

news
@
westhill



Autumn/Winter
2021

Report From Your Board Chair

We are now 20 months plus into the COVID-19 pandemic and it has been a long time since we have gotten together in person. Despite that, our weekly gathering times and mid-week activities have given us an opportunity to see and interact with each other. We commonly speak of the so-called “silver lining” that is expanding the reach of our presentations. It is a joy to have our community expand to Scotland, the UK, Africa, the US and across Canada. Our West Hill United experience is greatly enriched by the contributions and words from our growing catchment area. In planning our meetings, we have to be aware that folks joining from the UK, such as John McKechnie our Treasurer, had been signing into meetings at midnight his time. Consequently, we are now holding our Board and committee meetings in the late afternoon/early evening and this seems to be working out better for all.

The conclusion made in two Congregational Meetings earlier this year was that we needed to update and revise our plans and goals to adjust to our changing circumstances. This, simply put, involves an updated Strategic Plan with specific goals and timelines. In order to accomplish this, we have engaged a professional facilitator to guide us through this process. Under the leadership of Jean Skillman and our Planning Guidance Committee, we have engaged with Joe Manfo and his company, Listenology. Joe was a minister in a traditional evangelical church for over 25 years. However, when he began his progressive journey, he felt compelled to become a consultant for not-for-profit organizations and left his role as a minister. In this career as facilitator, he guides groups through a renewal of their mission, vision and values. Since we had just completed our Vision Works update under Scott and his committee, we had already done some of the necessary work. Joe attended our Board Meeting on November 9 to orient the Board to his program and laid out a plan to invite widespread input from all who are able to join in. Starting on Sunday November 21 following an abbreviated perspective, Joe will lead us in the methods and expectations of this exercise. We will have subsequent sessions with the Planning Committee the following week and two additional congregational meetings. With this preparation, we will have the action plan to start implementing the ideas.

We have passed a sad anniversary, as we have been without Rev Gretta since the end of October 2020. She remains on medical sick leave and under the care of her health team. Updates are received from Scott on a regular basis and we are unable to speculate when Gretta will be back to lead us. Gretta knows about our love for her and how we carry her in our hearts. Messages may be sent to her through the church office, but she is not answering personal notes. In her absence, we continue to have a Supply Minister, Rev Martha Martin, assigned to us by Shining Waters Region. Anita DesRosiers, Chair of Ministry and Personnel, has been active with her committee in addressing our needs. An outline of the roles and responsibilities for a Supply Minister has been prepared. Pastoral care requests and needs are being addressed through our In-Touch Team and, where necessary, the Supply Minister. We are grateful to Rev Martin who has been representing clergy at our Board and Congregational Meetings. The recruiting of speakers and setting up of our Sunday gatherings have been organized by Scott and I'm sure we all want to thank him and laud the excellent speakers he has recruited, as well as the many sessions he has personally presented.

As we approach the holiday season, we again prepare for our yearly events such as Singing The Season, The Longest Night and our Christmas Gift Campaign. Information about these programs can be found within this newsletter and in our eBlast.

As the COVID pandemic went into phase 4, we were able to allow small numbers of pre-registered attendees to be in the church at the Sunday gathering. As of now, we have upgraded this and are welcoming all who wish to attend to arrive without any pre-registration. In order to enter the meeting hall, you must show your COVID-19 Proof of Vaccination and answer pre-screening questions. Barb has assembled teams to set up the meeting hall and sterilize the space before and after the gatherings. Thanks to Barb and her volunteers! Inside, making Sunday Gathering possible, are Scott, Glenn, Peter and occasionally Babette and Donna. Thanks to Glenn and Peter, we are able to welcome folks who Zoom in from far and wide. It is our intention to continue to offer a virtual experience for our Sunday gatherings for those who are far away and for those who are unable or choose not to attend in person.

Continued on back page

First Nations Study Group

LEST WE FORGET RECOGNITION OF INDIGENOUS SERVICE Excerpt from Veterans Affairs Canada



The First World War

While exact statistics are difficult to determine, the rate of Indigenous participation in Canada's military efforts over the years has been impressive. These determined volunteers were often forced to overcome many challenges to serve in uniform, from learning a new language and adapting to cultural differences, to having to travel great distances from their remote communities just to enlist.

Francis Pegahmagabow was one of the most highly decorated Indigenous soldiers of the First World War. An Ojibwa from the Parry Island Band in Ontario, he was awarded the Military Medal (MM) plus two bars for bravery in Belgium and France. Soldiers who had been awarded the MM and later performed similarly heroic acts could receive bars to it, denoting further awards. Pegahmagabow was one of 39 members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force who received two bars to the MM.

Cpl. Francis Pegahmagabow of the Parry Island Band in Ontario was decorated three times for the marksmanship and scouting skills he displayed in Belgium and France. Known as 'Peggy' to other members of his battalion, he survived the war and later became chief of his band. This portrait of him by artist Irma Coucill was commissioned for the Indian Hall of Fame collection, housed in the museum of the Woodland Cultural Centre in Brantford, Ontario. (*Woodland Cultural Centre*)

Pegahmagabow enlisted with the 23rd Regiment (Northern Pioneers) in August 1914, almost immediately after war was declared. Previously, he had worked along the Great Lakes as a marine fireman for the Department of Marine and Fisheries. Within weeks of volunteering, he became one of the original members of the 1st Canadian Infantry Battalion, which, along with the rest of the 20,000-strong 1st Canadian Division, landed in France in February 1915.

Sniping was the specialty of the man his fellow soldiers called "Peggy." It has been written of him, "His iron nerves, patience and superb marksmanship helped make him an outstanding sniper." In addition, Pegahmagabow developed a reputation as a superior scout.

The 1st Battalion experienced heavy action almost as soon as it arrived on the battlefield. It fought at Ypres, where the enemy introduced a new deadly weapon, poison gas, and on the Somme, where Pegahmagabow was shot in the leg. He recovered and made it back in time to return with his unit to Belgium.

It was during his first year on the Western Front that he became one of the first Canadians to be awarded the MM. The commendation reads:

"For continuous service as a messenger from February 14th 1915 to February 1916. He carried messages with great bravery and success during the whole of the actions at Ypres, Festubert and Givenchy. In all his work he has consistently shown a disregard for danger and his faithfulness to duty is highly commendable."

In November 1917, the 1st Battalion joined the assault near the village of Passchendaele. Here, roughly 20,000 Allied soldiers crawled from shell crater to shell crater, through water and mud. With two British divisions, the Canadian Corps attacked and took the village, holding it for five days, until reinforcements arrived. The Allies suffered 16,000 casualties at Passchendaele, and Corporal Pegahmagabow earned his first bar to the MM.

Pegahmagabow served overseas for almost the entire war and remained in Europe an additional five months after the Armistice. Back home, he would join the militia. Here Pegahmagabow's fellow non-commissioned officers of the 1st Battalion pose two months after the end of the war (he is not in the picture because he was in England receiving medical treatment at the time). (*Department of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-3831*)

His citation reads: *At Passchendaele Nov. 6th/7th, 1917, this NCO [non-commissioned officer] did excellent work. Before and after the attack he kept in touch with the flanks, advising the units he had seen, this information proving the success of the attack and saving valuable time in consolidating. He also guided the relief to its proper place after it had become mixed up.*

Pegahmagabow would earn his second bar to the MM during the final months of the First World War in the Battle of the Scarpe (part of the 2nd Battle of Arras). The commendation reads:



A Peaceful Man,
Francis Pegahmagabow

"During the operations of August 30, 1918, at Orix Trench, near Upton Wood, when his company were almost out of ammunition and in danger of being surrounded, this NCO went over the top under heavy MG [machine gun] and rifle fire and brought back sufficient ammunition to enable the post to carry on and assist in repulsing heavy enemy counter-attacks."

In April 1919, Pegahmagabow was invalided to Canada, having served for nearly the entire war. Afterward, he joined the Algonquin Regiment in the non-permanent active militia and, following in the steps of his father and grandfather, became Chief of the Parry Island Band and later a councillor. A member of Canada's Indian Hall of Fame, Pegahmagabow died on the reserve in 1952.

Francis Pegahmagabow rarely spoke of his military accomplishments. However, his son Duncan recalls being told that his father was responsible for capturing 300 enemy soldiers. "My mother [Eva] told me he used to go behind enemy lines, rub shoulders with the enemy forces and never get caught." Duncan also remembers that Pegahmagabow "felt very strongly about his country." Mostly, he sees his father as a peaceful man: "He was always saying how we have to live in harmony with all living things in this world."

Like Pegahmagabow, Henry Norwest developed an impressive reputation as a sniper during the war. The former rodeo performer and ranch-hand was considered a hero by other members of the 50th Battalion. They were stunned when he was killed by an enemy sniper three months before the war ended. (*Glenbow Archives*)

One of the most famous Canadian snipers in the First World War was a Métis marksman who went by the name of Henry Louis Norwest. Norwest was born in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta, of French-Cree ancestry. In his nearly three years of service with the 50th Canadian Infantry Battalion, the lance-corporal achieved a sniping record of 115 fatal shots. The former ranch-hand and rodeo performer also merited the Military Medal and bar, making him one of roughly 830 members of the CEF to be awarded this double honour.

Ultimately, Norwest proved to be an inspiration to his unit. A fellow soldier wrote of him:

Our famous sniper no doubt understood better than most of us the cost of life and the price of death. Henry Norwest carried out his terrible duty superbly because he believed his special skill gave him no choice but to fulfil his indispensable mission. Our 50th [Battalion] sniper went about his work with passionate dedication and showed complete detachment from everything while he was in the line Yet when we had the rare opportunity to see our comrade at close quarters, we found him pleasant and kindly, quite naturally one of us, and always an inspiration.

Sniping was a hazardous infantry role. Most snipers worked in pairs, with one partner shooting and the other observing—scanning the surroundings and reporting enemy movements. It is said Norwest possessed all the skills required of a sniper: excellent marksmanship, an ability to keep perfectly still for very long periods and superb camouflage techniques. Much of his time was spent in No Man's Land, the dreaded area between opposing forces. As well, Norwest and his observer often slipped behind enemy lines.

The battalion's star marksman earned the MM in 1917 at a peak on Vimy Ridge dubbed "the Pimple." The Canadian Corps, part of a massive Allied offensive, was tasked with capturing the Ridge. Although previous Allied attempts to take it had failed, the elaborately planned Canadian assault succeeded. Most of the Ridge was taken on the first day, April 9. Three days later, the two remaining enemy positions, including the Pimple, were conquered.

According to his award citation, Norwest showed "great bravery, skill and initiative in sniping the enemy after the capture of the Pimple. By his activity he saved a great number of our men's lives."

The following year, Norwest was awarded a bar to his MM. It is not known why, and in August 1918, his bravery was again evident. During the Battle of Amiens, in France, Allied forces advanced 19 kilometres in three days. For his part, Norwest destroyed several enemy machine-gun posts and achieved a sniping record that was a battalion high.

A week later, the 50th Battalion was moving into position for its next assignment when the sharpshooter held his final post. On August 18, three months before the war ended, Norwest and two others were looking for a nest of troublesome enemy snipers. A sniper's bullet hit the Métis marksman, killing him instantly. For the members of his battalion, a genuine hero had been lost.



Sharpshooter: Henry Louis Norwest

submitted by Ruth Gill

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IN THE SPIRIT

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REMINDER — YOGA CLASSES (SENIORS DISCOUNT). We still offer special seniors classes (yoga in chairs and for those with mobility issues) Mondays at 10:15-11:15 a.m. and Thursdays 9:00-10:00 a.m. (\$15/class includes tea/coffee & cookies). (Highland Creek Plaza, 376 Old Kingston Road)

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A Reflection on 2021 / Events of the Season

As we are all acutely aware, we are heading into our *second* winter holiday season accompanied by the personal, local, and global effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many things have had to change and, as weary as we are of it all, changes keep coming – restrictions, recommendations, reactions, and responses. While great harm has occurred, impressive amounts of help continue to be offered, so it has truly been and continues to be both a time of need and a time for sharing joy and gratitude.

West Hill has adapted in many creative and innovative ways, thanks to a lot of work from a lot of folks. It's meant that we've been able to continue as a community of care, support, inspiration, and encouragement for many, even expanding beyond our borders.

We've continued to offer our signature programs throughout 2020, albeit in altered fashion, and so far in 2021 we've observed Dream Away I & II, Remembered Lives, Thanksgiving, and the recognition of a number of days of national and international focus, e.g., Indigenous and women's issues. Here's what's coming next:

December 12th, 10:30 a.m. ~ Singing the Season

Singing the Season is an interactive presentation of seasonal songs and sentiments, all in keeping with our commitment to a nonexclusive approach for celebrating the themes of giving, sharing, expressing care and compassion – our love for self, others, and the planet. We've held this event in the main hall in the evening for almost two decades, enhanced by the glow of candlelight; however, this year the glow will be the light of day (**Sunday morning**) so we can include folks from all different time zones.

Like last year, you will be receiving a small wire star into which can be inserted a slip of paper (also supplied) on which you will be invited during the program to write a particular aspiration, commitment or recommitment to help meet a particular need in the world, whether personal, local, or global. When in the hall together, we place the stars on an evergreen tree at the front; however, as a tree will not easily fit in the envelope, we will have to leave it to you to find a place to hang your star when we come to that point in the program together. We have heard that folks have used a branch brought in from outside, a wall hook or cupboard knob, a lampshade, houseplant, light, bottle, candle, computer screen, or even a buttonhole. I believe one person hung it from their own eye glasses, resulting, evidently, in a brief time of seasonal starry-eyedness, but we don't recommend it long-term.

December 19th, 10:30 ~ Affirming Service

This is the 12th year we have celebrated our official designation as an Affirming congregation. Long before that date, West Hill had made known its openness to the local and global LGBTQ community, including in matters of relationship, marriage, leadership, and human rights. The affirming public designation is a way for people to find a church in the area that is welcoming to all and that promotes an end to discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

December 21st, 7:00 p.m. ~ The Longest Night

On the longest night of the year, we focus on the realities of the phases of day and night, the changing seasons and the pendulum of darkness and brightness in our lives. We use light – light following darkness – as a metaphor for acts that identify, expose, and address the needs for justice and compassion in the world. In the past, we have given each other and candles to light and hold up together, and candlewick bracelets presented with the statement: "You are light in the world." You are invited to bring a candle, real or artificial, to the screen to light along with everyone. As well, you will be sent a candlewick bracelet to place on your wrist or the wrist of someone you are with during the program. This is a long-standing and deeply meaningful way of celebrating the season together and we warmly invite you to be part of it.

submitted by Scott Kearns

Zooming with West Hill

Please join us for our virtual **ZOOM** gatherings. **If you don't have a computer, you can simply access ZOOM by TELEPHONE to listen/participate.** Contact the office to get the phone and meeting identification numbers.

Sunday Morning Gathering/Perspective(s) at 10:30

Tuesday Afternoon Wellness Group from 2 to 3



Wednesday Book Study ~ Indigenous Canada Online Course (University of Alberta) - Free! 2 to 3:30

November 24, December 1st, January 12, 19, 26, February 2, 9, 16, 23 and wrapping up on March 2nd.

For more information or to sign up: <https://www.coursera.org/learn/indigenous-canada?#about>



Thursday Morning Coffee from 10 to 11

The Wind and the Tree

By Ken Ramsay

For Jeanne Hamel – July 2007

You, Jeanne, are many things.

Are you the wind or are you the tree?
No, you are both the wind and the tree.

It takes a stirring wind and a willing tree to create the rustling comfort of our souls.
It takes the deep-hued leaves and a willing breeze to enchant our hungry eyes.
It takes wind-blown, fallen leaves to touch the musty melancholy of our hearts.

You, Jeanne, are all of these things, and much, much more.

You blow on us as a delicate breeze and a stiff nor'wester.
You cradle us in your strong, oaken limbs and weep with us with your willows.
You're a whirlwind blowing laughter with the capricious twinkle in your eye.
You're the deep-rooted earthy strength we seek when we are weak or dying.
You're the harsh north wind slapping our faces with the courageous truth.

You, Jeanne, are all of these things, and much, much more.


We line up for life-giving hugs that fill us with healing breath.
We are enveloped in your bony branches of love.
You waft through our lives with the beauty of exploding blossoms
and the ancient wisdom of the Douglas Fir.

You, Jeanne, are all of these things, and much, much more.

We feast upon the constant, forever wind and the abundant, sustaining branches.

You, Jeanne, are all of this. You are all of life. We call it the Divine.

AMEN



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Outreach News

Christmas Campaign

Funds raised for the Christmas Campaign will be used to purchase gift cards for donation to the Boys & Girls Club of East Scarborough (retail gift cards for children/teens) and Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities (grocery store gift cards for families).

Please make your cheque payable to West Hill United Church, noting Christmas Campaign on the cheque. Gift cards will be purchased through the WHU Fundscrip account; which will also support West Hill United.



Thank you!

West Hill United Church
62 Orchard Park Drive
Toronto, Ontario M1E 3T7



The Outreach Committee sends out another big thank-you for your generous support of our backpack campaign. \$615 was donated to Family Residence on Kingston Road in support of children going back to school!

Please remember to support your local food bank this Holiday Season. Nonperishable food items and monetary donations would be greatly appreciated. The local food bank near West Hill United Church is run by Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities, located at 4100 Lawrence Ave E. Scarborough, ON. M1E 2S2 (416-847-4147).

*Outreach Committee Members: Gill Cockwell, June Dickson,
Donna Lockhart, Barb Russell, Ingrid Shouldice*

submitted by Barb Russell

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Board Chair Report, continued from page 1...

As we approach December, we have the yearly task of preparing for the coming year and the need to call an annual meeting. Many thanks to John McKechnie, Treasurer, who has a draft budget set up and requests those leaders who have need for funding for their programs and duties to submit a budget to him. Since we do not pay rent and have been meeting virtually, our expenses for those areas are less than expected. As in most church budgets, salaries and benefits are the largest categories. John and his committee are budgeting with the anticipation that Gretta may be returning.

An issue of widespread interest is the status of the Labyrinth Area (aka the hockey stick). As you may recall, when we finalized the sale of the property to the Boys and Girls Club of East Scarborough (BGCES), West Hill UC had the option to purchase back this area if we could accomplish the necessary permission from the City of Toronto to sever this property. We had 500 days from the closing of the property sale to accomplish this. It was the decision of the congregation to pursue this option and to acquire this property for \$200,000, if possible. Because we lacked the expertise on our Board to handle this transaction, we contracted with the United Property Resource Corporation (UPRC, an affiliate of the United Church) to act on our behalf to purchase this property. This ownership would enable us to develop the property with a building that could serve many different purposes. The obtaining of the necessary approvals proved more involved than first thought and we applied to have the term of the option extended from November 11, 2021 for one year. Our first request was denied by the BGCES last winter. As time went on, it was apparent that there were more barriers than anticipated and the UPRC had asked to again apply for an extension. This request was presented to and reviewed by the BGCES Board on Monday, November 15. Needless to say, there is a lot of information behind our request for an extension and it would be cumbersome to even attempt to summarize it here. So stay tuned. If our request to extend the deadline is denied, we will have to decide whether to let it go or to seek legal advice.

As always, I welcome your questions, comments and concerns. We have created a culture of respectful dialogue and disagreement. You can reach me the following ways: lawrieclan@rogers.com or 1-519-740-0761.

Travelling our journey together,
May love abound

Michael Lawrie, Board Chair



West Hill United Board of 2021

Board Chair: Mike Lawrie

Property Chair: Gary Megson

Ministry and Personnel Chair: Anita DesRosiers

Communication and Marketing Chair: Vacant

Education and Growth: Deb Ellis

Friendship and Hospitality: Barb Russell

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Celebrating the Spirit: Vacant

Finance Chair & Treasurer: John McKechnie

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West Hill United

A warm place to find yourself

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