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westhill



Holiday 2023

## Message From Mike, WHU Board Chair

Our November board meeting addressed business items and heard important reports from our various committees. The key issues will be highlighted, specifically from the Action Plan Team and the Ministry and Personnel Committee, and more information can be found in this newsletter from John McKechnie of the Celebrating Committee. The key points are gretta's return from a 3-month sabbatical on December 1st. She will be returning in a part-time capacity. We look forward to her Sunday Perspective(s) twice each month and to her support of the West Hill community with pastoral care. Administrative duties and oversight responsibility will continue to be handled by Rev Greg Daly, who has assisted with board and congregational matters as well as advising West Hill on matters relating to the United Church and the Shining Waters Region.

The Ministry and Personnel Committee report announced having received a letter from gretta declaring her intention to retire at the end of June 2024. That means we have 7 months to celebrate and recognize gretta for the remarkable leadership she has provided and the transformation of WHUC along many new and exciting pathways. The announcement of gretta's retirement date will see West Hill prioritizing the discussion of what our leadership structure will look like in order to meet the needs of our mission and vision. Significant input into this process will come from our Action Plan Team led by Jean Skillman and the Ministry and Personnel Committee with support and direction from the United Church. We will be establishing a Search Committee once we have decided on our leadership composition. It is not yet decided what role an ordained minister might fill.

On the same day as our board meeting, we celebrated the arrival of Tina from Africa. WHUC is one of the sponsoring groups for her settlement in Canada as a vulnerable refugee. We are most appreciative of the tireless work of Barb Russell and her team. A welcoming group consisting of Barb, gretta, and Eve Casavant met Tina at Pearson Airport to welcome her. Tina is currently settled in a hotel in the west end of Toronto, but we hope to see her soon at a West Hill gathering so that we can extend an official warm welcome.

The Refugee Resettlement Committee continues to find ways West Hill folk can offer support and care as Tina settles in. Volunteers are welcome to assist with providing transportation or offering specific items that would be helpful in the coming months such as technical equipment to boost access to family, community and resources. There is more about this in an article from Barb in this newsletter.

This is a time to celebrate - Welcome Tina!

As we enter December and our activities with music and gathering together, we also see the approaching New Year. Our committees and chairs have been asked to submit their budget figures for 2024. Under the leadership of Walt Shouldice and Treasurer, Joe Hatlett, we are anticipating a substantial deficit. Part of the planning for the next few months includes some significant upgrades to the AV setup to enhance the experience at our gatherings for both the in-house and online participants. Under the leadership of Glenn Cockwell, Aiden Ware, and the tech team, we are impressed with the improvements that have been implemented.

You are encouraged to be generous in your financial support of the work here at West Hill. For those moved to give, we have easy ways to contribute this season. In addition to accepting cash and cheques, we now accept *E-transfers to [finance@westhill.net](mailto:finance@westhill.net)*, contributions through *Canada Helps* as well as the ease of contributing monthly through our *PAR program*.

As we continue with the implementation of our Action Plan, we have 2 upcoming sessions with Joe Manafu of Listenology. The group working with Joe includes members of the board, staff and Action Plan Team.

Staff and leadership from the board continue to work with the Boys and Girls Club to ensure we have appropriate use of space and time in the building at 62 Orchard Park Drive. We look forward to fostering a positive relationship and to developing opportunities to partner with the Club in the coming year.

Keep well and may love abound!  
Mike Lawrie, WHU Board Chair

# Celebrations Committee Update ~ November 2023

The Celebrations Committee was established as a followup to the Report of the Primary Gathering Team, which suggested that we “support our minister with a group or standing committee (celebrations committee?) to help with themes, topics, guest speakers collect ideas from the congregation, seek personal stories from the congregation for sharing,” which is what we have set out to do. The committee currently comprises myself as Chair, Glenn Cockwell, Anne Jackson, Scott Kearns (Staff), Ken Lawton, Babette Oliveira, Annie DiPede (Staff) and Barbara Robinson.

We have covered a lot of ground since we first met in March, so I have selected highlights for this newsletter. We began by looking at the report of the Primary Gathering Team as our focus in the short term on:

- ◆ Achieve a balance between visiting speakers and gretta’s perspective(s) “sharing the load”;
- ◆ Encourage hosts/service conductors to return, offer training and enlarge the existing volunteer pool; and
- ◆ Develop the engagement with online participants.

Each of these will remain on our radar.

The most significant highlight to date has been the plan to upgrade our A/V Tech prepared by and presented by Aidan Ware (an associate of Rick Miller with extensive experience in how tech is used in the theatre). This was subsequently presented to the board in October when it was agreed to invest in professional grade tech to improve the experience of all participants whether in the gathering hall at 62 OPD (Orchard Park Drive!) or connecting on Zoom. Purchase and the introduction of this equipment is at an early stage but we plan an information session open to everyone to hear all about it and answer questions. Apart from improving our experience in the gathering, this will also offer us the possibility to hold other events given our quality tech base and its relative ease of use (subject to appropriate training). None of this would have been possible without the strong connection between Glenn and Aidan. Heartfelt thanks to both!

One of the developments which has encouraged me greatly has been the chat among the Zoom participants post the gathering; this interaction with speakers/gretta/Scott/Babette/Donna at 62 OPD is establishing a tight-knit community which we hope to develop when we have introduced our new tech. If you are at 62 OPD and want to chat with friends on Zoom join the line for the head mic! We’d love to hear from you!

We (Annie, Scott and myself) have been planning speakers during gretta’s sabbatical and established ourselves as a team to share this work; it is both rewarding as well as time-consuming, hence the need for a small team. I’m delighted to say that Barbara is going to join us going forward. We have speakers (gretta being one) for all the Sundays until the end of December. We are looking forward to welcoming gretta back in December!

Planning for gretta’s participation in her new part-time role is underway and will enable us to slot in guest speakers when gretta is not involved. This will also make it easier to give advance notice about upcoming perspective (s). Your suggestions of interesting and engaging speakers have been much appreciated and have given nourishing, interesting and challenging ideas. I think we are still absorbing the wisdom already shared. We continue to welcome your suggestions for speakers, themes or ideas for future gatherings; please continue to share these by emailing the office or by using our feedback forms.

We have been grateful for the feedback you have been giving us. I regret that we have not been more responsive. We are now giving this priority and if you have asked for a response, you will get one, hopefully within weeks rather than months. Thank you for your patience.

Respectfully, John McKechnie



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# Tina is Finally Here !



Tina arrived in Toronto on Tuesday November 14th. gretta, Eve Casavant and Barb Russell were at the airport to greet one of Canada's newest Permanent Residents!

Tina is delightful; all smiles and hugs! We brought her a winter coat that fits her perfectly!

For the first three/four weeks, Tina will be staying at the Crowne Plaza Hotel at the airport under the care of a government agency called COSTI. COSTI will help her acquire all the required documents needed to live in Canada as well as navigate the TTC and GO, get a bank account, find a doctor, assess language education and employment skills, and access agencies who assist the 2SLGBTQI+ community. In fact, she'll be kept so busy that COSTI discourages us from visiting and maybe taking her shopping for an afternoon... sorry gretta! Shopping at Thrift will just have to wait awhile!

Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada (IRCC) will meet with us and Tina to discuss the budget that she will receive once she has her permanent housing. The level of financial support is generally based on the prevailing provincial rates. This support will be in place for one to two years.

So far, her start-up expenses are a PRESTO card, and a talk & text phone plan. Dan Cooperstock has generously provided a cell phone for Tina. Thank you!

The Tina Resettlement Committee is now searching for a permanent residence for Tina in the downtown area, close to agencies and organizations that support the 2SLGBTQI+ community.

Tina would like to visit WHU on Sundays and we look forward to all of you meeting her! She will be present on our Affirming Sunday, December 3rd, which is also gretta's first Sunday back at WH, and it is also our Holiday Luncheon day! Please plan on joining us that day. If you will be staying for lunch, please let Annie know.

## Fundraising Plans for Tina

Donations received at our Holiday Luncheon will be used to support Tina. These will be free-will donations, meaning there will be no tax receipt applicable.

If you would like to help support Tina's cell phone plan, you can make tax-deductible donations to the church benevolent fund for her Tele-thon. This money will be used to pay for cell phone time at \$10 per week, and our goal is to pay for Tina's plan for 3 months (13 weeks).

In mid December, when we hope to have secured a place to call home for Tina, she will set up a "House Warming Gift Registry" at Walmart where you can purchase an item that Tina would like to have in her new home. Of course, grocery gift cards are always needed.

Thank you, West Hill, for your continuing support of the Outreach Committee and the Tina Resettlement Committee!

gretta, Eve, Ingrid, Gill, Ruth, June, Donna, Vilma, Barb

# First Nations Study Group

## CANADIAN PRISONS ‘DISTURBINGLY AND UNCONSCIONABLY INDIGENIZED’

**32% of all federal inmates in Canada – and 50% of incarcerated women – are now Indigenous, compared to 25% in 2013.**

There are still too many Indigenous people behind bars in Canada. The problem has gotten significantly worse. That’s what Correctional Investigator Ivan Zinger said on Thursday November 2, 2023, as he released a progress report that marked 10 years since he first flagged glaring issues in the system.

And nearly everything about the correctional system that can be measured – from the amount of time accused people spend behind bars before trial to the likelihood of their being placed in maximum-security institutions – perpetuates that discrimination.

“The disproportionate and growing number of Indigenous individuals behind bars is among Canada’s most pressing human rights issues, and it has featured prominently in all public reports issued by my office over the past decade,” reads the preface to the new report.

“Professionally and personally, this work grows out of increasing frustration with the futility of responding to the crisis of Indigenous over-incarceration in Canada with more of the same failed policies and approaches.”

The report describes the country’s penitentiary system as “disturbingly and unconscionably Indigenous,” and says it features many lingering hallmarks of colonialism. More than 220 people, including inmates, elders, and correctional staff, were interviewed for the report.

One of them told the investigator that the treatment Indigenous inmates face is reminiscent of what they experienced in residential school. The person, who is unnamed in the report, said “we have been put down,” and “we have been lied to.” “Our culture and spirituality have been taken away, yet again, by abuse,” the person said. “This is not fostering relationships.”

Canada will have to “own up to its colonial heritage” to reform the system, Zinger said at a press conference alongside Indigenous leaders on Thursday.

Public Safety Minister Dominic LeBlanc, who oversees the correctional service, said the government of Canada is working closely with Zinger’s office to address matters highlighted in the report. “Our work will focus on the rehabilitation of offenders and supporting their successful reintegration into society while keeping our communities safe,” he said in a statement. He said many initiatives are underway to address the recommendations.

Zinger’s report found that about three per cent of the correctional service’s annual budget goes to supporting healing lodges, Indigenous elders and a pathways program intended to help Indigenous offenders, amounting to \$75 million per year.

**Only two per cent of all Indigenous Peoples in federal custody are serving their sentence in healing lodges** recognized under the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, which offer conditions similar to minimum-security prisons. **There are no such facilities in Ontario, the North, Atlantic Canada or British Columbia.**

The original vision behind providing such services is not being met, Zinger concluded. He added that there is a “two-tiered” healing lodge system where such facilities operated by federal corrections are funded, staffed, resourced, and occupied at much higher levels than those that are community-run.

Zinger said that while Indigenous elders are supposed to be on par with other religious leaders, they don’t receive the same pay or benefits, leading to “discriminatory, derogatory or disrespectful treatment.”

“They told us (this) place is supposed to be elder-run. But man, it sure isn’t elder-run,” said one elder interviewed for the report.

Zinger found that the pathways program serves too few federally sentenced Indigenous people to make a difference in addressing overrepresentation in the criminal justice system.

His investigation also found that paternalism and pan-Indigeneity, which refers to a refusal to acknowledge the cultural differences between Indigenous communities, is pervasive within Correctional Service Canada. It’s an approach to Indigenous Peoples that erases historical and cultural differences and diversity among groups, he said.

One elder interviewed for the report said management assumed Inuit would engage with the same ceremonies as First Nations peoples, including sweat lodges, smudging and pipe ceremonies.

A couple of weeks after the person started their role in corrections, staff were questioning what was happening, and wondered why they weren’t holding any ceremonies. “I said, ‘You know what? We’re not all the same! Don’t ever make that assumption.’”

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami president, Natan Obed said at the press conference with Zinger that the report shows not only Inuit overrepresentation in the system, but a lack of Inuit-specific assessments and supports that make the issue worse. “At its root, over-incarceration points to a lack of basic needs being met to address the health and wellness of Inuit across Inuit Nunangat, (*the place where Inuit live*)” he said.

The new report urges the transfer of federally run healing lodges to local authorities, calls for a national Indigenous “decarceration” strategy and better supports for Indigenous elders who work in corrections.

“The findings of this report highlight the need for urgent action. We can’t afford to come back 10 years from now to witness this crisis getting worse. This must change,” said Ghislain Picard, Regional Chief of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec-Labrador. “We call on Correctional Service Canada to implement all 12 recommendations provided in the Correctional Investigator of Canada report.”

*excerpted from Alessia Passafiume, The Canadian Press Nov. 3/23*

**NOTES:**

- The annual federal prisons report, along with additional information and backgrounders, is available for public access at [www.oci-bec.gc.ca](http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca).
- There are currently six healing lodges in operation in Canada for federal offenders. Two healing lodges (Okimaw Ohci and Pê Sâkâstêw) are managed by Correctional Services Canada. The remaining four healing lodges (Stan Daniels, Ochichakkosipi, Wahpeton and Waseskun) are managed by Aboriginal agencies and/or communities.
- **Thunder Woman Healing Lodge Society (TWHLS)**, which members of WHU have supported over the years, is different from the Federal Healing Lodges discussed in this report in that TWHLS provides lodging for Indigenous and 2SLGBTQIA+ people who are out on bail or on parole and not serving their sentences. Here is the link to their web site: [www.twhls.ca](http://www.twhls.ca)



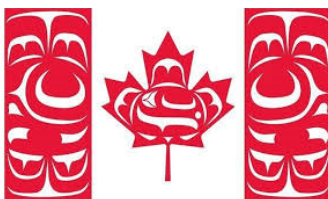
Okimaw Ohci Healing Lodge, Maple Creek, Saskatchewan



Stan Daniels Healing Lodge, Edmonton  
(the inner walls are painted by the residents)



Staff with the Correctional Service of Canada and community workers gather to listen to elders who work at Wasesun Healing Centre, north of Montreal



*submitted by Ruth Gill on behalf of First Nations Study Group*



*Greetings of the season  
& special thanks to our advertisers.  
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Wishing you and yours  
a happy & prosperous 2024!*

# DEGROOTS



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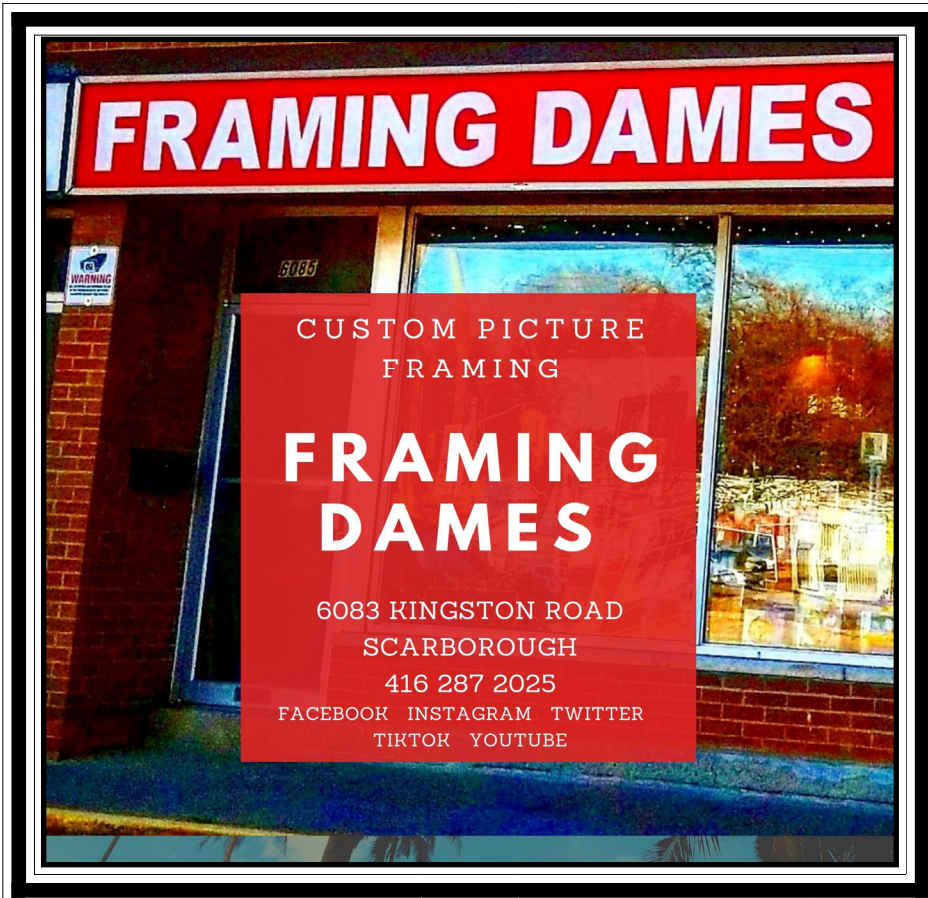
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## Colloquy ~ Message from Ellen

Colloquy has been well-attended this Fall and is rolling right along with a growing number of “regulars” and another contingent of “drop-ins.” Both the 2 PM and 7 PM Wednesday sessions have included participants from the Ethical Society in Northern Virginia. I think it’s so neat that people both here in Toronto and there in Virginia are getting to know one another through enjoying this shared experience.

Some of the themes we reflected upon recently were: Secrets, Hate, Resilience, and Honesty.

I invite anyone who is curious about what we do at Colloquy to contact me by email. I am more than happy to chat with you. ([ellendinerman7@gmail.com](mailto:ellendinerman7@gmail.com))



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# The Holidays At West Hill

Affirming Anniversary  
Celebrate! December 3<sup>rd</sup>

Featuring WHU's very own  
Aaron Sheedy and Dianne  
Clare's singing quartet  
(our WH bookkeeper).



The service will be followed by  
the Outreach Holiday Luncheon,  
a fundraiser for Tina.

*Singing the Season ~ West Hill's festive gathering of sing-alongs and solos fuses the wonder of Scott with the beauty of Christmas. It weaves celebration, wistful memory, inspiration, and joy. Invite your friends and family for a lovely taste of West Hill's unique celebration.*

*The Longest Night ~ On the eve of the Winter Solstice, we retell the story of darkness pressing over light and light's ongoing triumph, reflect on what has been and our complicity in its dark and brutal tale, and then, encouraged in community, move into light and, in so doing, let darkness slip from our hearts.*



***Singing the Season***  
An evening of Caroling,  
Warm Drinks and Good Cheer!  
With lyrics for our evolving world.  
***December 14, 7 p.m.***

***the longest night***  
a service celebrating  
the deepest roots of our tradition  
on the night of the winter solstice  
thursday, december 21st , 7:30 p.m.  
West Hill United Church, 62 Orchard Park Drive

*We hope you enjoy our signature seasonal services  
and wish you a beautiful holiday season and a wonderful New Year*

## CHRISTMAS MORNING

Please drop in at 10:30 a.m. for company and good cheer!  
Hosted by gretta and Scott



# Outreach Holiday Events

## Holiday Gift Drive

Through November to December 17<sup>th</sup>, the Outreach Committee is asking for donations to support Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities (SCHC) as it provides help to those families in need. West Hill United will purchase grocery gift cards for SCHC to be used both during this special season of giving as well as throughout the year.

Please remember to support the Food Banks where you live....the need is great.



## Affirming / Outreach Holiday Luncheon

On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, Outreach and Crafty Crew will host the Holiday Luncheon after the Affirming Anniversary Service. They will be serving Three Sisters Soup (vegetarian), beef barley soup, rolls, veggies and dessert. This luncheon will be a fundraiser to support Tina.

At the luncheon, the Crafty Crew will be selling its kitchen hand towels, dish scrubbies and dishcloths, crocheted animals by Heather and other items, as well as Mel's very popular antipasto.



## Gingerbread House Party

All school-age children are welcome to accompany their caregivers to enjoy an afternoon of gingerbread creations, crafts, games, songs and of course Santa!

Please bring a snack to share (no nuts please!) and a donation to the food bank! Hosted by Santa's elves.

Please let the office know if you'd like to join in!

## Gingerbread House Party December 10, 1:30-3:30



Outreach Team Members: Gill Cockwell, June Dickson, Ruth Gill, Donna Lockhart, Vilma Ramcharan, Barb Russell, Ingrid Shouldice

*submitted by Barb Russell on behalf of the Outreach Committee*

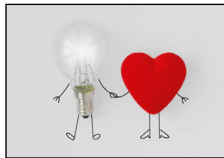
# Please Join Us For Our Weekly Service and Other Special Gatherings

Sunday Morning Gathering/Perspective(s) ~ 10:30 AM (in-person & Zoom)



Tuesday Morning Labyrinth Walk ~ 10:30 AM followed by refreshments in the church.

Tuesday Afternoon Crafty Crew ~ Tuesdays from 1 to 3 PM in the church



Wednesday Afternoon or Evening Colloquy Sessions  
2 & 7 PM on Zoom ~ January 17 and February 28

Thursday Morning Coffee ~ 10 to 11 AM (on Zoom)



**West Hill United Board of 2023**  
Board Chair: Mike Lawrie  
**Ministry and Personnel Chair: Vacant**  
**Communications and Marketing Chair: Vacant**  
Education and Growth: Donna Hall  
Friendship and Hospitality: Barb Russell  
Community Care: Babette Oliviera  
Celebrating the Spirit: John McKechnie  
Finance Chair: Walter Shouldice  
**Secretary: Vacant**

Members at Large: Jean Skillman, Florence Soknacki  
Regional Representatives: Annemarie Leepel and Louise Lawrie  
Trustees: Glenn Cockwell (Chair), Jim Hyland, Frank Kilroy, gretta vosper  
Minister: gretta vosper

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*A warm place to find yourself*

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