



Message From Mike, WHU Board Chair

Brief Summary of the ACM, Sunday, February 26:

Several important items were addressed: We were very happy that Deb Ellis has agreed to take on the paid position of Action Plan Coordinator. Deb's past experience, knowledge of WHUC, her exuberant personality and diverse skill set all make her uniquely qualified to lead us through the Action Plan. Rev Cindy had previously held this position, but when her Supply Minister term ended, it became necessary for her to move on from this position as well. Once again, we thank Cindy for her leadership and vision in getting this program started.

Gretta's Return:

This has been progressive since February 6, starting at 10 hours per week and increasing every 2 weeks by 10 hr/week. Gretta will reach full-time in early April. It is wonderful to have her back in action, but it is necessary for us to be mindful of our demands on her time and realize that she will need to put some of the less urgent matters on hold. In particular, her pastoral care duties will need to be directed to the more urgent matters. It has been energizing to us all to have her creativity and imagination challenge and inspire us. Gretta's medical leave of absence began near the end of October 2020. She has stated her deep appreciation and admiration that the West Hill community was able to accomplish so much in the period of her absence. The activities and plans that arose out of several congregational meetings and the engagement of Joe Manafo and his Listenology program enabled us to develop and start the implementation of the Action Plan, highlighted below and to be featured in a more elaborate report by Deb in the March 25th eBlast.

We are most appreciative of our Ministry and Personnel Committee, which was led by Anita DesRosiers with support from Mel Crossley, Adel Francis, Randal Holloway and June Dickson. This group connected and worked with Rev Cindy Bourgeois who was our Supply Minister for over a year. Cindy was instrumental in overseeing our Action Plan and brought her energy and organizational experience to formulate and start the implementation of this plan. The M&P Committee, with the exception of Randal, decided not to renew their positions at the ACM. We thank them for their efforts in seeing us through a challenging time when Gretta was on leave. After Gretta was cleared to return to work part-time, a phasing-in program was approved by the UCC and Canada Life Insurance. At that time, Cindy's term as Supply Minister came to an end.

Board Matters:

It is best practice that all committees have a designated chair, but it is possible for a committee to be highly functional in the absence of such a person. In that situation, one of the committee members would attend the board meetings to represent their group and report in where appropriate. We are happy to announce that Donna Hall has stepped forward to assume the Education and Growth position and are inviting others to join that committee.

Review of Regular Programs:

The Circle of Friends meets on Tuesdays to walk the labyrinth, however the asphalt where the labyrinth is painted was badly damaged by snow ploughs over the winter, so the group is discussing other alternatives. Please check with Marilyn Lott through the office regarding upcoming Tuesdays. The Crafty Group, led by Barb Russell, continues to meet on Tuesday afternoons. Due to dropping numbers and lack of a facilitator, the Tuesday Wellness Group has been put on pause. Virtual Coffee Time meets via Zoom on Thursdays at 10 am. This group has an open chat over coffee on whatever topics come up, be it local or world events, activities around WHUC, or personal stories and group conversations. Join us for coffee, listen up, and weigh in when you feel moved to do so.

West Hill is very fortunate to have Ellen Dinerman leading our Colloquy Group which began in the fall of 2022. Ellen is an experienced group leader with extensive involvement in the Ethical Society in the USA. This group experiences a shared reflection around a theme each time they gather. The program has continued this year. The size of the group is limited to 12, so please contact Ellen to reserve a spot.

Financial Review:

Our Finance Committee has continued to meet regularly. Treasurer, Joe Hatlett, did an excellent presentation on the budget at the annual meeting. He detailed some of the difficult issues we must face. The concept of a deficit budget, in which we spend more than we take in, seems uncomfortable and is certainly not sustainable in the long term. In the Pre-COVID era, it was the custom to take up an offering and pass the donation plate around. During this time, the vast majority of our revenue comes in via Pre-Authorized Remit (PAR). This way of supporting our church and its mission gives the donor the knowledge that their contributions will happen automatically whether or not they are present in person, joining virtually, or not connecting at all. It is noteworthy that, unlike many other churches, we have not been very persistent in promoting PAR or undertaking a stewardship campaign. Consequently, for the past several years, we have experienced many more departures from the PAR program than additions. On a typical Sunday morning, we might have 20 people on site at 62 Orchard Park and 35-50 cameras joining via Zoom; a true hybrid experience. Although an invitation to donate is issued to those joining us regularly and the choice of connecting through the church office or donating through CanadaHelps or some other agency, donations are dropping. No official Sunday morning offering occurs in the building, although a donation plate can usually be found at the entrance doors to meeting hall. I anticipate as we embark on our Action Plan, there will be a need to fund the various personnel and programs that are needed to implement the plan. Our financial team will be working on a program to raise the revenue for these activities. It is likely that we will be embarking on a stewardship program as well as some fundraising activities. Another source of revenue that we will explore is to apply for grants available through the UCC and several government agencies.

At the March Board meeting, we thanked several individuals who were leaving the Board, including Anita DesRosiers from the M&P Committee. Thanks also go to Mel Crossley, Adel Francis and June Dickson who also served on the M&P Committee. Randal Holloway remains on that group and welcomes Florence Soknacki, Cathy Richards and Ann McKechnie. The committee hopes to add 2 more members. John McKechnie will lead the newly formed Celebrations Committee which will assist with all aspects of the Sunday gathering. John is recruiting more members for that committee.

A heart-felt thank-you goes out to Glenn Cockwell who has the unofficial title of Production Guy for leading the set-up and take-down of the meeting hall for the Sunday gathering including the layout at the front of the hall, the cameras, microphones, video screens, etc.

That’s all for this month as we travel this journey together.
In this abundant blessing, we share the joy!

Mike



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Outreach News

A big thank-you to our West Hill community for its support of our Holiday Gift Card Campaign! \$575 in grocery gift cards will be donated to Scarborough Centre for Health Communities to support the many families who are challenged by food security over the year.

Next Campaign: Soup's On Luncheon ~ Sunday, April 16



Our Soup's On Campaign will support Second Harvest, Canada's largest food rescue charity. If you are unable to join us for soup at West Hill, you are welcome to make a donation! Please add "Soup Luncheon" to the memo line of your cheque or in the comments in your e-transfer.

Thank you for your continued support!



Update on Tina:


Tina is originally from Uganda, and continues to wait in Kenya for her refugee status to change to allow her to travel to Canada. She was an active participant at our Sunday gathering on March 12 via Zoom. Tina continues to need financial support during her very stressful time in Kenya. When she arrives in Toronto, she will be financially supported by the United Church of Canada, and West Hill United will help her settle into Canadian life.

If you would like your name added to a list to support Tina (\$10/month), please contact the office. Donations are free-will, so no tax receipt will be issued. Thank you from Team Tina!

submitted by Barb Russell on behalf of the Outreach Committee

Outreach Team Members:

**Gill Cockwell, June Dickson, Ruth Gill, Donna Lockhart,
Wilma Ramcharan, Barb Russell, Ingrid Shouldice**



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First Nations Study Group

DISHONOURING TREATY RIGHTS ATHABASCA CHIPEWYAN FIRST NATION TREATY 8 – 1899

Excerpted from The Guardian March 10, 2023



The Medallion given to the first chief of Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation at the signing of Treaty 8 in 1899

“I told the company (Imperial Oil) and I told the (Alberta Energy) regulator that a simple phone call would have cost you less than five bucks. A simple phone call...” Allan Adam, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation Chief

Throughout the summer and into the fall, members of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation ventured out onto the land as they do every year, hunting and fishing the streams and boreal forest of their community in western Canada. Over those same months last year, however, toxic water had been leaking from an oil sands operations upriver.

In May 2022, there was an initial discovery of discoloured water, but local communities were not notified of the regulator’s findings that containment ponds had failed.

The regulator soon concluded the water had come from tailings ponds where the company stored the toxic sludge-like by-products of bitumen mining. Environmental samples showed high levels of several toxic contaminants, including arsenic, iron, sulphate and hydrocarbon – all of which exceeded provincial guidelines.

In February 2023, there was another leak, in which 5.3 million litres of tailings water escaped from an overflowing catchment pond. This time, the community was informed two days later.

Imperial Oil said the second spill posed no threat to water or wildlife and that it had made “significant progress” in the cleanup efforts. But the company admits it doesn’t yet know how much toxic tailings water has seeped into the land and water over the last nine months.

Adam says he met with company officials three times during the period, but alleges they never mentioned the leaking tailings pond.

On Monday [March 6], Imperial apologized for not communicating with affected communities, admitting it had “fallen short of expectations”. Despite assurances from the company, residents remain wary. In the municipality of Wood Buffalo, city staff have stopped drawing from Lake Athabasca.

Also, in Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, community members have been advised by leadership not to eat any game or fish harvested in the last nine months. The community was waiting on test results of its water supply to determine if it is contaminated.

Imperial Oil has since been hit with both an environmental protection order and a noncompliance order in relation to the leak and the province’s regulator has demanded the company file plans to show how it intends to contain, monitor and remediate the areas affected by the leak.

Adam met with the the province’s regulator this week, and received an apology from senior staff for their failure to notify his community. “I told them don’t bother apologizing. We’re well past that. Fix this problem, and show me how you won’t let it happen again.”

He says the inability for residents to harvest from the lands is a violation of the nation’s treaty rights and by not notifying the community of the spill, the company breached its benefit agreement contract with the First Nation.



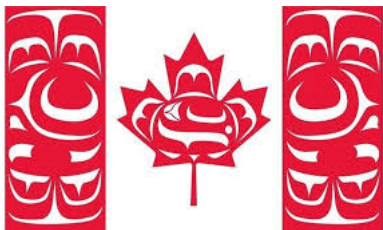
Allan Adam,
Chief of Athabasca Chipewyan
First Nation

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

Treaty 8 Territory



Editor's Note:
Try out the [hyperlinks](#) throughout the digital news@westhill. They are now functional, including those in our sponsors' ads, so you can click and go directly to the web sites!



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Letter from gretta to UCC

March 8, 2023

The Right Reverend Dr. Carmen Lansdowne
United Church of Canada
3250 Bloor St. West
Toronto, ON

Dear Rev. Lansdowne,

I read, with concern, that the General Council Executive of The United Church of Canada (UCC) has closed its doors to media while it is meeting. This is a significant change in practices which, I believe, undermines the intent of our founding documents, misunderstands the role of the General Council Executive, and hampers church membership to fully engage with and respond to significant decisions being undertaken at our highest court level.

The United Church, as you know, uses a conciliar structure which was created to ensure that the disparate perspectives coming into Union were engaged in the ongoing leadership and direction-setting of the denomination. As we struggle to navigate crucial issues facing our church, our country, and the world, it seems that furthering the practice of open and accessible leadership would be an important element in maintaining trust and engagement.

The Rev. Michael Blair indicated that the General Council Executive operates as a Board. This is fundamentally untrue. Having served five years on the Board of Governors for Centennial College and as the Chair of its Governance Committee during that period, I am very aware of the differences between a Board and a Council. A Board is not responsible to those who access the materials of the organization, be they employees, products, education, or beliefs. Often, its members do not have any ongoing role within the organization, bringing expertise from other sectors to the role of oversight and fiduciary responsibility. Indeed, their decisions may be taken in the interest of the organization and not in the interest of its current constituents. A Council is representative of the membership and is deeply embedded in the concerns of that membership. It is responsible to that membership and cannot undertake decisions that would not be in the best interests of the organization unless that membership is consulted. Our forebears were aware of these differences and put in place a system that would provide the greatest access and participation, not the least.

It may be argued that the conciliar structure arose to address distrust that may have manifest in the early years of Union and that such trust is no longer needed. I would argue that now is a period in the church's history that is as filled with concern and trust issues as it has ever been. Indeed, the recent choice of the General Council Executive to *not* include its decision to bar media from its meetings in the ['Highlights from the First 2023 Meeting of the General Council Executive'](#) could only undermine that trust. Why would GCE *not* want the media there? What are they proposing to do? Act as a Board and potentially make choices that are contrary to the health of congregations? Perhaps decisions that undermine the progressive underpinnings of the denomination, that make us a creedal church when we have long prided ourselves in *not* being such a church? What's the nature of the discussion that requires privacy and carefully controlled press releases?

As you may or may not be aware, the actions of the General Secretary taken in 2015 for the purposes of reviewing my suitability for ministry, were undertaken without discussion, consent, or knowledge of the wider church. No engagements were had with the wider church regarding the implications of mandating clergy ongoing affirmation of belief in the Holy Trinity as God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, an affirmation that could easily be required to be literal, as it was in my process. Clergy educated in a period of progressive theology were deeply threatened to the point that sympathetic colleagues contacted me but were unable to be publicly supportive.

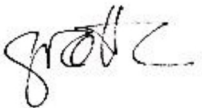
The impact of that decision on the wider church is concerning. Recent attempts to present petitions to General Council requesting regular testing of clergy under the requirement created to review me, seek to hold clergy, literally, to Statements of Faith that were, during my theological education, understood to be historical and

demanding of contemporary, critical theological interpretation. Many of the objections to progressive theology taught by United Church theological colleges come from conservative clergy entering through admissions processes that may not have tested adequately for theological consistency with the United Church's history. Indeed, during my review, the cultural sensitivity document of Toronto Conference cautioned on asking questions of theology due to the potential for perception of insensitivity to a candidate's originating culture.

My story played out on a national scale. United Church members took sides based on my identifying as an atheist, one who does not believe in a theistic god, a position shared by many of my colleagues. It was easy to make a national story of that. What was not shared throughout that process and not understood by United Church colleagues and members across the country were the decisions that allowed my review and how those decisions were made. The conversations that led to them took place in offices at 3250 Bloor Street West and were never disclosed to the membership of the wider church. I do not have the energy or interest at this time to write significantly about those decisions, having just returned to work after twenty-eight months of medical leave. I trust, however, that you recognize *the dangers inherent in choosing to make decisions behind closed doors*. The choice to deny firsthand access to *Broadview* or any other interested media to meetings of the General Council Executive is a decision to invite those dangers into the church along with their impacts, at least some of which we cannot foresee.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns. I hope that they invite the General Council to revisit the discussion about access to its meetings by the media, especially *Broadview*.

All my best,



gretta vosper
West Hill United Church

cc:

Michael Lawrie, Board Chair, West Hill United Church

Peter Hartmans, Executive Minister, Shining Waters Regional Council

Jody Maltby, Shining Waters Regional Council Jocelyn Bell, *Broadview Magazine*



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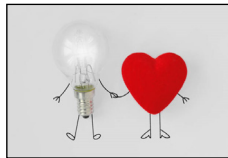
Please Join Us For Our Weekly Service And Other Special Gatherings

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



Tuesday Morning Labyrinth Walk ~ *Due to damage to the asphalt from snow ploughing, the labyrinth is presently “unwalkable,” so there will be temporary alternatives put in place for Tuesday mornings. Please check future eBlast notifications or connect with Marilyn Lott through the office for more information.*

Tuesday Afternoon Crafty Crew ~ 1 PM (in-person at WHU)



Colloquy (on Zoom) at 2 pm & 7 PM
Tentative dates for upcoming Colloquy Sessions are Wednesdays: April 19th, May 10th, & June 14th
Please check future eBlasts or connect with the office to confirm dates and register for a session.

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



West Hill United Board of 2023
Board Chair: Mike Lawrie
Ministry and Personnel Chair: Vacant
Communication 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: Vacant
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Minister: gretta vosper

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