mary Lou Gignac, Committee Member

Wendy Maloney, Co-Chairperson

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**ii) Green Team Report & The TBM Repair Café**

Committee: Norine Baron, Diana Dolmer (Chairperson), Phyllis Fleming, Marylou Gignac, Jim Oliver,

Heike Reck, Thérèse Samuel, Barry Tatchell

The Grace Green Team continues to provide services in the Town of Blue Mountains community as well as with our congregation.

Where possible green cleaning and paper products are used in the church building.

The recycling and composting system is working well. The coffee grounds make their way to the onsite composter and may end up in the church herb garden. Members volunteer at composting and clean up stations for the St. George's Fish Fry on June 21 and the Corn Roast on August 16.

With encouragement from St. George's and the Green Team, more participants are bringing their own cutlery and dishes to the events, which reduces further waste. St George's gives a donation in appreciation of the efforts.

The Green Team joined with the local Climate Action Now Network CANN, to operate a composting and clean up station at the Beaver Valley Fall Fair dinner on September 6. The Green Team washed and returned the cloth napkins used at St George's and the Beaver Valley Agricultural Society district meeting on November 22.

The Green Team, along with Grace Affirm Committee and the Repair Café, were represented in the Canada Day Parade.

Thanks to Barry and his team the Repair Café had an incredibly busy year in 2025. There were a total of 9 repair cafes where 352 items were repaired. 100 more than in 2024. It is most likely the busiest place in the Town of Blue Mountains on the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of each month. Not only is this a very successful outreach of Grace but also it brings in many volunteers from the community who happily give of their time and talents to mend, glue, nail, screw, etc. prolonging the life of items and keeping them out of the local landfill. This endeavor also brings community members who may not otherwise know about Grace into the building. Donations are accepted to offset costs.

The Repair Café used some donation dollars to purchase mats for the rear entrance of the church to reduce the chance of slip and falls on the wet floors during rain and snowy weather. There are currently almost enough funds from donations to purchase a tool cabinet on wheels.

Good Grief Coffee in Thornbury, generously donates the coffee for the volunteers and those patiently waiting with cookies in hand for their items to be repaired. Please thank them when you are in the café buying your coffee.

Our volunteer appreciation included a lunch held at the church after the Repair Café in June, and a potluck lunch hosted by Barry and Heike at their home in August. Volunteers are already excited about the upcoming Repair Café season.

Submitted by,  
Diana Dolmer  
Chairperson

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### **iii) Grace United Church Sunday School**

Teachers: Phyllis Fleming, Mary Lou Gignac, Lois Lockie, Debbie Potts, and Thérèse Samuel

We are using some Christian education in different forms for the little ones at church as recommended by Rev. John Smith. The attendance has been 2 to 4 children. We have had some feed back from the children themselves and from their parents.

A tremendous thank you to our teachers.

One thing we need is a second person to be downstairs during the class. This is a requirement for 'duty of care' policy. If any of you would like to do this on occasion, please speak to me about it.

Submitted by,  
Mary Lou Gignac

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## **MINISTRY AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**

Committee: Jim Dolmer, Chris Donald (Chairperson), Wendy Maloney, Jim Oliver

The Ministry & Personnel Committee (M&P) is one of the few mandated committees by the United Church of Canada, and usually, if all is running smoothly, you would hardly be aware of our existence.

We have four members and were pleased to add Wendy Maloney as our fourth member. Each member liaises with one staff member.

Over 2025 we met on four occasions and sent reports to the Board. M&P does not make decisions in most situations but does make recommendations to the Board, which may or may not be adopted. Jim Dolmer is our representative on the Board.

We were very happy to have Rev. Dr. John Smith here and sad to see his time with us come to an end. The Search Committee has been working hard to find a new minister, and Jim Oliver, who has been our liaison with the minister, is also the Chairperson of the Search Committee.

We are delighted to have Rev. Dr. Brian Goodings back at Grace until we are able to find a permanent minister.

Dr. Chris Burton continues as our Music Director and has been busy with his normal duties plus arranging special services and events. He passed a big milestone in 2025 and we hope he will continue to share his amazing talent with us in the future.

Vanessa MacDonald has been our Administrator for four years, working 15 hours a week. She works closely with other staff and our volunteers. Jim Dolmer is her M&P liaison.

Lyndsee Wright has become our Custodian following Lori Fitzgerald's leaving, and works closely with the stalwart Doug Clarke. Her M&P liaison is Wendy Maloney.

Candy Yeandle and Shirley Woolner deserve special mention as our loyal volunteers – "Thanks".

Submitted by,  
Chris Donald  
Chairperson

## **THE CANDY CANE FAIR REPORT**

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Committee: Mary Armstrong, Carol Clarke, Diana Dolmer (Co-Chairperson), Sandy Eagles (Co-Chairperson), Jean Kelley, Louise Lamont, Joanne Lougheed (Co-Chairperson), Mary Poulin, Carolyne Wedgbury

This year's fair was held on Saturday November 17 with tremendous results. We had an amazing number of cookies. New this year was the selling of frozen apple pies and we will likely do this again in 2026. The pies were a great success.

Along with the cookie bar, we had an incredible bake table and a delicious lunch.

Thank you so much to everyone involved for all your hard work. All efforts raised \$ 5,799.45, minus \$333.52 expenses, totalling \$5,465.93 profit.

We donated \$ 40.00 to the Royal Canadian Legion, Poppy fund, along with the following disbursements:

My Friends House \$ 250.00; GBCS Backpack for Learning Program \$ 750.00; Grace General Fund \$ 4,500.00.

The tentative date for this year's Candy Cane Fair is November 21.

Submitted by,  
Sandy Eagles  
Co-Chairperson

## WORSHIP COMMITTEE REPORT

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Members: Carol Clarke (Board Liaison), Mary Armstrong, Chris Burton, Debbie Potts (Secretary), Shirley Woolner (Chairperson)

This year has been one of many changes, the biggest being our partnering with St. George's Anglican Church for summer services. This allowed for a considerable cost savings for Grace, as Rev. John Smith left at the end of July, while Pulpit Supply and interest groups lead worship for the rest of the year.

I would like to thank Carol Clarke for all the time she spends on Grace United. Carol for many years has booked the Pulpit Supply, sits on the Church Board as our liaison, prepares weekly bulletins, handles the Memory Tree each Christmas, prepares communion and the servers required, and countless other smaller details otherwise overlooked. She is a great fount of information to our congregation.

Christopher Burton, as our Music Director, provides wonderful music each week, leading the choir and arranging musical events that support our church financially. We hope to use the bells more next year.

Our Senior Choir has welcomed some new voices this year, for which we are truly thankful. We would always welcome anyone wishing to join our musical team. We could really use a couple of tenors.

No words can express how much we owe our Tech Team of Orleen Anderson, Jim Dolmer, John Hunter, Jim Oliver, Emmerson Rocque. They record and upload services weekly, keep the computers and programs updated, and work tirelessly to meet the ever-changing needs of Grace United.

How to thank our decorating team! Sandra Eagles and Joanne Loughheed have changed the décor with the seasons as well as completely repainting the lower hall! They have spent many hours at Grace to make it a warm and inviting space. Carol and Doug Clarke also arrange Christmas flowers and assemble the Christmas Tree.

It is the responsibility of our group to arrange weekly ushers, greeters and lift operators. Thank you to everyone who answers the call to fill these positions weekly.

Our focus this year has been on keeping worship ongoing at Grace United. We have provided ministerial support in efforts to try new things such as partnering with St. George's over the summer, for the Remembrance Day service, and for our Carolfest.

The Worship Committee continues to work with the Board at Grace to plan for our future services and needs.

Submitted by,

Shirley Woolner  
Chairperson

## MINISTRY OF MUSIC REPORT

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Director of Music: Dr. Christopher Burton

2025 was a year in which I sensed a stability in Music at Grace that I had not felt for several years. Membership in the senior choir actually grew (although we're still looking for tenors.)

Grace has increased its footprint in the community, with concerts we continue to present. To name a few, we hosted Daniel Wnukowski and the Odin Quartet, Douglas Tranquada and Brahm Goldhamer, the string quartet with whom I had the privilege of sharing the stage in November. Grace continues its relationship with pianist Ken Gee, who rents the sanctuary for two concerts annually. Dates have already been set for Ken's appearances in 2026. We had four Thornbury JazzWorks events in 2025.

As well, we have been approached to accommodate events in 2026, presented by the Sweetwater Festival, and Michael Schmidt and the Saugeen Bach Chorale.

We celebrated Christmas by presenting our annual Carolfest in December, with all proceeds, as always, going to support the good work of the Beaver Valley Outreach. This year, Carolfest raised over \$2,700, which, to my knowledge, is the most ever. Let's keep it up in 2026.

My thanks go to the Grace community, our guest performers and especially to Janet Cringle, Rev. Grayhame Bowcott and the choir from St. George's Anglican Church. My thanks also to Camryn Ruthven for filling in for me so beautifully.

In June and July we had major work done on the Mason & Hamlin piano in the Sanctuary. My thanks to Dwight Pile who came and spent two full days working on regulating and voicing the instrument, and to my ear, it sounds sweeter than ever. I am always grateful for the work of Max Clark who does our regular tuning.

I look forward to another great year of music and worship in 2026.

Submitted by,

Christopher Burton  
Music Director

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## MEMBERSHIP, VISITATION AND COMMUNICATION (MVC) COMMITTEE REPORTS

Committee: Diana Dolmer, Sandy Eagles (Chairperson), Joanne Loughheed (Co-Chairperson)

### Part 1: MVC Committee Report

The MVC Committee did not meet in 2025. Prior to each board meeting, the members sent their report by email. The overall MVC group includes representatives from:

Hospitality/Catering, Membership, Pastoral Care Team, photography, Prayerful Ministry, social

dinners, telephone tree and website, all of which fall within the MVC committee's terms of reference.

As in previous years, Grace United sadly said goodbye to faithful members and friends who have either moved or passed away. The Historic Roll gets updated whenever we have been advised that changes are required, including adding new members. The Roll was updated after the deaths of Sharon Hewgill and Dorothy Johnson. Elliot Nichol has moved away and asked to be removed from the membership list. Wendy Maloney is a new member.

MVC is involved in communication in many ways:

**Telephone Tree:** This is used to update church announcements and is mostly for people who do not have email, or would rather be called. It is activated to inform people of upcoming events, funeral notices, closure of the church due to weather etc., and it is maintained by Sandy Eagles, along with the callers, Lynn Corrigan, Diana Dolmer, Susan Hoadley, Teddi Murray, and Eileen Robinson.

**Photo Board:** This is maintained by Sandy Eagles.

**Newsletter:** Hopefully we can resurrect this again. If anyone is interested in taking on this task, you can get in touch with Sandy or anyone of the members.

The weekly announcements page on Grace's website is updated every week. Any upcoming special events or special services are noted on the home page when appropriate.

Grace's website offers our weekly services. It is live-streamed every week. Thank you to the tech team: Orleen Anderson, Jim Dolmer, John Hunter, Jim Oliver, Emmerson Rocque, and Carl Sampson.

This committee provides nametags for new members and regular visitors. Thank you, Lynn Corrigan, for doing this.

Submitted by,

Sandy Eagles  
Committee Chairperson

## **Part 2: Program reports**

### **Hospitality:**

The committee catered to nine events and prepared 368 meals. We catered to a CANN lunch, Annual Congregational Meeting, Pie Day, two Congregational lunches, The Ascension of the Lord with St. George's Anglican Church, Lunch for the departure of Rev. John Smith, Affirm lunch and Grace's anniversary luncheon.

Thank you to all the people who helped out with food preparation, providing desserts, serving and clean up. It is much appreciated.

Submitted by,

Sandy Eagles  
Committee Chairperson

**Social Dinners:**

There weren't any social dinners in 2025. If any one is interested in Chairpersoning this committee, please get in touch with anyone on the board, or myself, Sandy Eagles.

**Part 3: Spiritual Care Annual Report 2025**

**Correspondence:** Teddi Murray sends cards as requested as well as for Christmas and Easter.

**Cradle Roll:** Diana Dolmer sends birthday cards to children who were baptized or received a baby blessing at Grace up to their sixth birthday. In 2025, we have three children under six.

**Hospital Visitation:** As noted in other years, there is often a delay in official notification that a person has been admitted to hospital. If you, or a member of your family, have a medical concern or are in hospital and would welcome a visit, please contact the church office (519-599-2438). For Emergency Spiritual Care call Rev. Brian Goodings at 705-441-0561.

**Prayerful Ministry (The Healing Pathway):** No report

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## PROPERTY MANAGEMENT REPORT

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Members & Volunteers: Doug Clarke (Property Manager), Chris Donald, Sandy Eagles, Joanne Loughed, Sylvia McMurchy (Flowers), Heike Reck, Barry Tatchell

The Property Committee's mandate is to ensure that the Church building, furnishings, and grounds are well maintained. For insurance purposes, a walk through is conducted by the Property Manager every Wednesday to check that all is in proper working order. Barry Tatchell inspects the fire extinguishers and emergency lights once per month.

### Highlights of 2025

Very heavy snowfalls from January to March strained the budget and required an appeal to the congregation for donations.

In early May, Doug Clarke, Chris Donald, and Jamie Proconier swept and cleaned the sand and debris off the parking lot which was a very big job.

A new contract for lawn maintenance was signed for the same cost as 2024.

In April the eavestroughs over the office area were cleaned by Doug and Chris.

The carpeted stairs in the entrance and narthex were shampooed and 3 weeks later the sanctuary carpet was also cleaned by Doug and Chris.

In the Fall, the leaves of the parking lot and driveway were cleaned up.

A new contract for snow ploughing was arranged at the same price as 2025.

In November, and in time for Advent and the Christmas season, the Christmas décor and the Memories and Blessings Christmas Tree were set up by the Volunteer team.

Throughout the year, contact is frequent with Lyndsee Wright our Custodian. A letter has been written thanking her for a job well done.

The Christmas décor and tree were taken down the first week of January 2026.

In the spring of 2026, an assessment of the condition of all 3 furnaces and the lift will be done in order to assess their longevity.

The responsibility of caring for Grace has given me personal satisfaction as well as many sleepless nights. However, I am very grateful for the continued support of my Volunteer team. Thank you.

Submitted by,

Doug Clarke  
Property Manager