

Keep Christ holy in your hearts.
Always be ready to answer anyone
who asks you to explain about
the hope that you have.

1 Peter 3:15

Between the Aisles

A Robertson-Wesley United Church Quarterly

SUMMER 2016

Welcome

With the upcoming retirement of Rev. Jim Allan in August 2016, the church is entering a time of transition. To help with the grieving process, this edition of the newsletter is dedicated to honouring the ministry of Rev. Jim. We are starting to say our goodbye.

Another ending that is occurring for me is that this is my last edition of the newsletter. After four years as one of the editors, it is time for me to move on. I have joined the refugee resettlement committee and every Sunday afternoon for two hours, I am teaching English, one-on-one, to the younger couple of the refugee family. I am enjoying this new venture.

One of the most important roles of planning the newsletter is assembling articles from congregational members. I want to thank the following writers, who so generously contributed ideas to this edition: Jim Triscott, Karen Hansen, Kathryn Rambow, Robert Mah, Colleen Ouellette, Sylvia Duffus, Jill Lambie, Tammy-Jo Mortensen, Marilee Stephens, Lorna Davidchuk, and Devika Short.

We want to acknowledge the skills of the following people and their contribution: Glen Warren (lay out), Tammy-Jo Mortensen (proof reading), and Jim Triscott, Hal Thiessen and Albert deVos (photography).

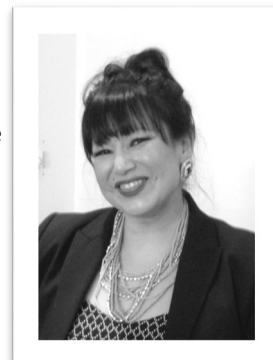
My best wishes for the continued success of the newsletter.

Maria Smyth

DEADLINE FOR THE
AUTUMN EDITION SUBMISSIONS:
AUGUST 7, 2016

The Force Within

On Saturday, March 5, 2016 Robertson-Wesley United Church hosted our first Stewardship Speaker's Breakfast. Each year our Stewardship committee creates a theme to guide our work within our church. This year our theme is *The Force is growing stronger.....Are you with it?* Our theme is based on the Star Wars movie *The Empire Strikes Back*.



Our speaker, Michelle Nieviadomy, took us on a journey through her life telling us of the role The Force, Creator, God, Jesus, has played in her life. Michelle told her story through stories and music. The music she wrote and composed herself. Michelle is a member of the Kawacatoose Cree First nation in Saskatchewan and has lived in Edmonton for the past 17 years. She is the Assistant Director of the Edmonton Native Healing Centre where she works with the urban indigenous community. Being a part of a national committee, Michelle lends a voice to indigenous justice issues, and developing programs for indigenous children, youth and women. For the past year Michelle has been Oskapew (Helper in Cree) with the Inner City Pastoral Ministry in Edmonton.

With over 60 people in attendance, our morning began at 10:00 am with a welcome, Grace, by Rev. Jim Allan, and then a continental style breakfast prepared and served by our Stewardship committee. At 10:50 am our speaker began the sharing of her Journey and the teaching of the basics of a round dance. After a Thank You to Michelle, we bid Farewell at 12:00 noon.

The purpose of our Stewardship Speaker's Breakfast was to provide a voice to the role of The Force in life beyond our church. The event was also a fund raiser for the operation of Robertson-Wesley.

Tickets were sold by our Stewardship committee to people at our church, to friends, family, and anyone who saw our advertising and wanted to attend. The reviews state it was a success and that people would attend next year. Already ideas of possible speakers are being given to the Stewardship committee. The mystery is..... What will our Stewardship theme be next year? Stay tuned.

Sylvia Duffus and Jill Lambie

Dialogue with Reverend Jim Allan

We presented some questions to Rev. Jim Allan upon his retirement and here are his answers.

Robertson-Wesley United Church is your last posting as a minister, how have you found this last leg of your faith and life journey?

I am grateful that these final years of my ministry have been with a staff team that is so positive, close, and congenial. However, it has been a challenge to get here; but there has been some willingness to make the journey, to make the sacrifices, to let the Spirit lead, to walk without knowing exactly where we are going, and ultimately to trust.

“FOLLOWING THE SPIRIT”

From your perspective, point out the highlights of your ministry at Robertson-Wesley.

The highlights for me in ministry at Robertson-Wesley have been the people who have opened their hearts and given themselves in faithful following of the Spirit—those who have become partners with me in ministry, both staff and members, with whom I have experienced the joy of true mutuality in this ministry of ours.

What would you say are your strengths as a minister and how has Robertson-Wesley United Church afforded you opportunities to use your abilities?

Sometimes I felt I brought strength to ministry and I could shine; sometimes I floundered and really fell short; and sometimes I just felt mediocre. When did I shine? There were a few pastoral moments, a few preaching moments, a few funerals and weddings that seemed to go well, the odd organizational development insight, sometimes when the Spirit moved in the teaching. Sometimes people are touched by the Spirit, even when I am not being strong, a kind of strength in weakness.

“FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING”

What strengths do you see in the congregation at Robertson-Wesley?

I witnessed a commitment to worship, in the true sense—truth, goodness, and beauty. There is an affirming inclusivity, boldly embracing all of God’s children with a freedom and courage to explore the edges of faith seeking understanding; compassionately reaching out to the hurting ones in our midst, in our neighbourhood, in our city, and in our world.

Nationally the United Church seems to be in a state of transition (some say crisis of faith), what vision do you have for the future of the United Church of Canada?

I like the proposals that are before the church today: wise and sound direction. Of course it is yet to be seen whether the Church has the courage to embrace them. Poignant for me though, because I felt they were needed decades ago. Too little, too late, but that does not mean that it is not the way the Spirit is leading us.

“MORE TIME FOR PEOPLE”

What are your plans for retirement?

Nothing new—just more time for all the things I do now. More time to travel, more time for reading, more time for the arts: theatre, music, galleries, concerts; and doing art: photography, painting, music. The arts are such an important dimension of old age. There will be time for more social interest involvement, maybe even some partisan political engagement; and more time for people: friends, family, new friends. Who knows, maybe even a bit more physical fitness!

Do you plan to attend Robertson-Wesley after your retirement?

We intend to continue living here in Westmount and I do have a deep appreciation for Robertson-Wesley so I expect we will be around. However, as a minister, I do need to disengage from the leadership and pastoral relationship with the congregation. So I might just disappear for a while before I come back.

Jim Triscott and Maria Smyth

Robertson-Wesley Ringers

The Robertson-Wesley Ringers are now eagerly anticipating attending the upcoming 17th International Handbell Symposium (IHS), "Soundings, Music of Our Lands and Lives", which is being held in Vancouver, BC July 26-30, 2016. The Symposium will be welcoming handbell ringers, conductors, and workshop clinicians from around the world! We are looking forward to listening, learning, playing, and returning to the Robertson-Wesley congregation inspired and ready to continue our ministry of music.

One of the unique aspects of the International Handbell Symposia is their use of massed ringing as a way to share in the cultures and talents of their member countries. Each of the countries represented as a member on the International Handbell Committee (Japan, USA, UK, Korea, Canada, Australasia, and Hong Kong) is invited to choose a piece to represent their country and culture in the Symposia massed ringing repertoire. Betty Radford, a member of the Robertson-Wesley Ringers, won a Canada-wide handbell composition contest in 2015. Her piece, "So Glorious and Free", was chosen to be played as the Canadian composition by the massed ringers at the upcoming IHS. Her piece is a Canadian soundscape for handbells featuring the rich heritage of Canada. Betty's biography was featured in the February 2015 edition of "Between The Aisles".

Each member country of the International Handbell Committee is also invited to select a conductor to represent their country on the IHS podium and lead delegates in the massed ringing of the Symposium repertoire. We are proud to announce that Stuart Sladden, who was our interim Director of Music from August 2015 to the beginning of November 2015, has been selected to conduct the Canadian musical selection! It will be wonderful to play again under his direction at the Symposium in Vancouver in 2016.

In addition to massed ringing, IHS 2016 will be offering a variety of workshops. All member countries are invited to provide workshop topics and leadership. We are pleased to announce that our very own Robertson-Wesley Director of Music, Tammy-Jo Mortensen, had her workshop topic selection chosen to be offered to the delegates at the Symposium. Her workshop will be about new handbell music by Canadian composers. Canada is starting to produce many new budding composers and it will be wonderful to learn about and play their music in this workshop.

Our next contribution to the Worship Service will be on Sunday, April 24th, 2016. Our final year end concert will be held following the regular Robertson-Wesley Worship Service on **May 29, 2016, from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.** Come and hear Betty's beautiful and moving piece "So Glorious and Free", featuring the Robertson-Wesley Ringers, members of the Robertson-Wesley Choir and members of the choral ensemble "Accord", under the direction of Stuart Sladden. We will be performing most of the musical selections that we will be performing at the massed ringing concert

at the IHS in Vancouver. There will be a freewill offering at the concert. All proceeds from this concert will go to the "Robertson-Wesley Music Society", a non-profit music society. The Music Society will provide some financial assistance the Robertson-Wesley Ringers trip to Vancouver in July 2016 and the Robertson-Wesley Choir for their trip to Carnegie Hall in New York in June 2016. We would welcome the attendance of the Robertson-Wesley congregation and their friends and family!

Lorna Davidchuk

Diversity

A Compilation of Thoughts Gathered One Sunday in March

Imagine being a fly on the walls within Robertson-Wesley United Church over the course of a week, or maybe a month...

You would have the opportunity to observe a wide diversity of people who frequent this place, not only for worship, but also for the dizzying array of activities, programs and services offered here. Such diversity may seem surprising to those who have yet to pass through our doors, but after all, "It's 2016!" It's also a point of pride to those who consider Robertson-Wesley as their community or their spiritual home. We are diverse in age, in sexual orientation and gender identity, in health and abilities, in ethnicity, and in economic circumstances. We are a reflection of the diversity in the wider world around us. Just as diversity in nature creates healthy species and healthy ecosystems, diversity within our church gives us the strength to move forward, both as individuals and as a congregation. One R-W member describes it so eloquently: "Diversity is like the seasons: without the differences, there's no growth."

Over the years, we have followed Jesus' example and challenged the status quo to create a space where all are truly welcomed and included, a place where people can share their ideas and talents, learn from others and be active participants in creating a better world. As individuals within a diverse community, we gain perspective and direction, understanding and empathy, and are better able to get along with others from different walks of life and different parts of the world. As a congregation, we have made the choice to "walk our talk... to welcome people from the many aspects that is Life," rather than shutting ourselves behind a fortress of narrow-mindedness.

May we give thanks to God who created such a wonderfully diverse world, may we gain the strength to foster ever-increasing diversity within our midst, and may Robertson-Wesley always be a place where everyone can say, "Me too, I belong here!"

Colleen Ouellette



Refugee Response Group: A Grace Filled Journey

September 2015: There are daily, heart wrenching news reports of desperate people fleeing war and chaos in Syria; a photo of a tiny boy washed up on a beach. A decision is made; we have to do something; we have to act. People are invited to meet and discuss "how to respond to the refugee crisis?" A bigger decision is made; we want to sponsor a family to come to Canada!

October 2015: The "Refugee Response Group" is formed. Our church steps up to offer support in so many ways; from the national refugee coordinator matching us with a family; to approval from the Robertson-Wesley Outreach Committee and Board to proceed; to the guidance and participation of Robert Mah with financial coordination; to the wisdom and experience of Garnet, Lois, and Linda; to financial contributions that start pouring in. North Glenora community members join in and gain support from the community league. Meetings start. Many meetings ensue!

November 2015: First fundraiser- bottle drive and bake sale raises close to \$5000.00. Hundreds of neighbours, friends, and interested community members participate and contribute. We are matched with our family of 13. Fundraising goal of \$50,000.00 is set. Teams are established: housing, finance, fundraising, household/clothing donations, communications, resettlement, health, ESL and schooling...

December 2015: More fundraising. Craft and bake sale raises another \$5000.00. Individual and group fundraising and donations bring in thousands of dollars. Household goods and furniture start to gather in storage. House hunting starts, and there is anxiety about finding an appropriate space for such a big family. News that the young mom is pregnant! News that the young family are coming! Much praying and preparation ensue. A Christmas Eve gift of \$15,000.00!

January 2016: There is another bottle drive, a fundraising choral concert and a clothing drive, where we collected a mountain of clothing to sort into sizes, then down into one suitcase for each family member. We continue with many more meetings.

February 2016: Still there is no family and there is a good amount of worry. Calls to government and church contacts for information and help to expedite their arrival, then a cancelled flight and more delay, with more prayers and more meetings. They finally arrive: a very young couple, with two tiny boys: an 18 month old and a 3 week old. Exhausted and terrified, they are welcomed with posters, flowers, and hugs, into a cozy apartment set up with beautiful donated furniture by a swarm of caring volunteers.

March 2016: Fundraising goal met! English classes, meetings with government supports, health checks, bank accounts, immunizations... busy days to get started in Canada. Then, we learn they are coming! The rest of the family arrives in a week! Somehow, a spacious, affordable house is found within 2 days, furniture and household goods are solicited and collected within 4 days, and a house for 9 people is completely set up within 6 days. A joyous welcome and reunion at the airport, a fleet of vehicles to drive everyone into the city, and a huge halal meal waiting on the table as they walk through the door, which they insist on sharing with anyone who comes through the door. Then, the start of a new life: school, English classes, playgrounds and soccer with neighbourhood kids, new bikes and learning how to ride them, interpreters and lots of communication using improvised sign language, and all the other actions (small and large) that it takes to become part of the fabric of a community, a city, a country.

This has been a grace-filled journey. The kindness, care, generosity, and welcoming spirit of Robertson-Wesley has been present since the very first moments of the life of this sponsorship group. This family needed to flee their homeland, and the actions of dozens and the contributions of hundreds has made their start in Canada possible. Thank you, Robertson -Wesley, for bringing the Beatitudes to life: welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, housing the homeless...this is faith in action, and this church has sustained and supported the Refugee Response Group as we worked to make everything ready. Thank you!

So many of you have asked about the family, and supported their journey here to Edmonton. It is time to show them a Robertson-Wesley welcome! On April 17 after church, we had a special welcome celebration for the Al Masoud family, with goodies and gifts, and an opportunity to say hello face to face. The theme was "Best of Edmonton", and we collected enough donations to gift the family with a few necessary items and passes to favourite Edmonton attractions, such as the Telus World of Science or some City of Edmonton attractions.

Kathryn Rambow

Past, Present, Future

“Give us this day our daily bread”

Where do you do most of your living: the *past*, the *future* or the *present*?

In her book: *The Promise of Politics*, Hannah Arendt discusses the importance of living in the *present* and joining in the public space that exists between people where relationships are created that allow for social inclusion and change.

She asserts that it is in the *present*, that we have the freedom for working miracles. She says that humans have a talent for working miracles through their actions, which can start something new and achieve the improbable and unpredictable. This freedom to create involves risk. But being free allows us to engage in two kinds of action: ‘free deeds’ and ‘free speech’ which are two forms of action that produce change in our world. In what we ‘say’ and ‘do’ we can create a miracle in our own lives and in the lives of others.

Arendt argues that both *actions* and *speech* can begin something new. She identifies two ways in which the world renews itself everyday, primarily through birth, which is a new beginning and through forgiveness, which also starts a new beginning. She sees forgiveness as an action that releases us and others into a new beginning; it starts something new. The *present* is where action occurs but we have to have the courage to act and speak the truth. Freedom when exercised in the ‘*present*’ makes us most alive; there is power in the *present* and it is important for us to live in the *present* rather than the *past* or *future*.

Soren Kierkegaard in *Spiritual Writings*, points out that the scriptures orient Christians to live in the *present*. He points out that the Lord’s Prayer focuses us on our daily bread: “Give us this day our daily bread.” Notice the orientation to daily living, which is focused on *today*. In the Old Testament, God delivered manna every day, by ravens, to the Israelites and this manna could not be hoarded until the next day, thus forcing the people to rely on God every day.

Kierkegaard also stresses the Christian practice of being thankful for all things. He points to the example of Job who gave thanks for all things including the losses. Job’s approach was that “God giveth and God taketh away” –either way it is still God. Job kept his eyes on God, the Holy One, even as he suffers; and in this way he survives his terrible suffering.

Kierkegaard gives the example of a rower who has his back to tomorrow and focuses on the *present* as a good way to live each day; with his back to the future, the rower focuses on the task at hand and does not focus on tomorrow. Kierkegaard admonishes us to “seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you” in the *present*.

If we can live today with a focus on the joy of today, then the simple beautiful things will bring us joy through our senses: hear/listen; look/see; eat/taste; words/spoken/written; feel/touch and this approach can reduce anxiety. If you focus on the negative-the cup half empty-you miss the positives of the cup half full. Enjoy the something that is happening in the *present* that is enjoyable and *act* and *speak* to produce positive changes in your life and in the world.

Maria Smyth

New York Trip

On June 9, 2016 several members of the Robertson-Wesley choir, along with music director, Tammy-Jo Mortensen, will be travelling to New York City to take part in a mass choir performance of Morten Lauridsen’s *Lux Aeterna*. Travelling as the “United Voices of Edmonton” (which also includes Warren Mack and members of the Knox-Metropolitan United Church Choir, as well as some members of the Willan Chorale), the group will land in New York City on Thursday, June 9; practice with the large mass choir over the next few days; and then have the opportunity to perform Lauridsen’s work in the world-renowned Carnegie Hall.

The performance is one half of a concert called “Eternal Light”, presented by Distinguished Concerts International New York (DCINY), and will feature performers from several different choirs. It is going to be held on the afternoon of June 12th, at 2:00 pm. The second half of the concert will feature internationally known Venezuelan conductor-composer Cristian Grases leading the young Distinguished Concerts Singers International in a light-hearted, culturally-minded program.

As well as the choir members going, there will also be several “VIP’s”, who are guests that will travel with the group and as such, will receive preferred seating at the concert, a special back-stage tour of Carnegie Hall, as well as also attending the “Gala” that will be held after the performance. In addition to the scheduled practices and rehearsals, there will hopefully be some time for the performers to head out and get a chance to visit some of NYC’s most well-known landmarks (I, myself, always enjoy a visit to the Metropolitan Museum, but there’s also the Empire State Building, Rockefeller Centre, Central Park and, of course, a Broadway show or two). The choir has been working hard on the *Lux Aeterna*, and that will help when we get to New York. Also, we’ve been lucky enough of have had a chance to perform as part of several fund-raising events over the last several months, from the “Broadway” concert several of us took part in last year, to our now annual “dinner and a show” night at the end of January this year (you have to love the tropical theme). Several of us will also be taking part in the Annual Run for Music that is coming up at the end of April, which is always a great way of promoting choral music in Alberta, while helping raise some funds for us as well.

Hopefully, for the next newsletter, we will be able to pass along the various wonderful stories that I’m sure will result from our trip. To paraphrase from an ‘older’ song, “New York City.... Here we come...”

Marilee Stephens



Reflection on Jim Allan's Ministry

I first met Jim during my first Ministry and Personnel Committee meeting after being recruited onto the committee by Jack Waters in 2006.

The members of the M&P committee partnered me with the new minister; we were both new and both named Jim. I looked out the window and saw the new minister: a stoutly shaped figure, casually dressed, with a big pair of suspenders, only surpassed by a big smile and a twinkle in his eye, strolling up to the Memorial Hall Entrance. I could see this working.

Rev. James Allan, B.A., M.Div. graduated from the Vancouver School of Theology in 1982 and was immediately ordained by the Alberta Conference of the United Church of Canada the same year. Jim served his ministry in the Canadian west, which took him to several congregations in Alberta and British Columbia; including Sherwood Park United Church in Sherwood Park, Alberta; St. Paul's United Church in Sidney, BC; Mt. Seymour United Church in North Vancouver, BC; Camrose United Church in Camrose, Alberta; and ultimately to Robertson-Wesley United Church here in Edmonton.

Jim is a man of many talents. His passion, as we all know, is his theology and his mission. His faith knows no bounds. When he is not spreading the 'Word' or working with the individuals or groups of the congregations he has served, Jim's scholarly side surfaces. He is constantly studying the scriptures and psychology/sociology of the human condition. He also takes keen interest in areas of human rights and the environment.

Jim's devotion and dedication to the various congregations he served has been exemplary. His portfolio itemizes work he has done which includes creating and improving team ministry, assisting with the reorganizing of church Boards. These are just a few of the many organization tasks he has been involved with. I often tease him by saying . . . "his next educational undertaking should be an MBA". He has a talent for such things.

His many talents go even further. He is enthusiastic regarding the use of modern technology in today's faith organizations. He has a great appreciation for the use of computers. Jim recognizes not only the use of such equipment for communication, record keeping, data research and presentation; but also strives to understand how these systems are impacting man's functional environment, as well as man's psychology and perceptions. I had an occasion to review several websites of various denominations in the Edmonton Area, and found Robertson-Wesley's website the best. The Robertson-Wesley congregation can thank Jim for his encouragement and support to produce such an outstanding element of us.

Jim experiences the Church as people, souls longing for faith and hearts longing for love; both on an individual basis and also as part of the community. He is deeply moved by the sight of people taking communion, coming with openness to the table: one in the Spirit.

Another facet of the Church Jim sees is its institutional aspect. This includes the structures of the organization and governance: its property, finances, personnel, volunteering, communications, administration and planning. Thus the reverend's ministry takes the invisible shape of administration and management. Therefore by working with each congregations members and boards, the vision of the Church, tone, and atmosphere Church, makes room for the Holy Spirit's direction.

Another segment of ministry which Jim Allan greatly appreciates and cultivates is the experience of the 'life-long learning'. The learning comes from the heritage of our traditions; as analyzed, researched, debated, and discussed by theologians, biblical scholars and spiritual masters throughout the centuries; including those experiencing the leading edge of the world of our time. Jim's academic credentials in combination with 'life-long learning', and a strong mix of 'real life experiences' enable him to present in-depth sermons from the pulpit on Sundays. The accumulation of quality knowledge which Jim collects, is also reflected in various forms of Bible Studies he leads. Jim says these continuous studies enables him to see deeply into human nature and the world. The joys, fears, sorrows and hopes of those, in the sea of humanity in which we live.

Reverend James Allan B.A., M.Div., the man of faith and words finds it difficult to express the quality of whole ministry.

His experience of call has included experiences of the moving of the Spirit in ways he has come to trust. That trust is the foundation of ministry for Jim. Jim has offered and dedicated himself to Christ's service, through his trust that what is really happening in the life and work of the Church and ministry is something far greater than humanity can comprehend.

I, like several in the congregation, consider Jim Allan, not only the 'Minister of Spiritual Development' at Robertson-Wesley United Church, but as a friend and associate on life's journey. I have worked with Jim in Church positions, participated in church studies, Men's Group presentations as well as helping out with Sunday Greeters and Ushers. However the best times I have with Jim are our once a month coffee mornings at one of the food establishments along 124th Street. There we discuss the concerns of mice and men, plus how to solve the worlds problems – all before the coffee gets cold. His function as a Robertson-Wesley Minister provides me with enlightening, educational, and often humorous subject matter, in our noisy, chaotic world.

However all is finite, and as of August 28th, Jim will be reaching our cultures traditional age of retirement. He'll be handing over the reins of Spirituality to the next generations. Even though Jim's ministry has been in Western Canada, Jim sees the world as community. He says he could live anywhere on the planet and thoroughly enjoy it. Already Jim and Dawn have travelled extensively, and are planning to continue to do so in the near future. I speculate the urge to travel is rooted in his continuing search for knowledge and understand of human condition. I asked Jim a question once: "Jim, in what direction is humanity going". His answer had a real sense of humour and reality. "Don't ask me where we are going, I'm still trying to figure out where we are at." Touché James!

I think I can fairly say on behalf of myself, and the Robertson-Wesley Congregation: thank you for your time with us and God speed on your life's future journeys.

Jim Triscott

Budget 2016

It is difficult to believe that another year has come and gone and that we are looking forward to another year of fellowship, spiritual development, worship, opportunities to further social justice, and the exploration of possibilities through glorious music & the arts. The budget was approved by the Board of Directors on November 17, 2015. It was the result of hard work by all those responsible for our programs and our building. Thanks are due especially to our hard-working staff as well as the Ministry & Personnel, Property, and Family Ministry Committees.

The revenues & expenses contained in the Budget reflect only local expenses. Offerings that you designate toward such purposes as Mission & Service; Refugee Response Group; Flower Group; United Church Women; the El Clarke or Wesley Funds are beyond the scope of this budget as they go directly toward their respective purposes rather than cover operating expenses.

Economically, 2015 was a challenging year in Alberta. Share prices have decreased by as much as 50% over the past 18 months, which affects not only our personal savings but also the value of our church's trust funds. It is because of this value decline that the Board chose not to draw from the Robertson-Wesley Reserve Fund to pay for the carpeting and the Anniversary-Legacy Fund to pay for part of the Historical Designation Expenses this year. Still, without these budgeted draws, the Church was able to report only a \$26,379 operating deficit.

Our deepest gratitude to you, our congregation and community, for making 2015 so successful. The scope our programming continues to increase in response to an expanding need and yearning within our city. Average attendance to our services grew by 1.3% in 2015 at a time when attendance in traditional churches is contracting and churches are closing.

Budget 2016 intends to build on the success of 2014 and 2015 that witnessed average worship attendance grow to their highest numbers in the last five years and expand the scope of programming to include Spiritual Arts Collective, Messy Tuesdays, and the Moms and Dads Group. In 2015, revenues were up by 4.5%; givings by 5.8%; property revenue by 7.5%, and expenses increased only by 4% over those of 2014.

The budget for 2016 has provision for an increase of expenses of \$42 thousand (9%); revenue increase of \$77 thousand (16.5%), including an increase of offerings of \$61 thousand (15.70%). While this may appear unrealistic, there are factors within these figures that add context that make the budgets appear less daunting.

The largest budget line, Ministry & Personnel, reflects our greatest asset: the staff who lead us; organize us; and make things happen every day. The increase to this line is \$27 thousand, 7.7% above actual 2015. This reflects a 2% increase for full-time staff as well as a staff retention increase. The increase is also a result of how much was saved in 2015 through a long-term disability claim. This claim resulted in a 2.4% saving from the 2015 budget.

Our second largest budget line, Property, reflects costs associated with our second most valuable asset – our building. This includes utilities, maintenance, and repairs, which is \$4.4 thousand lower than actual 2015. The reduction is due to the non-recurring cost associated with the carpet replacement in Memorial Hall but is offset by increasing costs, such as dishwasher leasing costs that were previously covered by a very generous donor.

The third highest operating expenditure is associated with administration, which includes photocopy and computer expenses. The increase of \$3.3 thousand or 9.4% is primarily due to an upgrade of information technology to “the cloud”, which replaces our aging server and provides more productivity for staff and volunteers.

On the revenue side, Fundraising is budgeted to increase by \$4.6 thousand (27.4%) over actual 2014 results. Fundraising is actually in a period of transition as our congregation seeks new ways in which our church can raise funds from external sources. Rummage sales are an example of this, but these sales take a lot of energy and volunteer resources to execute. Fundraising revenue was disappointing in 2015 for various discrete reasons and, although the budget calls for a significant increase over actual 2014 results, it is actually a decrease from the amount budgeted for 2015.

Property revenue is budgeted to be an increase of \$11 thousand, or 18.4%, but this is expected to be made up by a full year of tenancy for newly remodelled space which will add \$8,000 to church coffers while the balance can be raised through a global rental increase in the fall and additional wedding revenue.

Finally, \$25 thousand of the additional budgeted \$61 thousand in additional revenues has been gifted to the church from the late John Swanson who passed away on March 3, 2015.

The generosity of Mr. Swanson and his estate is a blessing to our church, as are the numerous gifts offered each and every day. Your generosity and the ultra-generosity of a few in congregation for whom we all owe a debt of gratitude is appreciated by everyone in our community. We keep up a tradition of generosity and gratitude, just as those who built our wonderful church did and had entrusted their legacy to us.

J. Robert Mah, CMA, Treasurer



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Three Years in Japan

In the spring of 1960, as my graduation from the University of Alberta with a Master's Degree in Linguistics grew nearer, the Women's Missionary Society of Robertson United Church sponsored me to go to Japan on a three-year teaching assignment.

A little background is necessary. In the late eighteen hundreds, Canadian women missionaries founded schools in India, Hong Kong, Korea, and Japan to provide education beyond grade six to young girls. In Japan, three such schools were established in the 1880's: Toyo Eiwa in Tokyo, Shizuoka Eiwa in that city, and Yamanashi Eiwa in Kofu. (Eiwa signifies 'English-Japanese'). Just before the Second World War, the three schools became private Christian schools because of fears that the Japanese military would seize foreign property but the schools continued their special relationship with the United Church of Canada.

Now, a little personal history: when my family moved to Alberta in 1944, we settled in Bonnyville where my father was the manager of the NADP creamery. At that time, Bonnyville was a French-speaking Roman Catholic village but just outside the village was the Duclos Mission, a Home Mission of the United Church of Canada. My family was Lutheran but anyone who was not French-speaking Catholic attended the church at Duclos. The surgeon and several nurses at the Duclos Hospital had come back from the Chinese mission field; another nurse, a Canadian of Japanese ancestry who was among those who had been moved inland during the war, Mitsue Shoyama, became my Sunday School teacher. Thus began my interest in Oriental culture.

After my arrival in Japan in September, the church office assigned me to Kofu, 120 kilometres west of Tokyo, to join Leona Douglas from Ontario and Violet Langland from Saskatchewan who were long-term missionaries there. My first assignment was teaching nine classes in grades 9, 10, and 11; these girls had already had some English. There were 60 girls in each class, for a total of 540 students who all looked alike with black hair and black/brown eyes, who dressed alike in their school uniforms, and who all had names that did not mean a thing to me. Japanese students are addressed by their family name and those names DO have meaning so there would be ripples of laughter in the classroom when I inadvertently reversed syllables, changing, for example, Kobayashi "a small grove of trees" to Koyabashi "an old bridge". Most of the teachers in the school did not speak English, nor did our housekeeper, Koshimizu San, or our neighbours. It was unimaginable to me not to be able to communicate with those around me, so, in my spare time, Japanese lessons became a priority. By my second year, my Japanese was competent enough to teach the beginners; this required some explanations in Japanese. Teaching the beginners had an advantage - there were only thirty students per class. But it also had challenges. In addition to its high academic standards, our school was known for having native English speakers

to teach oral English. The parents who paid the school fees wanted to see these foreign teachers so I often had as many parents standing at the back of the classroom as there were students in the desks. By my third year, my classes also included the grade 12 girls who would be taking university entrance exams.

Leona, Vi, and I attended different churches in the city. At Kofu Church, as at the school, it was a blessing to me to meet people who had lived amazing lives. In Canada, we have not had to risk liberty or life to profess our Christian faith. This was not the case during the military dictatorship in Japan. Moreover, Japanese civilians had suffered great hardships during and immediately after the Second World War. And yet, the faces of those around me radiated with joy; the hymn "They'll know we're Christians by our love" certainly applied to these people. I also taught English and Bible study classes at home; this allowed me to meet people in the wider community.

My sojourn in Japan was a life-changing event for me. I learned first-hand what it is like to be a very visible minority; there were fewer than twenty foreigners in Kofu at that time and, very often, I was the only Caucasian on the train to or from Tokyo. And those years have continued to enrich my life with lifelong friendships. At Christmas, several former colleagues and students still correspond with me although, sad to say, the list is getting shorter. One former student has come to Edmonton twice to spend Christmas with me. In October of 2014, it was such a pleasure to spend time in Ontario with three former J3s who were in Japan with me. The ties that bind are still strong. Thanks be to God.

Karen F. Hansen

Change

Darkness, tiny seed, way down deep
Embraced by the Earth, time to sleep
Patience; wait, wait a little longer
You'll change, sprout and become stronger

Humans begin their journey from a tiny cell
Enclosed in a nourishing cocoon growing so well
Patience; wait, wait a little longer
You'll change, blossom and become taller

Transformation occurs with every season
In nature and people, complex and simple, there is a reason
Patience; wait, wait a little longer
Everything and everyone changes for the better

Devika Short 2016

Does God and Science Intersect: Are Scientific and Religious Models Similar?

I mentioned in the first column I did on the book I am currently studying for this column, "Science and Religion: A Critical Survey", that the author has devoted different chapters of the book to how religion and different scientific fields can interact. The chapter that interested me the most, being a neuroscientist, was that of the biological sciences and religion. And in the first section of the chapter, he actually touches on a topic that I have often wondered and internally debated about for several decades of my life: What is it in us that makes us "sentient"... that makes us "alive", for lack of a better phrase.

In terms of both the basic physical and chemical sciences, there are fairly well explained rules that dictates how various phenomena work, whether it's the interaction of various elements in ionic or covalent bonds to create molecules, or the predictability of the path of a thrown object, based on its mass and shape. However, biology has the added dimension of "life" added in. As Mr. Rolston, the author of the book, points out, "the 'secret of life' was once thought hidden in the Spirit of God, but now seems rather lodged in DNA and RNA" (pg. 81). But what exactly is meant by life? Biology has looked at the *macro*-level in terms of evolution in terms of the origin of life, and at the *micro*-level in terms of the biochemical basis of life (though this is highly reductive in terms of breaking the components of life down into smaller and smaller pieces). But by doing so, the richness of what life is might be missed. As Rolston states, "when bioscience tries to explain the *more*, life, in terms of the *less*, matter, there comes the worry (either at the molecular or evolutionary level) that one may be getting too little explanation, true though that little may be" (p.81).

"WE ARE INFORMATION PROCESSING SYSTEMS..."

I have to admit, that's where I've always found a break between the neuroscientist in me, and the spiritual person (such as I am). I totally understand the complexity of a neuron, the components of it, the proteins it creates, the structures included, how neurons connect across both electrical and chemical synapses, how neurotransmitters flow, how current is generated in the neurons and how action potentials propagate. I know the neuro-electrochemical connections that exist in our brains. But I don't know, and have never really gotten how the physical and chemical properties and actions lead to our "identities" or "sentience" or "consciousness" of both our own bodies and the external environment. We know that by increasing the relative size of the brain to the body, as well as the number of neurons and connections between neurons, different animals species seem to different "levels" of intelligence, or awareness of environment they are inhabiting. But what is occurring at the cellular level to cause that "advancement", that ability to adapt and grow, to



be generally self-maintaining systems, with some level of self-repair. We are information processing systems unlike anything seen in the computing sciences (at least so far). We have needs that must be fulfilled to sustain "life" and we know at various levels (instinctual and conscious) that we must fulfill them. We have "vitality" in a way that a rock, a ray of light, a bottle of aspirin, etc. does not, even though those inanimate objects are composed of many of the same elements and molecules that we are. What is that "vitality" and what does it arise from that may be where the spiritual or religion areas can bring some clarity. As Rolston points out, "Some elementary vital force is resident within an organism, which directs its will-be, its will-to-be, its program. This is something additional to any mechanical propellants as these might be known from chemistry or physics. In such a life principle religion will also be interested. The mystery of how we tick is one to which there is a very ready religious attachment. If anything at all is to be sacred, it will be this elementary experience of vitality." (pg. 82) Where the spark of "life" comes from is not truly clear and science, and it might be this area where the spiritual can play a much more important role.

Marilee J. Stephens, Ph.D.
Rolston, Holmes, III. Science and Religion: A Critical Survey. 1987 (2006), Random House, Inc. United States of America, ISBN 0-394-36327-2.



Music as Meditation

I went to the Taizé service that Robertson-Wesley hosted last November. It was the first Taizé service that I had been to in a long time. And after the first chant, all the memories of why I love this style of service came flooding back to me. I used to attend Taizé services quite often, when I was in the midst of my undergrad degree. In those days, walking in to the quietness of the space, I brought in all the stresses and burdens of balancing school, jobs, and family. At the end of the hour-long contemplative service, I would walk out renewed, feeling a bit like a puddle – completely relaxed and lightened to start a new week with fresh eyes and a refreshed soul. What is it about a Taizé service that would achieve this rejuvenation in one short hour? Is it the dimness? The calm and quiet? The music? The heartfelt prayers contributed by anyone who wishes to pray aloud? The reading(s) in various languages? Perhaps it is all those things in combination? Of course, for a musician, the music plays a big part in any service. The simplicity of the Taizé chants, with repetition, often with a mélange of languages and harmonies is soothing for many. You can easily fit into the harmony, close your eyes and just sink into the text and the music in a different way than you can with a multi-verse, more complex hymn. I love complex music too, but this renewed experience of attending a Taizé service made me think again about the experience of music in worship.

It got me thinking about other music for services which is simple but not simplistic. Immediately a few centres that have created this style of music leapt to mind. Consider the short pieces of the Iona Community, many of which we have used at Robertson-Wesley in Sunday morning services. These minatures can act in the same manner that the Taizé chants do. They are short and carry a single message, can be used liturgically at specific points in the service, and can be easily linked to a theme, readings or sermon.

Thanks to Rev. Stephen Johann, the minister at Knox-Metropolitan United Church, I was recently introduced to the music of St. Lydia's. This church was begun in 2008, and now meets in a storefront in Brooklyn, NY. It is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and supported by the Episcopal Church. Some of the criteria for the music used in their services is that it is simple and can be taught easily, learned by ear, and can bear repetition. They also want to make sure that the music is communal, that it represents their theological language, and doesn't require accompaniment to "work". They have a song-book, and music is taught by a song-leader, but the congregation goes "paperless" to spend time sinking into the music and communicating with one another. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church is located in San Francisco, CA. While it follows some of the same parameters of the above worshipping communities, and most of the music is done without accompaniment of any sort, a variety of musical styles is intentionally chosen with a range of eras and styles in every service. They have a number of composers within their congregation that contribute to the repertoire of music used at St. Gregory's. This is perhaps closer to

our style at Robertson-Wesley. Any music, regardless of era or style is considered for use, as long as it fits with the theme, scripture, season or message of the service.

The conclusion that I came to in looking at all these centres for worship, is that there are many common threads in how they speak about music for worship. They all use melodies and texts from various parts of the world, and sing often in languages other than English. While some of these communities use longer hymns that carry more than one image, they all use shorter chants and repetitive pieces. They are all thinking deeply about language and theology, and how to involve people in communal music-making. Amen!

Tammy-Jo Mortensen

The next Taizé service at Robertson-Wesley will be Sunday, October 16, 2016 from 7-8 pm in conjunction with the Koinonia worship group.

For more information on each centre of worship:
Taizé - <http://www.taize.fr>
Iona - <http://iona.org.uk/>
St. Lydia's - <http://stlydias.org/>
Gregory of Nyssa - <http://www.saintgregorys.org/>





This edition's photos are by
Jim Triscott, Hal Theissen,
and Albert de Vos



Robertson-Wesley United Church

10209-123 Street, Edmonton AB T5N 1N3

Ph: 780-482-1587 Fax: 780-482-1580

Email: mail@rwuc.org Website: www.rwuc.org

Follow us:



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Between the Aisles is published on Treaty Six territory in
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

