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# Tidings

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Advent/Christmas/Epiphany 2020

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# Tidings



David Wardlaw

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**T**he Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB) is highlighted in this issue. The feature article by Henry Reinders describes the transformative impact of teaching yield-increasing farming techniques based on agricultural science to people previously undertaking subsistence farming using local, traditional agriculture methods. In so doing it reveals an aspect of CFGB and CFGB-partners programming that I suspect will be unfamiliar to many – it certainly was to me. FSA supports the CFGB every year via the Grow-a-Row project which is undertaken jointly with St. Marys United. A final report on Grow-a-Row for 2020 is found in the committee reports section.

This is the last of the four issues of *Tidings* published in the calendar year. The time is right to thank and acknowledge the many people who contributed their time and talent in 2020 to make this magazine vibrant and sustainable. There are far too many individuals to list by name, so I'll recognize the myriad of volunteers in groupings. First, there is the *Tidings* Team as listed on the inside of the front cover. Next, the authors of the articles and reports. In 2020: there were regular reports from the chairs or designate reporters of 12 committees and groups, and a regular message from our minister; 35 articles by members and adherents of FSA; and four articles by guest authors from outside FSA. Finally, there are the fiscal contributions which make possible the high quality hard copy printing of each issue, namely our paid advertisers and the congregation as a whole by virtue of approving an annual budget for Communications & Marketing that includes a supplement to the advertising revenue. To all of you, I express my sincere thanks and deep appreciation for the high quality of your varied and valued contributions to *Tidings*.

The *Tidings* Team wishes you a peaceful, joyful and restorative holiday season. May Advent provide opportunities for reflection and worshipful moments, even amidst the changes, disruptions and stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic. †

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Rev. Dr. David McKane

It has been a most remarkable year with COVID-19 affecting every facet of our lives. Even as we prepare to celebrate Christmas we are still unable to sing our Christmas carols except in the privacy of our cars or homes. No room in the inn is a familiar Bible story, the journey of Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and unable to find a room, Mary births Jesus in a cow-stall. It's part of our Christian DNA. It is also part of our contemporary Canadian story. Thousands of Canadians have no homes or live in inadequate accommodation, one in seven of them children. Over the years FSA has been involved through its Mission Outreach Committee in building affordable housing in London, 425 King Street and Indwell at 356 Dundas Street. All of this is good work but we need to encourage all levels of government to address the issue of homelessness.

235,000 Canadians are homeless in any given year, not a large percentage in a population of almost 38 million but, for some 235,000, too many. Four

and a half million Canadians fall below the level where they can feed themselves and 20% of all prescriptions written are never filled because the people who need the meds cannot afford to pay for them. To address these inequities it will cost us but what we so often forget is that it costs us now to maintain the status quo. Every \$10 invested in affordable housing saves us \$22 in Social Services. Economically it is a no brainer. Politically it doesn't even make it onto the radar. Why is that? The faith communities in Exeter, with no emergency shelters, note that half of Huron County made less than a living wage in 2019, and are attempting to address the problem, (see November *Broadview*.) "No one chooses to be homeless," notes Ryan Erb, Director of the Exeter United Way ... "maybe it's the loss of a job or a broken relationship, but once in it's really difficult to get out." "No room in the inn" is not just a Christmas story. Huron County is just up the road and the City of London could do so much more. †

# CANADIAN FOODGRAINS BANK – FEEDING THE 15,000



\*Henry  
Reinders

**C**anadian Foodgrains Bank is a Canadian humanitarian organization comprised of 15 churches and church-based agencies working together to end global hunger. The key word is “together” because we know that we could not achieve our success unless we work together with God blessing the work we do. Last year we provided over \$42 million of assistance to 866,000 people in 34 countries.

In February of 2018, I was part of a group of ten people from across Canada, and two Foodgrains Bank staff members, who visited Malawi to learn about the work being done by our partners.

Kolinda David is a 52-year-old grandmother looking after seven grandchildren and

and very little furniture. She and her husband farm two acres of land, and for the last few years have been unable to grow enough food to feed the family. Through Canadian Foodgrains Bank partners, Kolinda and her family received an emergency monthly food assistance ration of 10 kg soybeans, 50 kg corn, 10 kg beans and 2 L oil.

When we visited Kolinda’s field, we saw a corn crop that was weak, spindly and stunted with no hope of yielding a crop that would meet their requirements. Poor soil fertility, improper planting techniques, and drought were some of the reasons for this poor crop. And despite the continual setbacks, Kolinda insisted they had to plant corn because it was all they knew and what they needed. It was obvious that the single, most critical factor holding her, and many others, back from improved food security was lack of knowledge.

Further north, in the Ekwendeni region of Malawi, our group split up to spend three days living with Malawian families as part of our home stay experience. My host was Pressings Moyo, a community leader within his area who was part of a \$2.75 million Malawi Farmer-to-Farmer Agroecology (MAFFA) project sponsored by Global Affairs Canada and Presbyterian World Service and Development.

Prior to becoming involved with MAFFA, Pressings could not grow enough food for his family of eight on the 10 acres of land he farmed. Through our partners he learned to grow crops other than corn. He learned that legume plants such as pigeon peas or ground nuts (peanuts), not only supplied an alternate form of nutrition, but they also improved soil fertility by fixing atmospheric nitrogen in the soil. He learned that planting one corn seed per hole in holes 6” apart and rows 15” apart would allow each plant to grow to its full potential. He learned how to grow other crops such as cassava, millet, bamboa nuts,



Malawian farmer, Kolinda David standing in her sparse, drought-stricken field of corn.

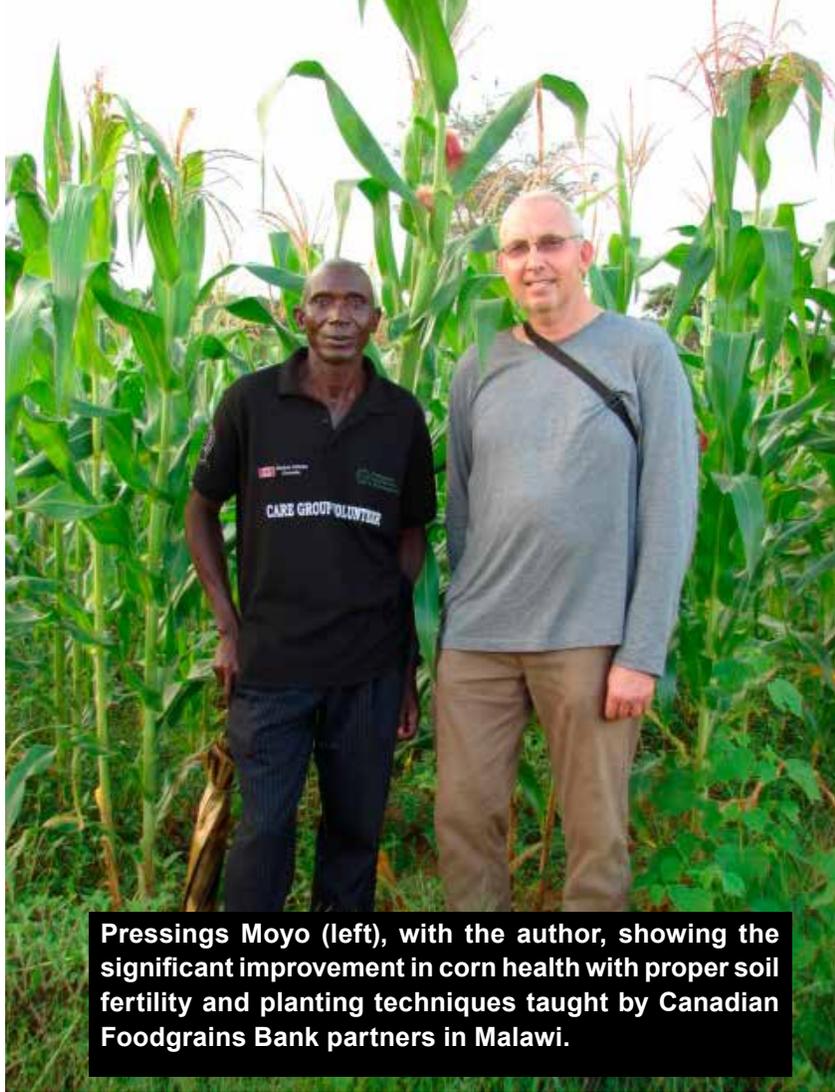
her paralyzed brother, Ntoso Kasisha. She lives in a small brick house with 3 rooms, a dirt floor,

sorghum, chili peppers and soybeans. In seven short years, Pressings went from not having enough food for his family to having excess that he could sell. He has been able to improve his standard of living and he has been able to send his children for further education beyond grade eight.

It doesn't stop there! As a community leader, Pressings is now hosting meetings and training sessions and others are learning from him. His success speaks volumes to others and more and more people are eager to learn how he and others have been so successful. To sum it up, Jane Saranda, a fellow MAFFA participant says, "Using these new farming techniques means no more piece work, no more hospital for sick children, no more worries." Their lives have become so much better.

There is a beautiful story that goes along with this experience. In 2000, a Canadian university student by the name of Rachel Bezner Kerr came to the Ekwendeni region of Malawi, looking for 10 mothers, facing hardship with hunger, to work with for her master's degree. She started a program to teach cooking skills using different vegetables to improve health and nutrition. The program ran for one year and was remarkably successful. The following year more women came forward asking to be a part of the project. Because Rachel had completed her work, local people working at the Ekwendeni Centre took up the challenge and created a group to carry on with her work. That year 30 women signed up and were successful in the outcome.

The program kept expanding until it became the MAFFA program in 2012. At the time of our visit, it had resulted in over 15,000 farm families becoming food secure through learning about new crops, technologies and farming



**Pressings Moyo (left), with the author, showing the significant improvement in corn health with proper soil fertility and planting techniques taught by Canadian Foodgrains Bank partners in Malawi.**

methods to produce food.

ISN'T THAT AMAZING! From 10 women in 2000 to over 15,000 families—FAMILIES—that could be well over 100,000 people in less than 20 years that are now self sufficient. It reminds me so much of the miracle of Jesus feeding the 5000 with five loaves and two fishes. Here we have the miracle of the feeding of the 15,000 because people like you cared enough to run growing projects, to host fundraising events, to make donations to the work of the Foodgrains Bank. Through the generosity of the matching 4:1 government grants and the efforts of local Christian partners on the ground, your donation is multiplied time and again

to the point where it helps not just one person or one family, but hundreds and maybe even thousands of people.

Thank you for supporting Canadian Foodgrains Bank in our mission to end global hunger. †

*\*Henry Reinders is the Ontario Representative for the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. This text is adapted from his message delivered on Sunday September 13, 2020 as part of the worship service at First-St. Andrew's.*



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\*Florence

# All that Glitters

It was a December morning, back when groups still gathered. Before social distancing was a thing. I lay on my yoga mat in the little country church, contemplating the small bedazzled stiletto hanging above the baby Jesus.

Huh.

I'm pretty sure that wasn't what guided the Magi in the well-loved story, but there it was, dangling incongruously above the rustic crèche. Little wooden figures, representing all the key players, were positioned around the baby. And twinkling above the manger, a three-inch replica of a high-heeled pump; resplendent in gold glitter.

It's interesting what you can find in church basements. Small items, like Christmas decorations that don't quite fit a specific theme. Scraps of wallpaper, pinecones, and pipe cleaners collected and ready for Sunday School. Casserole dishes long forgotten by the original owners. Large items also: mismatched couches, floor lamps that lean ever so slightly to one side, end tables with one leg shorter than the other three.

Church basements are the repository for all sorts of interesting things. Like the furniture, untouched for years, with the distinctive 80's vibe. From the one room in someone's home that, despite the label 'living room,' rarely witnessed any actual living. Pieces simply too good to throw out. The church basement seems, to many, the perfect retirement destination for their not-so-cherished possessions.

We are blessed to receive these items of course, church budgets being what they are. Most are welcomed and put to good use. A little paint here, a slipcover there. Church people are renowned for refreshing, reupholstering, and rewiring. Recognizing possibilities. It's what we do. We can find the perfect spot for just about everything. Including apparently, a bedazzled stiletto.

For everything else, there's the Property Committee's annual yard sale. For \$5 in the early 90s, I bought an actual Kingston traffic light, circa 1972. It was just sitting in the church basement, waiting for me. You would not be the first person to wonder why I would want such a thing. But at the time, I knew a certain little boy, waiting for me at home, would be overjoyed with my purchase.

Perhaps that's one of the greatest gifts we offer to one another – the ability to see value – not only in the things, but also in the people who enter our sacred space. When we open our doors, we're not saying, 'only the bright and sparkly are welcome.' We welcome all. And for those unable to step across the threshold, we go to them; meeting them, where they are, in that moment.

At our best, we grieve with those carrying the anxiety of a recent diagnosis, or coping with loss. We rejoice in the news of recovery and reconciliation. Celebrate new babies and children and fresh perspectives. Open the door to the homesick, and heartsick and lonely.

This is where all who are burdened and heavy laden are offered rest. Where we have the opportunity to lay down



our mantles of pretence and simply be. Trusting that those around us have the grace to accept us as we are. This is where love is. Where we recognize love is love.

Temporarily unable to gather in community because of this new normal, we seek familiar faces through technology. The growing number of people connecting through virtual Sunday morning services reminds us that the church is more than bricks and mortar. The church is its people.

this together.

The church doors will reopen eventually and once more we'll meet face to face.

There will be new ways of doing things; new ways of being. Let's hope that some of the lessons we've learned during this time of isolation are lasting ones. And that, no longer blinded by all that glitters, we're able to see clearly – the baby, lying in the manger.†

Niven



We know there is much work ahead. Eventually we'll have to face the aftermath of this pandemic, the terrible human cost, the economic repercussions. But for now, we stay home. With empty calendars, our lives move at a slower pace. We take walks in the middle of the afternoon to break up the monotony of the four walls. From a distance we say hello to strangers who pass by, and are no longer surprised when they return our greeting with a ready smile. We are kinder because of this crisis. We know we're in

*\*Florence Niven and her husband Don attend Edith Rankin Memorial United Church in Kingston, Ontario. Florence has published a series of essays on the Edith Rankin website and this piece is one of them. It is reproduced here with permission of the author and is the second of her essays to be included in Tidings.*

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Barrie Evans

# GOD in the Time of COVID: The Second Wave

I have had even more time to contemplate God than I anticipated a few months ago. The coronavirus is persisting which makes our lives more constrained, more filled with uncertainty and anxiety. Despite the brief opening up over the summer, we are now into the second wave and more lock-downs. The routines of social distancing, wearing masks, washing and sanitizing hands have become second nature and accepted as a vexatious but necessary part of our daily lives.

During this time of existential crisis I have continued to read and think about Karen Armstrong's *A History of God* (K. Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, NY: Ballantine Books, 1993). It's a strange title if you think about it. How can there be a history

of an eternal presence? The subtitle clarifies this – *The 4,000-year quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*.

What has become clear or clearer to me is that there has been a lot of anthropomorphizing, or making God in our image, throughout the ages. The abilities of planning, acting, punishing and forgiving, listening and talking and even, sleeping and awakening have been attributed to God. It is interesting that these, apart from sleeping and awakening, are solely human characteristics, although some animals possess them in some measure.

However, the Bible in Genesis 1:27 states the opposite: God created Man in His own image. Therefore, all these abilities are God given and thus handed down from the One who originally possessed them. God of the creation story is represented as a kind of super-human being. This idea is very much

present in the representation of the "Gods" outside the monotheistic Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions.

In attempting to represent the idea of God, there are limitations to language which prevent us from doing this with any degree of definitiveness. In fact, I would suggest that there are problems even using the word "God." If we name God as a separate and distinct entity, we are forced into the dialectical logic of distinguishing between "God-Not God." Naming is a process of categorizing what the named thing is and what it is not. The ancient Hebrews got it right when they said that they could not utter the name of God, "Yahweh." Who is able to say what God is not? Where does this leave us in our understanding of God? The 17<sup>th</sup> c. philosopher Spinoza asked a similar question (*A History of God*, p. 312).

I have learned through reading

Karen Armstrong that these are questions which have been asked throughout the ages. About 1500 years ago, Denys the Areopagite (a member of the highest governmental assembly in ancient Athens) was a 6<sup>th</sup> c. Greek who, like Aristotle before him, said that there is a religious truth that cannot be adequately conveyed by words or rational discourse. In his view, all our words and concepts for God were inadequate. "Even the word 'God' itself was faulty, since God was 'above God,' a 'mystery beyond being.' Christians must realize that God is not the Supreme Being, the highest being of all, heading a hierarchy of lesser beings." (*A History of God*, p. 126).

Denys also considered that God revealed His nature in many ways and we have to go beyond the names for God found in scripture: God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit. He considered that these names are important not by increasing our under-

standing of God but by their ability to draw men and women closer to Him and to share in His divine nature. Today, we may increase our connection by thinking of God as the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sustainer.

Denys believed that, through prayer and silent meditation, we can achieve an ecstatic union with God, and this is the closest we can come to knowing God. Music can also draw us closer to God. I have been listening to some beautiful choral music by Voces 8 in a collection entitled "After Silence." This title was taken from an essay entitled *The Rest is Silence* by Aldous Huxley (in *Music at Night and Other Essays*, © 1931,1958 London: Chatto and Windus) who wrote:

"... all the things that are fundamental, all the things that, to the human spirit, are most profoundly significant can only be experienced, not expressed. The rest is always and everywhere silence.

After silence that which comes

nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music."

During this challenging time of COVID, we can take the time that we have to become closer to God through reflection and prayer, and also through music. †

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*Author's footnote: I am using the customary masculine "Him/His" in reference to God although "Her" would be just as or even more suitable since in Hebrew, the Holy Spirit is feminine. Both pronouns, however, underline the inadequacy of our language as we can acknowledge that God is above gender classification (which is no longer considered binary anyway).*

*For Christmas, consider transferring to DVD or USB old family films, tapes, slides or audio tapes stored away. Give the old family memories new life!*

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Heather Vouvalidis

**R**ev. Ann Corbet, along with her siblings Heather and Geoffrey, are proud to represent the fourth generation of their family at FSA United Church. Ann's maternal grandparents, Jessie and Sheriff Donald Graham joined the congregation of First Presbyterian in 1922. The First Church/FSA membership continued with Ann's grandparents, Donald & Dr. Ivan Smith, and parents, Barb and Gene Corbet. Growing up in the 60s and 70s, Ann attended Sunday School at First-St. Andrew's, as well as Messengers (hosted in the home of Bob and Louise Slater), Explorers (on the top floor of the church building), and CGIT, (in the second floor classroom). CGIT was co-coordinated by the illustrious Joan Bancroft. Ann continues to enjoy her friendship with Helen Mahabir, whom she met at FSA at the tender age of 10!



Ann attended McMaster University, and majored in Religious Studies and Social Work. While studying in Hamilton she became very involved in the life of a local congregation. Here she began to discern a call to ministry, a call which she tested with Rev. Frank Meadows, and the Session at First-St. Andrew's. She became a candidate for ministry, and thoroughly enjoyed three years at Emmanuel College where she earned her Masters of Divinity.

Upon ordination in 1992, Ann was settled in the Eastern Labrador Pastoral Charge. This proved to be a great adventure. In 1996, she returned to

## Ann Corbet

Ontario, serving the Tupperville Pastoral Charge, a farming community in Chatham-Kent. From there she moved to Windsor where she served Bedford United Church for many years, and then to Essex County – the Wood-slee Pastoral Charge. By interesting coincidence, Ann was following in the footsteps of others known to FSA: Rev. Fred Lloyd was a predecessor of Ann's in Tupperville; and Rev. Herb Wonfor was a predecessor of Ann's in Windsor.

Ann returned to London in 2018 to be closer to family. She presently serves part-time as the Minister of Visitation at Siloam United Church, and on the Sundays she is not at Siloam, she loves to guest preach, something she is doing on a regular basis at FSA in the fall of 2020.

Ann's daughter, Blythe, currently enjoys her studies at King's University College (Western), and makes the odd trek to visit her cat, who happens to co-habitate with her mother. †

## INTRODUCING



Susan McKane

**S**o... have you said "hello" to Elizabeth Stewart yet? Have you welcomed her to the FSA community? NO? The reason is that most of us likely will not see her. Elizabeth has been hired, in Jane's absence, to offer support to Chris Lindsay and both youth groups, and to provide curriculum support to Allyson Watson and the other volunteers who work with the children on Sunday mornings. The reason why you won't be



seeing her on a Sunday morning is that she is also the minister at Port Stanley United Church – so is rather busy on Sunday mornings! She does, however,

## Elizabeth Stewart

attend staff meetings and meetings of the CD committee and brings her energy and skills to those groups.

Elizabeth grew up in London, attending Central Secondary School (where her Dad was head of the Math dept.) and joined the Youth group at Robinson Memorial U.C. It was there that she developed an interest in and passion for issues of social justice and community building. She remembers being given responsibilities within the congregation at Robinson that helped develop lead-

ership skills and gave her outlets from her growing social conscience. It was in that context that she decided that ministry was the place that she wanted to spend her energy.

Working to support the connection of her church congregation to its community combined with her 12 hours/wk with us at FSA fills her working hours. For leisure Elizabeth enjoys walking and yoga and gets special joy from watching the birds from the window of

her rental farm house in Tavistock. She loves talking to the cows on the farm but didn't report that they are a particularly good audience for rehearsing Sunday sermons!

To us at FSA, she says, "Your young people are the future leaders of our community and our country. Their interests in issues political, historical, and scientific are exciting and motivating for them and for us, so we owe them the honour of our time to listen to their

ideas."

To Elizabeth, from us at First-St. Andrew's, we say thank you for your willingness to be the bridge of support to our volunteers who count youth and children as a priority. They offer their gifts, in ways unseen to many, and your willingness to work with them during Jane's absence is vital and so very much appreciated. †

## REMEMBERING



Barbara Dalrymple

**J**ames Hutchinson was born in 1941 in Guelph, Ontario. After graduation from high school Jim attended London Teachers' College. He began his career at Governor Simcoe School and then moved on to Mountsfield, Manor Park, Brick Street, Kensal Park and Wortley Rd. During these 35 years he taught intermediate students including the gifted program, as well as obtaining his Master of Library Science degree leading to his being a teacher-librarian working with primary and junior children as well.

Shortly after his arrival in London, Jim joined the bass section of the FSA choir for 10 years. In 1961 Jim met Nancy, a fellow teacher. They were married at FSA in June of 1966 with Clark Wilson as their soloist and their reception in the Ladies' Parlour. Theirs was one of the last weddings with the organ in the chancel. Nancy was also a choir member, retiring when their daughter Martha was born in 1967.

Jim was very proud of his Scottish ancestry and enjoyed cemetery hopping while researching his genealogy. He and Nancy were members of the Royal



Scottish Country Dance Society. They performed with their demonstration team and attended the Anniversary Ball in the Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh. HM Elizabeth II was also in attendance. MacDonald of the Isles kilts were purchased in Glasgow.

Jim, who taught himself piano, had a passion for many music genres and had a large collection of CDs. He supported the Arts, attending the Shaw Festival as well as Stratford and volunteering at the Palace Theatre and Kiwanis Music Festival. He and Nancy were life-long learners traveling the world, including trips with Frank Meadows and David McKane. They especially enjoyed cruises. In retirement Jim took an income tax course and volunteered with the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program. The Hutchinsons were avid bridge players in the FSA Bridge Group.

# Jim Hutchinson

In 1997 an archives committee was re-formed at FSA with the purpose of preparing a historical book of FSA to celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2007. Jim volunteered to be chair. No doubt his background of teacher-librarian and research served him well. He read countless letters and primary sources, wrote articles and became the 'go-to' person for all things FSA. His fellow archivists thoroughly enjoyed working with him and describe him as a quiet, dedicated, conscientious, extremely knowledgeable leader who worked diligently behind the scenes even as his eyesight began to fail. All described him as a gentle gentleman with a good sense of humour.

Jim died July 7, 2020. His legacy to FSA is the book prepared by the Archives Committee under his guidance over a 10-year period. He arranged for the publication of *A History of First-St. Andrew's United Church, London, Ontario 1938-2007*. What a wonderful gift to FSA!

He leaves behind many friends at FSA, Nancy his wife of 54 years, his daughter Martha, her husband George Bere and his grandchildren Jason and Katie. †



Steve Elson



**D**evaTree is a professional yoga teaching organization that meets at FSA on a regular basis. It offers a variety of courses and instruction to people intending to become certified yoga instructors.

DevaTree School of Yoga was co-founded by Carolyn Jyoti Burke and Tamika Schilbe.

On Sunday, October 25<sup>th</sup> 2020, Steve Elson sat down for an interview with Carolyn Burke to learn more about DevaTree and its relationship with FSA.

**How did you come to FSA?**

We started renting here almost seven years ago now, in 2014. We knew Deb Carter (who also rents space at FSA) through The Lotus Centre and we were looking for a community space to rent. Deb spoke to Rev. Dr. Kate Crawford who was the Minister at FSA at the time. We met with Kate and were welcomed to FSA.

We have always wanted to be a community rather than studio-based school and FSA fit what we were looking for. Being in, and part of, a community is important to us.

**How have you fit into FSA?**

We had some initial questions about what we were all about and some adjustments were made but overall, it's been wonderful and relationships have been built over time, especially with staff and people like George (Jolink), Kathryn, Tim and Heather. We are flexible when it comes to scheduling and where we hold our classes – even more so with COVID, and we greatly appreciate the flexibility that FSA offers us. Michelle and Joyce were fundamental to DevaTree establishing a smooth working relationship with the church because we always felt so honoured by them. Michelle had us come to and participate in a few services and that was special for us – to be included.

**What kind of yoga do you teach?**

We operate under the general umbrella of hatha yoga but

more specifically we offer Cross-Disciplinary yoga, which is an inclusive system of yoga that teaches students to honour their personal truth. Cross-Disciplinary Yoga promotes balance and creativity through compassionate self-study and a multidimensional practice. It's an inclusive yoga because it's a balance of active and reflective practices. Active practices are the postures, flows, and movements. Reflective practices include meditation, breathwork, mudras, chanting, and restorative yoga.

Our foundational course is 200 hours and this essentially teaches how to become a yoga teacher. From there people can opt to take a 300/500-hour track and

enhance their education or specialize in a specific form of yoga – children's yoga for example. Once a person qualifies as a yoga teacher, they are required to take yearly continuing education credits of 30 hours – it is self-directed.

We offer a supportive community here – both of

us as co-founders (Carolyn and Tamika) are trained in social work and are counsellors in private practice, so we know how to support and guide people. We offer a non-authoritarian approach that has deep listening at its core. We see ourselves as guiding people to discover their own yoga, to become their own guru (or leader). Everyone has innate strengths and we encourage our students to focus on honouring who they are.

**Are you certified?**

Yes. We are part of Yoga Alliance International and Canadian Yoga Alliance, so what we teach is recognized internationally – we follow a set curriculum and hours of study. It includes technique, practicum, anatomy, and philosophy. People are attracted to DevaTree because we offer a professional education and because we offer a supportive community. People come to us who are serious about becoming yoga teachers and learning more about themselves in the process.

*Derived from the root 'div' meaning to become bright, Deva [dave-ah] is a Sanskrit word that means radiant light. DevaTree symbolizes the healthy balance between light, hope, expansion and growth, contrasted by the solid and steady foundation of our roots that ground us in the here and now.*



**What impact has COVID-19 had on DevaTree?**

Huge. We had to cancel all our in-person classes and go on-line. Now we are offering a combination of the two. It's been a real learning curve and all yoga schools and classes are going through the same thing. It's been a big adjustment for the teachers. Zoom is working for us – for example, it allows for break-out rooms for people to chat and stay connected. That's really important when we cannot meet in person.

We are coping with COVID but it has been challenging.

For example, if people can't come here in person some have a hard time participating due to their home situation.

**Any closing comments?**

We love FSA and everything about it! We miss seeing the people we used to meet in the hallways. We know we can raise eyebrows when people see us in bare feet but that's just part of who we are and what we do. LOL.

We enjoy the space and the people. We see ourselves as part of FSA and want to continue being here. We feel welcome here and are grateful for the on-going support we receive. †



# Owen Spicer – FSA Organ Scholar

INTRODUCING



Merran Neville

As the saying goes, “It’s an ill wind that blows no good.” The ill wind of the COVID-19 pandemic has this time instead brought the gift of Owen Spicer to be our Organ Scholar this year. Without the pandemic, Owen would have been studying at McGill University in Montreal but the pandemic has kept him at home in London, much to our advantage.

Owen studied organ with Karen Schuessler, Music Director at Wesley-Knox United Church, during high school and was influenced by her and William Lupton, organist at Huron University College and St. Martin-in-the-Fields Anglican Church, London, Ontario, where he was organ scholar for three years. In 2016, Owen attended the Montreal Organ Festival, thanks to funding from the RCCO London Centre, which gave him the chance to hear many world class organists, such as Olivier Latry, Titulaire Organiste at Notre-Dame de Paris and Hans-Ola Ericsson. On graduation from H.B. Beal Secondary School, Owen continued his organ studies at McGill with renowned organ teacher, Professor Hans-Ola Ericsson (Organ & Church Music). Owen is in second year and when the pandemic prevented his return to university, he approached Paul Merritt, RCCO London Centre Co-President and FSA Organist Emeritus, who referred him to Erich to ask if he could practice on the FSA Casavant Organ. This was an opportunity too good to miss and Erich invited Owen to be our organ scholar and to participate in some services. Owen has already performed preludes in two services – October 11<sup>th</sup>, he performed *Chorale Prelude on RHOSYMEDRE* by Ralph Vaughan Williams and on October 18<sup>th</sup>, “*Dorian*” *Toccata in D-minor*, BWV 538 by J.S. Bach. You can see and hear Owen performing in the



Owen playing the organ at FSA on Oct. 29<sup>th</sup> during a lesson (via Zoom) with his organ instructor at McGill

FSA YouTube videos for these services. Owen continues to take organ lessons with Professor Ericsson, now via Zoom.

Owen comes from a musical family. His father, Shawn Spicer, teaches trumpet at Western’s Faculty of Music and is the principal trumpet for London Symphonia. Shawn played in the recent Thanksgiving service with Ken Baldwin and we’re sure to hear more from him. Owen’s mother is Rev. Barbara (Barb) McGill. Barb was commissioned at Grace United Church in Sarnia on Sunday, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 and is serving as a diaconal minister at First Grantham United in St. Catherines. She also served as Children and Youth coordinator at Wesley-Knox United Church before she began her discernment. Members of First-St. Andrew’s will remember Barb leading a couple of our services in the summer of 2018. Barb holds a B.Mus degree in Music Therapy and a Montessori Teaching Diploma.

Owen’s favourite composers are J. S. Bach (no surprise), César Franck, Olivier Messiaen, and Maurice Duruflé, whose *Prélude sur le nom d’Alain* was one of his audition pieces for McGill.

Welcome, Owen.

†



### Council Report Steve Elson

What a year! Who would have thought in December 2019 that 2020 would be the “Year of the Virus”? Here’s hoping that 2021 will see the backside of COVID-19 and we can begin to be physically present in more “normal” ways.

At the same time, we know we have learned some important life lessons through the pandemic. People who often remain hidden and silent are being seen and heard. Weaknesses in our social service safety net have been exposed. For the most part, people have demonstrated resilience and patience—together with a willingness to self-isolate, help others, to wear masks, keep social distance, and to wash hands frequently—for the protection of everyone.

People living with compromised health conditions and their loved ones have endured isolation and lack of human contact—it’s been a real trial. Losses of loved ones have not been witnessed nor mourned as we would like. Weddings and baptisms are a shadow of former celebrations. Zoom, Facetime and Google Meets are OK and have been lifelines, but they do not give us the social and emotional connection we feel when we get hugs and kisses, hold hands and sit

close, or talk in close proximity.

Here at FSA we have, in spite of COVID-19, been able to say goodbye to **Rev. Michelle Down**, and her partner **Joyce Payne**; to recruit **Erich Knapp** our new Director of Music, and, steps are being taken to bring a new Minister of Worship and Congregational Life to FSA. We have also recruited **Elizabeth Stewart** to help support the children and young family’s programmes while Jane Dockrill is on medical leave. Last but not least, **Rev. Dr. David McKane** has expanded his role with FSA and will be our Supply Minister until a new Minister is on board.

FSA staff have learned how to work from home and Zoom has become the go-to way to meet virtually. We have learned how to hold both in-person and virtual Sunday services—Kudos to everyone who has made this happen!

So many changes with more to come.

Throughout the year your Council has responded to immediate issues and led FSA through these turbulent times. I extend a sincere thanks to all Council members for stepping up and providing FSA with the leadership, direction and guidance it has needed throughout the year. Well done! †



### Faith Development Jo Ann Silcox

Several years ago Council elected to try a three pronged model of governance (Faith, Arts, Service) in concert with the overall vision of the church. This meant combining the work of the

Christian Education and Worship Committees—a lovely exercise in learning to work together. Staff illness, resignation and deaths, combined with the large workload, occasioned a review earlier this year and we have elected to revert to the older model of two committees—Worship (chaired by Jo Ann Silcox) and Christian Development (chaired by Allyson Watson) with cross membership to ensure that communication remains a priority.

Worship has been focused during the time of Covid on creating on-line Worship services through the summer and fall, combined with a cautious return to the sanctuary. Many willing hands have offered their skills to this new multi-media approach—knowing that the pandemic has invited us to be multi-taskers.

For Christian Development, Jane Dockrill’s prolonged illness and the restrictions on contact necessary during this time have presented challenging conditions. The committee

has focused on recruiting on-line teachers and arranging for cautious outdoor classes and Youth activities through the Fall. The arrival of Elizabeth Stewart, a part-time Diaconal Minister, to temporarily fill Jane’s role, has been a great gift in recent months.

Like congregations across the country we are learning to work together in new ways, with new companions, using unfamiliar media and modalities to ensure that this community of faith finds fresh life in these uncertain times. †

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**Music**  
*Merran Neville*

At the time of preparing the September 2020 issue of *Tidings*, it was difficult to know how the fall at FSA, from a music program point of view, would look. Nothing is quite the same this year of the pandemic but, in spite of that, we have been enjoying services in person and a video of each service on YouTube a week later, a benefit for those not able to attend in person. Erich and our fabulous FSA Chamber Choir have blessed us with beautiful music in each service. The performances have lifted our spirits and established well and truly how important music is in our worship. Each service has been special in its own way but the November services, Nov. 1<sup>st</sup> – All Saints Day, Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> – Remembrance Sunday and Nov. 15<sup>th</sup> – the service in memory of our beloved Terry Head on the one-year anniversary of his tragic death, have been particularly inspiring and poignant. During worship on Nov 15<sup>th</sup>, the FSA Chamber Choir and the FSA Strings with brass performed the choral masterwork, **Requiem** by Gabriel Fauré with soloists Sonja Gustafson – soprano, and Alastair Smyth – baritone.

As we go into the Christmas season, it will be like none other. However, there will be many positives which we can

look forward to. The first Sunday of Advent, Nov. 29<sup>th</sup>, was the annual service of Nine Lessons and Carols led by the FSA youth who read the scripture passages. The children’s music program has been curtailed by the pandemic and so it was a special treat to have the youth participate in this way. The annual Friday Advent Noon Recitals (without lunch following) will take place – Dec. 4<sup>th</sup> – Erich Knapp – Organ; Dec. 11<sup>th</sup> – Jordan Baldwin – Countertenor; Dec. 18<sup>th</sup> – Laudamus Bells with Erich Knapp, Director. The Laudamus Bells have been fortunate to be able to return to rehearsals by staying well apart and wearing face masks. The group also performed in the first Sunday of Advent service.

We are especially delighted to have Owen Spicer as our organ scholar this year, funded by the McKane Fund. An introduction to Owen is found on page 14 of this issue.

Plans for the new year are evolving and we hope to have a Lenten recital series. Of course, there will continue to be glorious music in Sunday services coming from Erich and the FSA Chamber Choir, and other instrumentalists. †



**Membership & Nurture**  
*Heather Locking-Cusolito*

November marked our Committee’s first meeting since February. Despite the long intermission we have continued to try and meet the pastoral care needs of our congregation. Early in the pandemic Heather Locking-Cusolito asked for volunteers willing to do grocery shopping or other essential errands for people unable to leave their homes. She received eight willing volunteers including two Western students. After calling people in the congregation living alone, especially seniors, she was impressed that no one required the service because they had family or friends, many of them from FSA, helping them. In June, David McKane, Jo Ann Silcox and Heather met under the trees on the front lawn of FSA to review our congregational roll, to identify any outstanding pastoral care needs. Jo Ann and David continue to do yeoman service looking after those needs. In addition, the Caring Callers and the Prayer Chain under the able leadership of Annabelle Logan have been keeping in touch with FSA members who benefit from a friendly phone call. At our recent meeting Annabelle described how one of the callers had sent out handmade Thanksgiving cards to her flock. Gerry Meacham continues

to reach out to people experiencing loss or bereavement through her ministry of letter writing.

Some other nurturing and supportive activities, however, are in need of rejuvenation. We have had considerable turnover in our lay visitation team and would welcome new members. Anyone interested in becoming a member of the team in preparation for the time when we can freely visit people please contact Heather Locking-Cusolito (519-433-6344). As well we have had some recent difficulty finding rides for people unable to drive to Sunday service. If you are willing or able to help, please contact Gerry Meacham (519-850-6309). The Affirm Committee, which comes under the umbrella of Membership and Nurture, is also looking for new members. If you are intrigued by the work of this committee which focuses on inclusivity, please contact Heather Locking-Cusolito (519-433-6344).

Finally, we are very pleased to report that Don Jones has agreed to take on the position of Chair of Archives with the help of Pat Carter and Regina Moorcroft. Our thanks are extended to Willis Buckingham, Pat McGregor and Bev Lindsay who have worked diligently on Archives. †



**Mission & Outreach**  
*Barbara Dalrymple*

**East London United Church Outreach (ELUCO):**

The ELUCO Walkathon was a great success this year with \$8800 raised. This is higher than usual and ELUCO is appreciative of these donations as there are great needs in the Marconi community at this time.

Families have been adjusting to the new school year. About half of our children have returned to the classroom while the others are doing on-line learning at home. The schools have loaned Chromebooks to students in need. Many have had difficulty navigating the system, and/or simply do not have experience with computers to assist their children. Nancy has been able to provide some technical support for many families.

Struggles with arrears for rent, utilities and other bills has been an issue for families. Some have had disconnection of services or eviction notices to deal with. In many cases these problems can be taken care of with payment plans. Nancy has helped many families to set up plans through London Hydro, Union Gas, Housing Stability Bank or with their Landlords. Some issues have been referred to Neighbourhood Legal Services who have helped through phone and email contact.

It's continued to be busy with assistance with applications for Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, RGI Housing Access, and Annual Reviews for London Middlesex Community Housing.

Counselling support and support with CAS cases has been a big demand, and much appreciated by our families. Talking to people outside, sometimes while going for a walk, has been working well, while the unit remains closed to the community.

The ELUCO Food Cupboard and the Welcome Wednesday Lunch Program have continued with modifications.

Donations and support for ELUCO from FSA make it possible for these families to get much needed assistance. Many thanks for your generosity.

**From St. Paul's Social Services Food Bank & Fellowship Centre.** "I want to thank all of you at FSA. Your generous contribution from the Golf Tournament and Thanksgiving fresh food drive during the pandemic is deeply appreciated. Your ongoing care for those in our community who live in food insecurity is a beacon of light in dark times." †



**Grow-a-Row Report**  
*Linda Badke*

The Grow-a-Row project had another successful year at First-St. Andrew's. With the combined spring and fall campaign we took in \$5,270 while our partner church, St. Marys United, raised \$4,880. The two amounts are put together along with the sale of the crop which this year was winter wheat grown by Bob Ready in the St. Marys area. Mr. Ready harvested the crop and then sold it, yielding \$1,665 after deducting his expenses for planting, growing, and harvesting. The total of \$11,815 that will be sent to CFGB from this year's FSA/St. Marys Grow-a-Row project is the sum of these three contributions. The Canadian government through the Canadian International Development Agency then contributes quadruple our total to CFGB resulting in a grand total donation of \$59,075. The FSA component was down somewhat from last year, possibly due to the lack of a corn roast that has traditionally brought in a significant amount of money. †

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## Planning Committee

Kerry Hill

The Planning Committee is currently assessing various options to redevelop St. Andrew's Hall to better serve our needs and those of the community. One goal of the redevelopment is to increase revenue potential in a manner consistent with our Christian values. We are fortunate to have the assistance of A.J. Wray, a doctoral student in Western's Geography & Environment program, who has a special interest in projects like ours. A.J. has many contacts in non-profit organizations that assist with redevelopment projects. He considers his time advising us as part of his ongoing education. We are, indeed, fortunate to have his pro bono help.

Two of A.J.'s students, Wyatt Wahl Lehner and Menar Hasan, have developed a survey aimed at the Woodfield community, exploring attitudes to potential new uses of our property. In mid-November, the surveys were dropped in mailboxes by the Western students and some of the planning committee. (Unfortunately, COVID-19 prevented us from speaking to residents in person.) If we receive a sufficient number of responses, the results will be very important to our decisions. We anticipate having at least one town hall discussion of the results.

Thanks to Steve Elson for taking the lead on the property redevelopment. †



## Trustees

Doug Jones (left)  
Jackie Williams (right)



Back in 2019, FSA pledged \$75,000 over three years to the "Revitalize Camp Kee-Mo-Kee" campaign. Despite the market volatility during 2020, FSA's investment portfolio performance was sufficient in September to pay the 2020, second annual installment of \$25,000.

As Committees of the Board of Trustees, the Long-Term Giving and the Memorials Committees have created a new "Proudfoot Society Benefactor Program" to provide an opportunity for living donors to support the Trust Funds. Although there are ways that FSA recognizes donors, we have never had a formal benefactor program that provides recognition for increasing levels of donations from living donors. By giving to the Proudfoot Legacy Trust today, the value of the gift grows and increases the sustainability of FSA. As in making a bequest in a will to the Trust, living donors of significant funds will now be recognized as a Benefactor through their membership in The Proudfoot Society.

Our Trust Funds continue to provide FSA with significant financial support annually. These funds are conservatively invested to protect the principal of the funds while providing income annually for FSA operations, capital projects and our community. Although markets experience short-term fluctuations, such as during this pandemic year, the Trustees are focused on the long term. Thus, we expect that, despite the volatile markets due to the pandemic, the Trust Funds

will continue to generate sufficient revenue to support FSA programs in the future.

The Investment Committee meets regularly with our professional investment advisors to make the best investment decisions. To date in 2020, financial support for FSA operations totalled approximately \$150,000 without drawing down capital. This included the previously mentioned \$25,000 support for Camp Kee-Mo-Kee and capital projects such as the work on the church's roof cabling.

Prudent Trust Fund stewardship is important, not only for the current congregation and to future congregations, to give them confidence that all gifts will be used wisely, but also to those who have generously left legacy contributions in the past. †

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## Finance Kerry Hill

In September, the Finance Committee completed a year-end forecast, using our actual financial position as of August 31 and revised fall revenue and expense projections.

Our forecast indicates that we will incur a deficit at least \$24,000 higher than was anticipated in the 2020 budget. Although some expenses were lower than anticipated, rental income was significantly reduced because of COVID-19 restrictions, which, as you know, led to closing the church for several months. There are still some activities that are prohibited due to COVID-19, even though the church is open for worship and small meetings. Particularly, rental income from concerts and outside choirs will be lost - likely for some time, given the strength of the "second wave" of COVID-19.

On the plus side: Members maintained their pledged givings during the pandemic. And, one tenant, Meals on Wheels, is deemed an essential service and they continued to operate through the year. Their rental income has been very important to our financial health.

The Federal Government has provided several pandemic-related loans and subsidies to individuals and organizations. FSA has received a \$40,000 loan, of which \$10,000 is a forgivable grant. The government recently increased the available loan by an additional \$20,000. Of the \$60,000 total, \$20,000 is forgivable.

The Federal Government has also provided salary support to allow organizations to cope with lost revenue. With assistance from the United Church of Canada, FSA has received a ten percent subsidy toward salaries of full-time staff for a period of a few months; a subsidy that did not require us to submit any financial data. We are now in the process of assessing our eligibility for a

program that would provide an additional salary subsidy, based on specific levels of lost revenue.

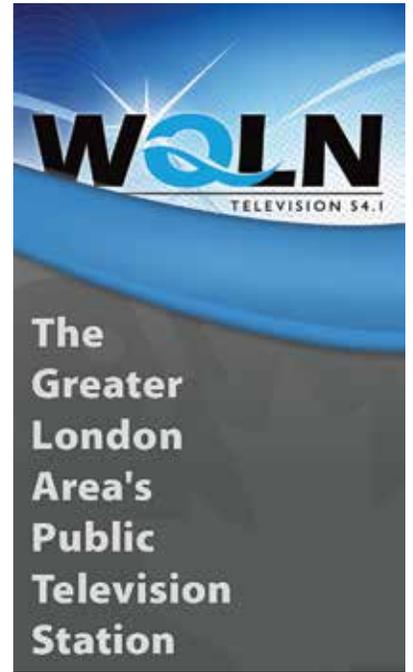
First-St. Andrew's will certainly weather the financial difficulties brought about by the pandemic. However, we will have to be careful with our financial decisions going forward. I believe that it is important that Council and the Congregation take a thoughtful, detailed look at the future financial health of FSA. This will require us to consider both current and future income sources (internal and external), as well as staff requirements. It will be a difficult conversation, but one that is imperative.

Our 2021 Stewardship Campaign is currently underway. *If you are able*, please consider a modest increase in your givings, as you reflect on what First-St. Andrew's means to you. We are so fortunate to have a beautiful sanctuary, dedicated staff, hard-working volunteers and many exciting programs.

Also note that in December we will hold our Annual Christmas Appeal, which was "jump started" by a recent, significant deficit-reduction gift from a long-time member.

Blessings for a wonderful Christmas.

†



## Archives Don Jones

Have you ever wondered what is in the archive room at FSA? I have been wondering about this for the past few months. I volunteered to help with the Archives of the church in the early summer and was put in touch with Heather Locking-Cusolito, chair of the Membership and Nurture Committee which oversees the Archive Committee. I talked to Willis Buckingham who deserves our thanks for his untiring efforts in digitizing many of the archival files. As he is retiring from the committee, he suggested I contact some of its former members.

The Archives Committee, in 2007, consisting of Willis Buckingham, Jim Hutchinson, Bev Lindsay, Pat McGregor, Helen McLeod, and Barbara Williamson put together a manuscript for a book entitled *A History of First-St. Andrew's United Church London Ontario, 1938 – 2007*. This book captured many of the groups and activities of the church in that period and is supported by the many articles and photos in the Archives room.

The reconstituted Archive committee has the following volunteers: Regina Moorcroft, Pat Carter, David McKane (Staff Rep), Heather Vouvalidis. Discussions with some of the former committee members and with our friendly FSA Webmaster Dr. Jim Silcox, have helped me to understand a great deal. My knowledge was further expanded when I visited the Archives room and took some photos to see what the newly formed committee will be looking at when it is able to meet in-person post pandemic. The Web site has wonderful historical archives (Reports/History/Tidings) which can be viewed online at <https://www.fsaunited.com/archive-tidings>.

Some items must be submitted to the United Church Archives in Toronto. To that end, I have been searching the various United Church web sites and found lists of what needs to be kept for posterity and submitted to Toronto for the National and Regional Archives.

†



**Climate Action London**  
Mary Ann Hodge

Despite the lack of community events due to the pandemic, Climate Action London continues to be busy. This Fall, the federal government called for submissions for the Canada Climate Action and Awareness Fund, and Climate Action London, sponsored by First-St. Andrew's United Church, submitted two grants for \$300-\$500K. One application speaks to the "Service" aspect of FSA's vision. The grant would allow for the hiring of four staff to promote various climate actions by Londoners in three different streams: via faith groups, schools and neighbourhood groups, to see which approach is most effective; as well as costs for managing technology and the cost of promotional "action kits". The other application appeals to the "Arts" aspect of FSA and essentially duplicates and expands the Richmond Street underpass Art Project to the Wellington Street underpass with the theme of climate change.

This grant was open to groups across Canada, so our chance of success is slim, but has opened our eyes to new possibilities and project partners. The United Church orga-

nizations "EDGE" and "Faith and the Common Good" are interested in how we can move forward on engaging with the London community about climate change. We have also applied to the Seeds of Hope Innovation grant for funding.

Another impact of applying for grants was the impetus to move forward with transitioning to a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Database such as MailChimp. If you are on our email list, you will soon see a more professional look.

We are excited to hear of a new national ecumenical organization, "For the Love of Creation" which has been endorsed by the United Church of Canada. It echoes our views that addressing climate change is a manifestation of faith. We look forward to working with them to reach out to other faith groups in London.

These are exciting times. Join us the 3rd Monday of every month on zoom (when not in the Fireside Room), email [climateactionlondon@gmail.com](mailto:climateactionlondon@gmail.com) to receive our weekly Environment Message, or follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. †

## NOTEWORTHY

Because many of you have asked if there are plans to honour Dr. Bocking, we thought it was important to share with you that the Bocking family will be establishing a new medical student award in his honour: the Douglas and Vivian Bocking Medical Student Award.

This student award will commemorate Dr. Bocking's legacy and will be awarded annually to a medical student who exemplifies the many wonderful characteristics Dr. Bocking possessed, including outstanding leadership skills and active involvement with community-based projects.

If you would like to make a gift to the Douglas and Vivian Bocking Medical Student Award, you may donate by reaching out to Kayla at [kayla.kalijarvi@schulich.uwo.ca](mailto:kayla.kalijarvi@schulich.uwo.ca) or 519-520-6231. †

## MILESTONES

### DEATHS

Beth Bailey, October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## BULLETIN BOARD

### Friday Advent Noon Recitals

December 4<sup>th</sup>: Erich Knapp – Organ

December 11<sup>th</sup>: Jordan Baldwin – Countertenor  
Erich Knapp – Piano

December 18<sup>th</sup>: Laudamus Bells – Erich Knapp, Director

## CHURCH STAFF

- **Pastoral Charge Supervisor, Supply Minister, Minister Emeritus & Minister of Visitation:** The Rev. Dr. David McKane (Ext.1)
- **Director of Music:** Erich Knapp (Ext. 3)
- **Youth & Young Family Co-ordinator:** Jane Dockrill & Elizabeth Stewart (Ext. 4)
- **Church Administrator:** Heather Vouvalidis (Ext. 5)
- **Administrative Assistant:** Kathryn Skelly (Ext. 0)
- **Facility & Maintenance Coordinator:** Tim Miedema (Ext. 6)
- **Designated Pastoral Care Volunteer:** Jo Ann Silcox
- **Part-Time Custodian:** George Jolink
- **Organist Emeritus:** Paul Merritt