

WESTMINSTER UNITED CHURCH

Winter 2014 Newsletter

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas, and it's feeling that way lately. Brrrrr.....

By the time you read this, it may not be so cold, or so the weatherman promises. I heard on the radio this morning that we should expect a milder winter than 2013; should we get our hopes up?

A reminder that if you have any submissions for the Spring newsletter, please email them to me at annah@telusplanet.net by March 2nd and I will be sure to include them.

.....Anna Marie Hancock

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"Christmas comes but once a year/But when it comes it brings good cheer".

Cheer, yes. And for many among us, exhaustion. We get so hyped up trying to create the perfect, memorable festivities, urged on by dramatic, extravagant displays in advertising, that by the time the day arrives there is little energy left to enjoy it.

Reminds me of the other one-liners about pregnancy: It takes nine months, and the tenth is the worst. As anybody who has been there can testify, those last weeks of pregnancy with a belly like a beach ball feel like an eternity. Waiting is, appropriately, the theme of the season of Advent: Together with Mary we anticipate the fulfillment of God's plan in the birth of the Christ child. We are like youngsters doing the Advent countdown, impatient that it soon be completed. And as we wait we reflect on our readiness to receive Christ anew in our hearts, recalling the times we have fallen short of our calling. The colour for Advent is blue, a reminder of Lent's purple of repentance.

Make Advent waiting intentional. As pregnancy is measured in trimesters, so Advent is in weeks—hope, peace, joy, love. Spend each week pondering how

you experience each of these in your life and how you can share them with others. When you take time to sit down to focus your thinking you may be surprised at how much hope, peace, joy and love are part of your daily diet. I'm planning to spend some time with my grandkids, aged 5 and 2 ²/₃--a sure dose of youthful enthusiasm for my sometimes jaded adult soul.

Join us in worship on Sundays as we count down together. On Dec 7 our Sunday School is offering a Christmas play, and on Dec 14, our choir will present a cantata. Dec 21 at 7:00 pm we observe The Longest Night—winter solstice—with a service for those whom the festive season is a time of loneliness, darkness or loss. On Christmas eve we will have a family service at 7 and traditional candlelight communion at 9:00 pm. For Dec 28 a joint service will be held at Fifth Avenue Memorial at 10:00 am. We'll be back into our regular routine in January.

From me & mine to you & yours, a joyous, serene, and exciting Christmas!

— Rev Jan Stevenson, Rev Gordon Saville & Sir Winston Pugglesworth (the dog)



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As we step into Advent, a time of waiting and preparation for the annual reliving of the birth of the Christ child, I am amazed that I have already been at Westminster United Church for nearly 5 months. If, as we learned from the Fresh Start program, a church's time of transition stabilizes 12-18 months after the new minister(s) arrive(s), that means that we are just 7-13 months away from our new normal! The countdown is on....

It seems to me that this cycle of a congregation making and re-making itself is very Christian indeed. The Christian year begins with the first

Sunday of Advent, as we await the birth of Christ. We celebrate the Messiah's birth, rejoicing "Hallelujah!" Next, we glory in the short period of Jesus' ministry on Earth before we begin the inevitable descent toward the cross. We know even in Jesus' birth that death is waiting. Death comes. As an Easter people, we also know that new life is the ultimate promise. Death cannot separate us from the love of God. Love *always* wins. After that, we have months upon months of living (and learning to live) into that love. This culminates in Reign of Christ Sunday, where we uplift Jesus Christ as the sole person worthy of our love, service and devotion, above and beyond any earthly empire. The following Sunday, the drama begins again.

Never is the Christian year experienced the same. Always a new creation is made, a new creation offered. We learn to live into love differently each year. People come and go. We learn how to be the church – the Body of Christ – in a new way every time we go through transition. We learn this through living our cycles of life, and death, and life beyond death, and God with us all along the way. As the old hymn goes:

*My life flows on in endless song;
Above earth's lamentation,
I hear the sweet, tho' far-off hymn
That hails a new creation;
Thro' all the tumult and the strife
I hear the music ringing;
It finds an echo in my soul—
How can I keep from singing?*

Happy New Year! What will we discover this year? What music will our souls hear and remember? What shall we sing?

Peace and Good Will to All,
Rev. Chelsea Masterman

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Reports:

Finance Committee

As 2014 comes to a close the committees of the church have been working hard preparing 2015 budgets. We are looking to maintain or decrease previous expenses wherever possible. The finance committee advises that we are currently in a deficit budget position for 2014 due to a shortfall in offerings. As we celebrate this Christmas Season please remember your Church in your financial gifts.

Sunday School

Sunday School has been going strong since the middle of September. We are a group of about 8 who come on a regular basis. We enjoy getting together for class and for special days like Halloween, when we got to dress up, play games and carve pumpkins.

On *Children's Sunday*, the children participated fully in the service, from greeting, taking up the offering, helping to write some of the prayers and serving Communion. They were AMAZING, in case you missed it. Right now , we are busily preparing for the Christmas play on December 7th.

While our kids are going strong, we are struggling to fill our teaching slots each Sunday. Parents are busier than ever these days and some of our teachers need a break.If anyone is interested in joining the teaching rotation or knows of someone who might be, please speak to Lynnette Burry.

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Winter Happenings

- **Sunday, December 7th: Sunday School Pageant**
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- **Sunday, December 7th: “A Tuba Christmas”** The Big Brass of the Medicine Hat Concert Band Society present a TUBA CHRISTMAS at Westminster United Church at 2 p.m. Admission will be a food donation to the food bank, or a cash donation to the new Wheelchair Lift at Westminster. Come out and enjoy this most unique singalong of some of your favourite seasonal music!
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- **Sunday, December 14th: Senior Choir Cantata**
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- **Sunday, December 21st: Wear your favourite Christmas sweater/tie/clothes**
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- **Sunday, December 21st: Longest Night** At 7:00 p.m. Westminster will be holding a “Longest Night” Service for people who are experiencing the Christmas season as a time of loss, loneliness, sorrow and darkness.
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- **Friday, January 9th, 2015: Annual Report Deadline** Please have your annual reports ready by this date and give/send them to Cheryl in the office.
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Save the Date

Sunday, February 1st, 2015: Annual Congregational Meeting To be held immediately following worship, including a potluck lunch.

Saturday, February 7th, 2015: Fresh Start Session 3 from 12 noon — 5 p.m. Beginning with a potluck lunch, the topics for Session 3 are “Roles and Expectations” and “Family and Friends”

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Fresh Start Round #2

— by Rev. Jan Stevenson

You really had to be there. A dozen Westminster folk met with facilitators Rev Bob & Rev Sarah Wallace and Jane Franz to explore modules about Entering a New System and Power, Authority and Influence. A picture speaks a thousand words: In this case we viewed an early episode of the BBC sitcom The Vicar of Dibley in which the parish council was distressed by the arrival of a new vicar—a woman (back in the days when our British colleagues had yet to embrace the ordination of women). The story offered plenty of insights about starting up in a new pastoral relationship, congregational power structures and how we can find our way through the process of developing our own pastoral relationships between congregation, board of elders, staff members and newcomers Jan, Chelsea, Cheryl (secretary) and Roxanne (bookkeeper). A word from those in the trenches: try doing it ‘the way we have always done it’ when nobody on the team knows the tradition doesn’t work !

Our second session on power, authority and influence struck close to home as we were invited to ‘see’ and name our own powers, both formal and informal. How is agreement coerced or evoked over controversial issues? Whose opinion holds sway, how and why? What or who pulls our strings and pushes our buttons? Our understanding of what makes

groups—congregations—tick helps us to avoid pitfalls and work effectively with who we are in our specific context. Once again the video clip illustrated for us some strategies to incorporate new people and ideas. Our facilitators presented a variety of tools to use in identifying our own constituency, communicating clearly, and building trust and cooperation in pastoral relationships.

As we ended our conversations the process segued automatically into our next session: "Roles and Expectations" and "Family and Friends----- starting with potluck lunch Saturday Feb 7, 12 noon – 5:00 p.m. The Fresh Start program offers plenty of insights to help us establish an intentionally healthy and lasting ministry for Westminster. If you are interested in participating let Cheryl in the church office know.

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Home for the Holidays

--by Rev, Jan Stevenson

I have a hunch there is no time like Christmas to draw us back to our roots: family of origin, extended family, home town, home cooking. On my recent jaunt to Mexico I found myself pondering what makes home, 'home' for us. I visited a ranch owned by two Mayan families, with a compound of buildings made of branches cut even and stuck in the ground with a thatched roof. Hammocks slung from beams, a fire, and a few chairs, tables and shelves furnished what we would see as a 'primitive' dwelling. But given the constant heat and humidity and limited electricity available it made perfect sense: the space between the branches allowed any cooling breeze to waft indoors. I recall seeing similar housing in Zimbabwe, where dried cornstalks were stuffed between branches and walls plastered with mud. Not the Ritz, no fancy embellishments, but a cosy family home none the less.

Here in Canada we expect our homes to come equipped with ensuites, Jacuzzis, air conditioning,

central heating, WiFi and every luxury and labour-saving device you can imagine, all controlled by computer remote. However could we manage without coordinated TVs in every room, and of course, a phone in the bathroom? To top it off, for a vacation we pack up to 'rough it' camping in the wilderness or move into a luxuriously-equipped RV, a home-on-the-road.

What makes a house a home? In my experience, the more fancy installations you've got, the more to repair. Sometimes simple works best. Few things are sadder than the finest house exploding with anger, sorrow or loneliness. And even the meanest hovel filled with love and laughter is a home to be envied.

This year, go 'home'—metaphorically—for Christmas. Find what really matters and dispense with all the extras. May your Christmas be warm in spirit, rich in compassion and gently generous.

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Barnabas' Corner

Special thanks to Arlea Harper for her treat of tea and biscuits to welcome Rev. Catherine Christie on her recent visit from Korea.

Thank you to Pat Evans for her dedication to operating the sound system, and her tireless efforts to have the new wheelchair lift installed and to getting it up and running.

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MERRY CHRISTMAS!