

WESTMINSTER UNITED CHURCH

Fall 2017 Newsletter

Welcome to the Fall Newsletter! It is indeed the fall, although this week it has felt more like winter, what with the not so wonderful dump of wet, heavy snow we experienced on October 2nd. I do believe Mother Nature might have gotten her seasons mixed up. As I write this, it is 3 days after the snowfall, and there is still snow on the ground!

The storm really reeked havoc in and around the city, what with power outages, highway closures, high winds, fallen trees and school closures. And all on a Monday to boot!! Not exactly the way most of us want to start a new week.

That being said, we do have a lot to be thankful for; not the least being the opportunity to come together, after a very hot summer, to worship together and to share fellowship with one another. I sincerely hope that you will all continue to make Westminster United Church a regular part of your life, as we join together in love and friendship and prepare for the coming of Jesus at Christmas.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this newsletter—I can't

do it without all of you. I hope you enjoy reading this edition. Take care and HAPPY FALL! (And don't anyone mention that 'S' word!!!)

.....Anna Marie Hancock

Jan's Jottings

In this liturgical season of Creation, a time when kids get back to school and everybody gets back on schedule after a lazy **hot** summer, maybe it's time to think back to those iconic words: In the beginning...nothing. From the void, from nothingness emerged land and sea, plants and animals, and eventually—on the sixth day—humanity. We could argue incessantly about evolution versus creationism: both miss the point. The story is told the way it is (two versions!) to show God's might that shaped the world as we know it, not as a scientific or philosophical treatise.

I was listening on the radio the other day to an expert in ancient Biblical languages named Sarah Ruden, author of *The Face of Water: A Translator on Beauty and Meaning in the Bible*. She

is fascinated by the hidden humour, rhyme and *double entendres* that she found in the Bible. If we take off our oh-so-serious lenses we too can delight in the laughter hidden in scripture and the sly comedians who provoke it. Adam means *adamah*—earth, soil, dirt. Our passion for cleanliness = godliness forgets that we humans are fundamentally the same as the earth we stand upon, the mud we scrape off our shoes. A few verses later, ‘couple was nude, snake was shrewd’. We miss these phonetic clues when we read translations. Indeed, translators tend to build upon past renderings, just as for centuries (before Gutenberg’s press) copyists had inserted ‘corrections’ and ‘clarifications’ to the text that were repeated so often that they were incorporated into scripture. Reverent attitudes towards the words that comprise the Word of God forget that these are human words, with human emotions and a sense of humour. Ruden’s observations come as a refreshing break to shake up our preconceptions.

The story of Jonah, for example, is a parody of typical prophetic narratives—avoiding the call like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos; dramatic surprise as Ninevah repents—the text depicts everyone and everything, including animals, clad in sackcloth and ashes--and the *denouement* with the supposed whale that swallows Jonah. It’s a spoof, so read it with a grin. Taking scripture seriously doesn’t mean you

can’t appreciate its occasional subtle absurdity or hyperbole.

You must be born again: the word used could mean ‘take it from the top’, starting from the beginning, certainly not crawling back into the womb, even less the ritual ‘born again’ conversion demanded by some Christian groups.

When confronted by a pushy Syrophonician woman (Mark 7:24-30) Jesus resorts to diminutive expressions—a “little girl” possessed by a ‘little demon’ (Greek words rhyme, so it’s a play on words)—and portrays a feast in which pushy ‘little doggies’ (slang) gorge on the abundant crumbs dropped from the table with plenty left over (divine feast in which all are fed?). There are other, more common words for child, demon, canine: the choice of vocabulary is significant.

Look up Ruden online or cbc.ca/tapestry podcast to hear more. Prepare to laugh—healthy for you because it releases feel-good serotonin. God give us laughter!

“You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.”

.....Jane Goodall

Nine Ways to Reimagine Your Church's Ministry

Many churches are finding it harder and harder to sustain full time paid ministry. The most common response is to reduce ministry hours, or look for a cheaper alternative – student supply, for example, or only calling ministers in salary Category A or B.

These responses often end up being short term gain for long term pain. They take the pressure off the budget now, but usually contribute to the long-term process of decline. Fewer hours means less ministry. And it becomes harder to attract ministers who need to make a living.

When we're faced with an urgent situation, we look for a quick fix. But there is no quick fix. The warning signs of decline have been with us for thirty years. It didn't happen overnight. It won't be fixed overnight.

Preparing for the future is more about transforming deeply entrenched attitudes and habits than it is about finding some magic button we can press. That change in attitude can only happen with patience and persistence over time – which is hard to do when anxiety about the future is high. But it's what is called for.

Here are nine ways that even the smallest congregation can reimagine

and refocus its ministry.

Start with Why

“Why are we here? What is our purpose?” These are the basic questions every church should ask.

These are deep questions of identity and mission. They can't be answered with nice-sounding generalities (“We seek to be an inclusive community, welcoming to all”) but with clear specifics. What exactly are we here for? What difference does it make that we are here?

Management guru Peter Drucker says that the purpose of a church is to produce “transformed individuals.” Whose lives will be changed and in what way because of the church? That's what churches need to wrestle with honestly, imaginatively, courageously and prayerfully.

God gives the church its purpose -- to carry on Christ's work through the power of the Spirit. But each community needs to work out for itself what it means in practical terms to be faithful to that purpose. We need to create as many opportunities as we can think of to talk about this question. It's number one because it's the most important.

Look at Assets First

Assets are all the things we have that make ministry possible. They include

buildings and money, but they also include less tangible things like the abilities of our members, accumulated wisdom and experience, connections to the community, the faith we have inherited and the presence of the Spirit.

Even the smallest community has a wealth of assets, many of which they may not recognize. When we are struggling, it's easy to see only deficits – what we don't have rather than what we do have. The church begins to regard itself a problem to be solved. And because it sees only what is lacking, it looks outside for an “expert” solution, which makes it feel even more inadequate.

Focusing on assets can open our eyes to the potential of the community to creatively address its challenges. While outside knowledge and experience is valuable, the answer is found first of all “in here” – in the assets and capacities already present in the community.

Be realistic about your deficits. But start with your assets.

Gather in order to Scatter

We're conditioned to think that “church” happens when people come into the building, for worship, meetings or activities. Therefore, we see our main job as bringing more people in. It's important to bring people in, but in our time, the impact of the church will

felt be less through the programs and activities within the church, and more when people are equipped to live out their faith in their daily lives – in their families, workplaces, neighborhoods and communities. We need to see the church as the place where we gather in order to be equipped to scatter into God's world.

Distinguish Means from Ends

A church's “end” is its mission or purpose (not to be confused with a “mission statement.”) One way to discern our ends is to answer three questions suggested by Gil Rendle and Alice Mann:

Who are we?

What is God calling us to do?

Who is our neighbor?

The church's means are all the ways it puts the answers to these questions into practice, which includes money, buildings and staff.

It's common in churches to talk about a means – a balanced budget, a beloved building, a longstanding program – as if it were an end in itself. We need to be sure we are putting our means at the service of our ends – and be willing to find other means if the ones we have aren't doing the job.

Rethink Why you need a Minister

Churches often think of ministry as a list of tasks -- preaching, visiting,

going to meetings.

Many churches with part time ministers expect the minister to show up for worship every Sunday. Since most people's primary experience of church is Sunday morning, this shields the congregation from the full consequences of part time ministry because there is no time left for mission or outreach.

Maybe having your part time minister spend most of his or her time preparing for a one hour Sunday service is not the best use of their time. Maybe there are other, more important things your minister should be doing. Start with your "Why?" and ask how the paid staff you have can best serve that end.

(An interesting example is Cariboo Presbyterian Church in British Columbia. This church is a network of house churches in small, scattered communities. The paid ministry staff train and equip local people to lead worship, prayer and pastoral care in each house church. See www.cariboopresbyterianchurch.bc.ca)

Commit to Collaborate Upfront

Cooperating with other churches sounds like a good idea. But if you wait till you're looking for a new minister, it's too late. Your immediate needs of the moment may not line up with those of neighboring churches.

The commitment to a cooperative

vision should be made now so that you can respond to future ministry needs out of that commitment rather than trying to patch together an arrangement on short notice.

And – your potential cooperative partners may not be United Churches!

Think Bi-Vocational

Part-time ministry may save the congregation money, but it doesn't provide the minister with a living income. Congregations need to be proactive and innovative in thinking about what other sources of income could be available to potential candidates. This might mean seeking a minister who has marketable skills in an area where there is need within the community and making that part of the search process. We can no longer assume that full time ministry is the norm, but it should not be entirely up to ministers to bear the burden of that reality.

Your Church is not Your Building

The largest churches in the New Testament had around fifty people. That's how many would fit in someone's house. And the vast majority of churches in the world today have fewer than fifty members. The problem is not that our congregations are too small to be effective. It's that many of them are struggling to maintain aging and costly buildings.

Ask what the life and ministry of your church could look like apart from the building in which it is currently housed. This is hard, because we're so used to thinking of the church as a building. Closing the building usually means closing the church.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Imagine how your church could still be a vibrant Christian community if you didn't have your building.

Pray

Adapting to change is a spiritual, not just an organizational challenge. Change is a journey of the heart. Find ways to invite as many people in your church as possible into that journey. Discover ways for them to participate in the long-term spiritual discerning of your congregation. And trust that God is not finished with the church.

Written by the Rev. Paul Miller, posted Thursday, June 8, 2017.
<http://waterloopres.blogspot.ca/2017/06/nine-ways-to-reimagine-your-churchs.html>
Rev. Miller may be reached at pmiller@watpres.ca or 905-321-4309

.....Submitted by Chelsea Masterman
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Representatives from the boards at Westminster, Gordon Memorial, Peace and Fifth Avenue Memorial United Churches met this summer for a retreat at the historic

Hargrave Ranch out by Walsh (the Hargraves are members of Peace United). Jan and Chelsea facilitated the retreat, in



which we reflected on and connected around Paul Miller's article "Nine Ways to Reimagine Your Church's Ministry."

"Joy is a decision, a really brave one, about how you are going to respond to life"

-----Wess Stafford

Woman Tells Pastor: “I Won’t Be Going to Your Church Anymore”—His Mic-Dropping Response Has the Internet Applauding

Posted on August 2, 2017



Bri Lamm

There’s no better way to make a point than the use of an analogy. You know, when someone explains something using different examples to express similarities. And there’s no one who uses analogies better than a church pastor.

Pastor Andy Harris of The Church of the Cross in Haughton, Louisiana, shared a story on his Facebook page about a woman who made the decision to leave her church after she was burned by some others in the congregation—sound familiar?

It’s not stated whether or not Pastor Andy’s story was a real-life example, but its reliability and the analogy that it paints is enough to sell us on its message either way. His viral post has now been shared over 220,000 times.

As the story goes, a woman approached her pastor to inform him that she’d no longer be attending his church.

Perplexed by her decision, the pastor pressed her as to why.

“Ah! I saw a woman gossiping about another member; a man that is a hypocrite; the worship team living wrong; people looking at their phone during service; among so many other things wrong in your church,” she replied.

The pastor was sad to hear her reasoning, but not surprised, as he’s heard it all before. That’s why he let her go. But not before she did one final thing for him.

“But before you go, do me a favor: Take a full glass of water and walk around the church three times without spilling a drop on the ground. Afterward, leave the church if you desire.”

An odd request to say the least, but the woman knew it would be a piece of cake.

She followed his instructions, walked three times around the church with her full glass of water, and returned to him—task completed.

The pastor prompted her with just one more thing before she left:

“Before you leave I want to ask you one more question. When you were walking around the church, did you see anyone gossiping?”

She told him, “no.”

Then he asked if she’d spotted any hypocrites, or come across anyone on their phones.

Again the woman replied, “no.”

Then the pastor offered up this perspective-shattering, thought-provoking analogy that would leave even some nonbelievers shouting “amen.”

“You were focused on the glass, to make sure you didn’t stumble and spill any water. It’s the same with our life. When we keep our eyes on Jesus, we don’t have time to see the mistakes of others. We will reach out a helping hand to them and concentrate on our own walk with the Lord.”

And that my friends, is worthy of a mic-drop.

——submitted by Chelsea Masterman

“Believe you can and you’re halfway there.”

.....Theodore Roosevelt
26th U.S. President

The Good News and the Sad News About Being on PAR

GOOD:

The donations are constant, as in the same amount each month, the same time each month and it doesn’t take a holiday. Each month the church receives about \$6300.00 to the general account and \$1000.00 for the Mission and Service account. Cash donations from envelopes and loose change are about between \$4800.00 and \$5000.00. It is easy to make changes to PAR — just a phone call or by word of mouth.

SAD:

PAR was started in July 2001. Some donors have given the same amount each month for 16 years. Guess it is so worry free, we don’t even think to make a change.

Some food for thought!

———Donna Scharf
for PAR and Finance

*“Three things cannot be long hidden:
the sun, the moon, and the truth.”*

.....*Buddha*

A Much Sought-After Recipe

Arlea’s Scones

Preheat oven to 450 degrees.

Mix together:

3 cups of flour

1/3 cup sugar or substitute

5 tsp. baking powder

1/2 tsp. salt

1 – 1 1/2 cups chopped ginger,
raisins, dried cranberries or other fruit.

Cut in:

3/4 cup margarine

Combine:

1 egg

1 cup buttermilk

Pour liquids into the dry ingredients.
Stir until the mixture leaves the bowl.

Turn on to a floured board. Knead, fold
in half, knead, fold in half, knead, etc.

—About eight times or until dough is
smooth. Roll out to 3/4 thick. Cut into
shapes and place on ungreased cookie
sheet.

Bake for 12 to 15 minutes, until lightly
browned.

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Other News of Interest

Where have you gone to church?

According to the pins stuck into the
map of Canada, we have attended
services at 303 locations!

Sandra’s Shower

Fifteen ladies attended a shower in
celebration of Sandra Oancia and
Wayne McDonald’s wedding.

We wish them a lifetime of love and
happiness.

Poinsettia Tea

The UCW will be holding a bake sale
and tea on November 18th at 2:00 PM.

Other UCW News

The next UCW meeting will be at 1:30
on November 9 in the lounge. Come
and see what we are about. You don’t
need to be a member to attend.

*“There’s always going to be bad stuff
out there. But here’s the amazing thing
—light trumps darkness every time.
You stick a candle into the dark, but
you can’t stick the dark into the light.”*

.....*Jodi Picoult*
Author

An August in the Life of Rev. Chelsea

For one month in the summer, WUC does not hold services (this year it was August) and the congregation generally chooses to close the office for much of that time. However, behind the scenes, your clergy are often busy tidying up administrative loose ends from the past few months, catching up on pastoral visits, and preparing for the upcoming seasons.

In case you have ever wondered what a minister does when the church building itself is more or less closed, please allow me to share my experience of August 2017 with you.

During the rest of the year, I find that worship, working directly with people, be it committee work or pastoral care, face-to-face, as part of Vacation Bible School, online or by phone take high priority in my day-to-day schedule. As such, the paperwork often takes a back seat – which, in my case, generally means my desk winds up looking as though a small paper factory has exploded across it (see photo!).

This was the case at the beginning of August, so I spent a couple days starting to catch up on administration – expenses, filing, mail and e-mail, etc. During this time, I also stopped in at the hospital for a pastoral visit and worked with Jan to start planning the

4-board retreat that would be happening later in August.

Then, I took 2 weeks of vacation, from August 3-16. It was wonderful. I am grateful to Jan for holding down the fort for both of us while I was gone – conducting pastoral visits, presiding at a funeral, preparing and leading worship at Gordon Memorial and Peace on August 13, and doing her own share of administrative catch-up.

The day I returned to the office after vacation was a Thursday. Jan and I took the day to finalize the 4-board retreat, which the two of us would be facilitating together. On Friday, I finished a few of the things on my to-do list for the retreat. The retreat was



that Saturday, so we left Medicine Hat at 8am and I got home around 7pm. It was an awesome experience to visit the beautiful and historic Hargrave Ranch (the Hargraves are part of Peace UC), get to know everyone better and see various folks from our churches meeting each other for the first time. It

was especially good to have meaningful conversation and do some planning around the future of the 4 churches: Westminster, Fifth Avenue Memorial, Gordon Memorial and Peace United. The article Jan found for us to focus our conversation around was excellent, and is included in this newsletter: “Nine Ways to Reimagine Your Church’s Ministry,” by Paul Miller.

That Sunday, I attended FAM with the rest of the WUC folks. Later, in coffee hour, I continued to build inter-congregational relationships with the folks at FAM and made some pastoral connections with people from WUC. Coffee hour is one of my favourite times to touch base with congregants: sometimes building relationship through casual interactions, other times having in-depth conversations about loss, love, faith and family, church business, or making arrangements to have these conversations later in the week.

The week of August 21-27, I continued to catch up on admin, debriefed the retreat with Jan and David Pollard from FAM and then we started planning for the next 4-board meeting – to be held in November. The Recovery Centre Community Kitchen was at the church on August 23, so I checked in with them. In consultation with Jan, I started putting together our worship calendar for September-

December. I also prepared worship and presided at GMUC and Peace on August 27. This week was admittedly a little slower for me than some weeks are... and since I had worked an extra 12+ hours on my days off the week before (the Friday and Saturday with the retreat), taking some flex time was a blessing.

From August 28-September 3, among other things I continued working on the worship calendar, got back to our Sunday School coordinator around intergenerational worship dates, and corresponded with Paul Miller to obtain his permission to reprint his article in our bulletin. I wrote a reference letter, helped arrange a couple worship services for later in the year at South Country Village (at the invitation of the chaplain there), connected with MHART over some sewage backup that was happening in the manse and put MHART in touch with our faithful property committee. That Saturday morning, I rode Peace United’s float in the Irvine Twenty Mile Post Days (check out our Facebook page for a photo!). In the afternoon I connected with the Irvine community by joining Peace at the table they had set up in the Sports Complex to sell various crafts and delicious goodies. Then I returned to WUC to celebrate Al Piotrowski’s 80th birthday with a bunch of his friends and family (biological, chosen and church family!). Through it all, I

prepared for and presided at worship at WUC on Sept. 3, then participated in a meeting of our joint Music and Worship Committee (GMUC, Peace and WUC) after the service.

August was a fantastic opportunity to get caught up from the previous months and prepare for when the office re-opened and we found ourselves all back together for our regular weekly worship, committees and various ministries. It's good to see everyone back at church, and for those whose paths haven't yet crossed with mine, I look forward to catching up soon!

Blessings,
Chelsea

“There are good ships and wood ships, ships that sail the sea; but the best ships are friendships, may they always be!”

.....*Irish Proverb*

GOALS OF, BY AND FOR
THE WESTMINSTER
CONGREGATION

Wilton Thorsteinson is the author of, and accepts sole responsibility for the information, ideas and opinions stated on, this document.

This document was revised on October 12, 2017.

The purpose of this document is to ask the congregants, the clergy and the friends of the Westminster Congregation of The United Church of Canada located in Medicine Hat, Alberta, (hereafter called “the Westminster Congregation”) to engage in the creative process of congregational soul searching and congregational goal setting.

For the purpose of orientation, I recommend the reader read:

- One or more dictionaries for the definition of *goal*
- One or more thesauruses for the synonyms and antonyms of *goal*
- Wikipedia’s articles titled *Goal setting* and *Dunbar’s number*.

I believe that the mission, purpose, reason-for-being, of the Westminster Congregation is to improve the quality of life and standard of living by causing the congregants, clergy and friends to profess and practice (“to live”) the principles of the philosophy of Christianity, including, in particular, the foundational principles commonly called *The Great Commandment, The Great Commission, The Golden Rule, The Beatitudes*.

In this document:

- *congregant* means an adult, adolescent or child whose name is recorded on the

congregational records as a congregant.

- *congregation of Christians* or *Christian congregation* means an organization of people who want to live as Christians – as disciples of Jesus - to live Christlike – to live a Christian life.
- *goal setting* means the creative process by which a person discerns her or his personal goals, a group of people discern their group goals, an organization of groups of people discern their organization goals, an industry of organizations of groups of people discern their industry goals, an association of industries of organizations of groups of people discern their association goals.
- *ministry* means an identifiable service perceived, planned and performed by a person, a group, an organization, an industry, an association of industries, (*the benefactor/s, the contributor/s, the donor/s, the giver/s, the minister/s, the provider/s, etc.*) for the purpose of improving the quality of life and standard of living of an identifiable person, group, organization, industry, association (*the beneficiary/ies, the receiver/s, the recipient/s, etc.*).
- *Southeast Alberta* means the geographical area of the City of Medicine Hat, the Town of Redcliff and Cypress County.

The congregational names of the four congregations of The United Church of

Canada located in Southeast Alberta are, in alphabetical order:

- Fifth Avenue Memorial – Medicine Hat
- Gordon Memorial – Redcliff
- Peace – Irvine
- Westminster – Medicine Hat

In 2016, each of the four congregations had the following number of members, non-residential members and adherents:

- Fifth Avenue Memorial 298 members, 61 non-resident members
- Gordon Memorial 96 members
- Peace 40 members
- Westminster 184 members, 10 non-resident members, 93 adherents

In 2016, 76,522 people lived in Southeast Alberta:

• City of Medicine Hat	63,260
• Redcliff	5,600
• Cypress County	7,662
• TOTAL	76,522

In 2016, 711 of the 76,522 people living in Southeast Alberta, less than 1% of the population of Southeast Alberta, chose to be congregants of 1 of the 4 congregations of The United Church of Canada located in Southeast Alberta.

In 2016, 75,811 of the 76,522 people living in Southeast Alberta, more than 99% of the population, chose not to be congregants of 1 of the 4 congregations located in Southeast Alberta.

The following information is printed on page 7 of the *2016 Annual Report of the Westminster Congregation*:

The following information is printed on page 3 of the *2016 Annual Report of the Fifth Avenue Memorial Congregation*:

The following goal statements are samples only:

1. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to have more than 650 men, women, adolescents and children as congregants.
2. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to have the congregation governed, led, managed by the Congregational Leadership Group democratically elected annually by the congregants at the annual general meeting.
3. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to have more than 5 companies of between 60 and 180 congregants per company.
4. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to have each company governed, led, managed by the Company Leadership Group democratically elected annually by the congregants of each company at the annual general meeting.
5. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to have one-half of the congregants of a company of more than 150 congregants start a new company.
6. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to have each company have the Annual Ministries Plan of the Company approved by a majority of the congregants of the company, by a majority of the members of the Company Leadership Group, by a majority of the members of the Congregational Leadership Group and by a majority of the congregants of the Westminster Congregation.
7. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to have an annual budget equal to more than \$1,500 per adult congregant per year.
8. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to be a debt-free congregation.
9. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to be a congregant-financed congregation.
10. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to have

the companies of the congregation share the real property (AKA land and architecture) and the personal property (AKA artifacts, chattels) located at 101 6th Street SE, Medicine Hat, Alberta.

11. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to own the real property (AKA land and architecture) and the personal property (AKA artifacts, chattels) located at 101 6th Street SE, Medicine Hat, Alberta, independently, free and clear of any claim by The United Church of Canada and by any creditor of The United Church of Canada.
12. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to have each congregant who wants to serve as a member of the Congregational Leadership Group to complete the Congregational Leadership Group Training Program *before* he or she is eligible for election as a member.
13. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to have each congregant who wants to serve as a member of a Company Leadership Group to complete the Company Leadership Group Training Program *before* he or she is eligible for election as a member.
14. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to have each ordained minister of The United Church of Canada who wants to serve

the Westminster Congregation to complete the Congregational Leadership Group Training Program and the Company Leadership Group Training Program *before* he or she is eligible to serve as the incumbent of the position of ordained minister.

15. The congregational goal of the Westminster Congregation is to have the following paid positions of work:
 - 1 or more positions for an ordained minister of The United Church of Canada
 - 1 or more positions of an administrative assistant
 - 1 or more positions for a Music Leader, an Adult Choir Leader, a Junior Choir Leader, a Children's Choir Leader
 - 1 position for a building caretaker
 - 1 position for a security person

Every goal needs a plan of action and every plan of action needs a goal. A goal without a plan of action is merely a dream, an idea, wishful thinking.

Each plan of action is performed by people. People who do the work of the plan of action must be involved in planning the work.

Marlene Wilson is the author of *HOW TO MOBILIZE CHURCH VOLUNTEERS*. This book is an excellent source of information and ideas. The term *management* (AKA *governance*,

leadership) is defined on page 47 as follows:

“It simply means working with and through other people to accomplish organizational goals and purposes. Since 99% of the churches work force is unpaid and unordained member volunteers, learning how to work with and through them is essential.

The functions a manager or leader needs to perform are the same whether he or she is managing IBM, the Red Cross, or St. John’s Church. They are:

- 1. Plan - Goals – Objectives*
- 2. Organize – Plans – Job Designs*
- 3. Staff – Recruit – Interview – Place*
- 4. Direct – Train – Supervise*
- 5. Control – Evaluate”*

Friends, let us not ask what our Creator, our country, our community can do for our congregation. Instead, let us together ask what our congregation can do for our Creator, our country and our community to improve the quality of life and standard of living. *(Adapted from the inaugural speech given by President John F. Kennedy on January 20, 1961)*

“A room without books is like a body without a soul.”

.....Marcus Tullius Cicero

Suicide Prevention

.....by Jan Stevenson

Trauma wrapped in shame and dipped in enigma.

That’s suicide in a nutshell. We see headlines about suicide rates among Indigenous youth and those who have resorted to suicide to escape abuse or bullying. For centuries it has been taboo, vilified by religious and social agencies. Unfortunately it is also more frequent than we would like to think. Suicide in our homes or church family opens wounds for many who have been touched by it.

Why would anyone take their own life? Loss. Abandonment. Despair. Shame. Depression. Unremitting physical pain. Isolation. Fear. Sense of worthlessness and lack of meaning in life. PTSD. Statistics show that middle aged men coping with loss or failure, previous attempts or examples, substance abuse, access to means, and perpetual high stress levels all point towards suicidal thinking. When in crisis, one’s perspective narrows and thinking is distorted. Obvious self-harm—cutting, extreme dieting, substance abuse—may be ways in which people, especially youth, try to find a way to stay alive.

Suicide bequeaths to the living feelings of guilt (why didn’t I see it coming?), shame (I hope people don’t talk about

it, judge us), anger (how could the deceased do this to us?) and grief at the death of a beloved. Our faith teaches us that there is always hope, but when darkness pervades our lives, any hope is hard to find. Suicide is never a reason for blame, distancing or gossip. As people of faith, we are called to respond with compassion and caring to those who are pondering suicide or bereaved by it. Rev. Jan has done SafeTalk training – a suicide awareness and prevention training program, and Rev. Chelsea has attended suicide awareness presentations, most recently one focused on the book/Netflix series “13 Reasons Why” and how to talk about it with youth. .

Some learnings: **T-A-L-K**

Tell, or more precisely, listen. The ‘telling’ can be understood through them clearly saying it, through what we see in their actions, what we hear them say, what we sense or what we learn about them through their life. Be alert to ‘invitations’ of suicidal thoughts

- withdrawal (leave me alone)
- peaceful surrender (I have found a solution)
- giving away cherished possessions (I want you to have this..)
- personality changes (aggression, carelessness, moodiness)
- g a l l o w s h u m o u r (We all gotta die someday)

- Inattention to personal care and hygiene

Ask directly. Are you thinking about suicide? Some people fear that bringing it up will put the idea in someone’s mind – it will not. If it is in their mind, though, it opens the door for them to get help. If they are thinking about it, ask if they have a plan. Note the ‘invitations’ you have perceived that lead you to such questions. Trust your instincts.

Listen attentively. Keep calm. Ask open-ended questions that encourage a full response. Respect choices and feelings with empathy. Assure that you are there, listening, caring and willing to share the burden. Never trivialize or dismiss how another sees and experiences life—take secret fears and sorrows seriously. Commit time and energy to hear. Do not try to dissuade or offer instant quickie solutions that minimize problems—this unintentionally devalues what is experienced by the other as crisis. Just listen. Be prepared to hear so you don’t feel overwhelmed and thus want to pass the buck. Just being present and listening say more than any words could.

Keep safe. Once you have established that the risk of suicide is present, you need to take action to keep the person safe. It is very important to get the help the person needs, which may include

help from family, a counsellor, a medical doctor, or the emergency department of the hospital. If you think an emergency is about to happen right away, call 9-1-1. Don't keep it a secret – ensure they are getting help in dealing with their thoughts of suicide. You may want to create a safe-plan with them. Ask if they have a plan. Figure out how you can disable their plan safely, if possible. Explore personal strengths and sources of meaning that you have discerned and seek to alleviate identified stress factors. Assure that there are sources of ongoing support. Provide the contact information listed below. Carry “Distress Centre” and “When You Need Help” cards in your wallet. Follow up in the future as a sign of your ongoing concern.

Should you be the one contemplating suicide, reach out. Get help. Suicide is not the only answer. Be open to alternatives – if one person does not help as you hoped they would, go to someone else. Keep going until you receive the caring support you need. If you have been involved in suicide prevention, practice self-care. This is traumatic for you, too, just as it is for first responders. You have metaphorically accepted a heavy burden so seek counselling to deal with it.

Perhaps the toughest to deal with is a suicide that has no signs or warnings. This compacts shock, grief and stigma into an even more brutal trauma. Some folks are unknowingly predisposed to suicide. Those who have suffered childhood epilepsy, for example, are 5 times more prone to suicide. Check with a physician or suicide prevention counsellor to learn if you or your family members are at a higher risk level. Establish a family policy to talk about suicidal ideation so you can intervene.

Be gentle with those who have been bereaved by a suicide. Don't blame them: They are not responsible for the tragedy; it is the action of the deceased. In some cases there are no invitations or signs, so the death is as shocking as a motor accident or natural disaster. Be as open with survivors as with potential suicides. Avoid implying guilt. Become comfortable enough with the subject that you can support and converse with those suffering the social stigma attached to suicide. Your "I don't know what to say" excuse isolates and punishes those most in need of compassion. Think 'ministry of presence': Be there. Listen. Share the grief. Take care of tasks left undone - food, housecleaning, laundry. Be the secret angel who holds things together when grief disrupts lives. Offer your shoulder for tears and a big hug of

support. Accompany through the stages of grieving—anger, disbelief, self-doubt, shock, despair.

Recent legislation allows ‘assisted dying’ in extreme situations. Many can empathize with those who would prefer this to years of chronic pain with no hope for the future. Those who cannot find meaning and purpose in their lives may likewise consider death as a valid option. Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl observed that WW2 concentration camp inmates could survive unthinkable horror as long as it had meaning for them. Without such meaning, they were lost. Our calling is to help others in need to discern their own sense of meaning and purpose. May we do so with courage and conviction.

If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of suicide:

- Text “START” to 741741
- Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

The Distress Centre provides 24 hour support, counselling and resources to anyone in the 403 area code. Call 1-800-784-2433.

This article is in support of Brenda Fischer and Jim Summers who hope , that by encouraging suicide awareness, they can find meaning in their son’s death. Thanks to Erin Reeder, Suicide Prevention Coordinator, Brenda Fischer and Rev. Chelsea Masterman

“We look forward to the time when the power to love will replace the love of power. Then will our world know the blessing of peace.”

.....William Gladstone
