

In the Orchard



Banner Traces the Journey Through Lent

by Rev. Robyn Brown-Hewitt

At the front of church sanctuaries you will see cloth hangings, usually displaying faith-based symbols or words. The hangings on the communion table, pulpit and lectern are called antependia. These are used to indicate the changing seasons of the Christian calendar using various colors (blue for Advent, white for Christmastide, etc.) and different symbols (Celtic trinity knot, tree of life for season of Creation, etc.). It was noted the sanctuary at (the former) St. Andrews in Wolfville did not have a purple antependium to mark the season of Lent.

Local textile artist, Louise Perrin, was commissioned to create one that would illustrate the 'journey' or 'wilderness' themes of Lent and reflect our local landscape. She crafted a beautiful, quilted

antependia, with purple backing and trim, which illustrates a pathway winding across the dike land to the base of Blomidon.

Observing Lent does not have a long history in the United Church. (I don't remember it at all as a child.) As a worship leader, I was constantly searching for a way to highlight the season's themes and tie it together. Louise designed a hanging that would unfold and enlarge, using snaps placed along the edges, thus building 'suspense' as we moved week by week closer to Holy Week. She added invisible snaps along the path enabling us to add a different symbol each Sunday during Lent and different symbols each year. During Lent, this antependium was hung from the pulpit and the symbols were used as the basis of 'The Word with All Ages' each Sunday.

I do not remember all the sets of symbols used at St. Andrews, although they were usually connected to one of the weekly bible stories or characters. The possibilities are endless for future use. I do remember the following examples:

The Extravagant Gifts of Creation:

These highlighted items from nature mentioned in the weekly bible stories.

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| 1. Resisting Temptation | Bread in the wilderness |
| 2. Protection | Mother Hen |
| 3. Second Chances | Fig Tree |
| 4. Forgiveness | Corn husks (the Prodigal son feeds the pigs) |
| 5. Selfless Generosity | Perfumed Ointment |
| 6. Triumph | Palm Branch |

A Journey to the Cross:

Week by week we explored the stories behind the following crosses:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Latin (Scripture: 'take up your cross') | 4. Maltese (Red Cross) |
| 2. Ankh | 5. Celtic |
| 3. Greek (St. Andrew's) | 6. Donkey's Cross (Palm Sunday) – a cross-patterned mark is on the shoulder blades of every donkey |



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We Are a Foodie Church

“Do not work for the food that perishes but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” - John 6:27

I have been told that the United Church is the ‘foodiest’ church there is. Whether it is our many potluck dinners, supper with the youth and their families every Friday evening, or sharing food and fellowship after every worship service. Food is a natural and spiritual part of our welcoming and hospitality.

I am not the main cook in our home but I do dabble from time to time. I suddenly had the inspiration to put the slow cooker to use and tried a few recipes while Cheryl was away staying with her mother. I have gained an appreciation for all the flavours and textures that go into a successful culinary dish. I also love fish. Cheryl, not so much. So, there again I have stretched myself to try making a few fish recipes just for me (and Bumblebee – she loves fish too). They are not always successful, but I learn something new and get a little better every time.

In our Lenten Study this year we

are talking about food, and how it is entwined into our faith and our lives. In our church we provide food for what it is we hunger for. You provide regular donations to local food banks. We are now serving meals in a bag for those who could use a little help from time to time.

We explored the spirituality in the making of sourdough bread, how it begins with sharing the starter, caring for it, and having patience in a world that looks for instant gratification. We shared stories about regardless of how many unexpected guests show up at dinner, there is always enough, remembering Jesus feeding the 5000+.

Wherever we go in the world, food is an integral part of people’s culture: people share meals as a love language, as a community building exercise, and as a spiritual and cultural practice. Food provides our physical bodies nutrients

to work, survive, and thrive. Food also allows us space to taste lineages and traditions that have spanned millennia. Food, and the relationships that are nourished with it, are all gifts from God. God provides and we make beautiful things with the ingredients.

Through God’s provisions, we learn to share without receiving, patience with others and with ourselves, perseverance to fail and try again and again, and the courage to reach beyond our comfort to be difference makers.

Food is at the core of our faith – the food that nourishes and provides life – spiritual and bodily life. The ultimate food that provides life is Jesus, the “Bread of Life”. Jesus’ Easter promise is one of new life for you and for me.

Blessings to all in this season, for he is risen, he is risen indeed.

Rev. Don Sellsted

Holy Week Services and Events

Mar. 29 Palm Sunday

10 a.m. Worship Service

Apr. 2 Maundy Thursday

5:30 p.m. Soup Supper &
Passover Seder Meal
Service of foot washing
& Communion

Apr. 3 Good Friday

7 p.m. Service with
Stations of the Cross

Apr. 5 Easter Sunday

7 a.m. Sunrise Service
followed by breakfast
10 a.m. Easter Service
with Holy Communion

Some Food for Thought

by The Very Rev. Richard Bott (43rd Moderator)

You, friend.

You are the hero
the world needs.

The one who is treading
a path

towards the horizon,
that others might see,

and believe - no -
that others might

know -

that the time is at hand,
for all that is good,

all that is loving,
all that is sacred,

to rise and join
in defense

of the innocent,

in care

of the broken,

in the hope

that is not a feeling,
but a demand,

that life, in all its goodness,
is for all,

and war (and all his minions)
have

no
dominion.

You, friend.

You are the hero
the world needs.

And so

am I.

So let your heart rise.

Let your voice sing.

Let us go.

Let us be.

Not with bravado.

Not with hubris.

Simply knowing that we,

each and every one,

are all

the heroes the world needs.

For there are no others.

Council Chair's Message: "Take Flight"

This winter has been the snowiest one in quite some time. Even though it felt like it would never end, suddenly, today (March 9) my car told me it hit 17C in the valley! Some may measure winter by the melting of the snow. Some by the arrival of spring's earliest floral messengers (the crocus, snowdrops, glory-in-the-snow). For me, I think that spring is best heralded by the birds.

Although not a birdwatcher, nor a person with any level of expertise... I do love my birds. Saucy chickadees, brash bluejays, nuthatches, juncos, grosbeaks, goldfinches, purple finch and various woodpeckers visit us all winter... yet spring brings out brighter colours, greater abundance, and sweeter songs.

Summer brings my favourite singers, the vireo and hermit thrush. If you know me, you know I love cardinals, and grieve that they don't live on our mountain...but if you see me standing still for no apparent reason in the church parking lot, it's a good bet that I am listening to cardinal song, in amongst the

others. My favourite of all, though, is the hummingbird - I love their speed, delicate beauty, and arrogance, as they demand their feeders be refilled (and will even land on them while I am returning them to their spots). Imagine my happiness to find that in Mayan astrology, my sign, Iq, is symbolized by the hummingbird.

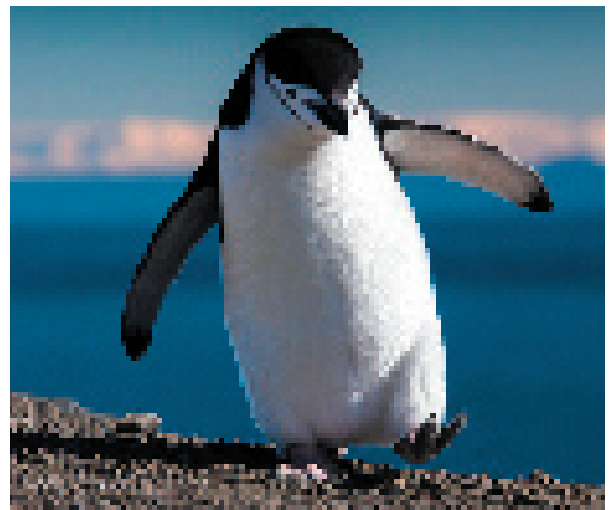
It's no wonder people picture angels as beings with lovely big wings – what better heavenly messenger than one who can fly so high, closer to God, to see so much of the world from their vaulted height, to travel so swiftly and so beautifully.

Alas, among the eagles, hummingbirds, and songbirds of the world, I fear I am much more like the penguin than any other bird – doomed to plod along, looking up with envy. I am assured, though, that God loves the penguins of this world

as much as any other of his birds.

I hope that this spring you will take flight! That you will fill your hearts and wings with joy, and your surroundings with song. That you will use your gifts so that people will see God in you, and you as his messengers. I hope that you and yours have a most blessed Easter.

Easter Blessings to you all,
Mindy Vinqvist-Tymchuk



Council member Helen Seymour presents outgoing Council chair Mindy Vinqvist-Tymchuk with a bouquet of flowers and a card. On behalf of Council, Helen expressed appreciation for Mindy's four years of service to Council.

Easter Music in Worship

by Thea Koenig-Burton, Choir Director

Our special Lenten/Easter services this year began with the Steeple Strummers leading us in worship on March 22nd.

On Good Friday, the choir will offer music for a Tenebrae service with O Wondrous Love by John Carter. On Easter Sunday (April 5th), invited vocalists as well as trumpet and trombone players will join the choir for a rousing introit and anthem.

In June, the youth, supported by the adult choir, will present It's Cool in the Furnace as part of the Sunday School closing.

Much appreciation to our faithful choir members and to Carmen Peng for the extra effort and practices for this season's offering of music at Orchard Valley.

The Steeple Strummers continue to meet once a month and welcome any with a stringed instrument

and interested in group music.

In January a musical was held as a fundraiser for Meet Your Feet and was well received. This presentation included skits by Robyn Brown-Hewitt and production by Thea Burton. Many choir members

took part in this event which highlighted the music development of hymns over the last 100 years.

Choir members Donna Murphy and Thea Koenig-Burton performed in the fundraiser.



The Steeple Strummers were responsible for the music for the March 22 worship service. They did the anthem "There Will be Peace in the Valley" and led the congregation in the Hymn of Benediction, "Let it Be".

On Palm Sunday, the choir leads the congregation in "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna."



Welcome Kendra, our New Custodian, to OVU

by Mary Cormier

We would like to welcome Kendra Hain to Orchard Valley. She is from the Niagara Region in Ontario and moved to Nova Scotia in 2025, then in November, to Kentville.

Kendra says that her first six weeks here



have been great, and she is glad that she applied for the job. “As a newcomer to the area and Nova Scotia, I hope the church will be a place where I can meet people and be part of the community.”

She’s a member of the church’s Property Committee and also of the Landscaping Committee, where her horticulture expertise and experience will be of great benefit as she helps to create gardens on our grounds.

Kendra is artistic: designing gardens, creating in oil paint and glass paint, and she also welds. She likes to hike trails, walk the shores, kayak and bike. We are very fortunate to have Kendra as a part of the Orchard Valley team.

Kendra in a selfie on a hike on Grand Manan Island, an alternate activity after her whale watching tour was cancelled by heavy fog.

Although much of Kendra’s job involves keeping Orchard Valley clean, there are other tasks like paint touch-ups that are part of it as well.



Gluten-Free and Alternatives Cookbook to be Published by Congregational Life Committee

by Brenda Parker

I have been gluten-free for well over 30 years. I felt like it was the end of the world when I was diagnosed at that time. Gluten-free options were very limited – only found in health food stores at premium prices, so I learned to cook most items from scratch, by trial and error. A good slice of homemade bread is still out there, somewhere....

We are very fortunate today, as there is a good selection of gluten-free items available at most grocery stores, and although they are a bit pricier, the availability makes a huge difference.

Being gluten-free, I have in the past, and still occasionally, avoid social gatherings when food is involved as it makes hosts feel badly, not having “something you can eat”, which can lead to feelings of isolation and depression.

When a gluten-free and/or dairy-free option is offered, it makes you feel

welcome, valued and delivers a sense of belonging.

When the idea was suggested at a Congregational Life Committee meeting, to create a cookbook, I was transported back, in my mind, 30 plus years ago, and how overwhelmed I was – how can you bake without flour!

As time has passed, my allergies have increased, therefore, my cooking experiences have as well. It is my intention to include options for alternatives in the cookbook to hopefully be a more inclusive guide. By inviting others to contribute favorite recipes, if they so choose, it will enhance our own kitchen creations!

We are proposing a deadline of April 30th for recipes, to allow me time to compile the cookbook, with hopes of having them for sale in the fall.

If you have a recipe or a few to contribute, please either leave them at the office, email them to me: bparker@techshop.ns.ca, or

hand them to me personally. I will do my best to put together an informative and useful cookbook.



Brenda Parker stands with a batch of spice gluten-free muffins that she brought for coffee time after church.

OVUC Team 3rd in Valley CNOY Standings

by Sylvia Jacquard

Orchard Valley has had a team participating on the Coldest Night of the Year walk for many years.

This year the 11 official team members, and others who walked with us, raised \$4325.70, over 200% of our goal. This earned us 3rd place in the list of the forty-seven teams across the Valley who helped Open Arms raise \$68,898 and the national organization surpass their goal of \$15,000,000. The variety of ways that money was raised in 2026 by team members was Sunday Sundae, bake and craft sale, collecting refundables, and individual donations.

The walk, on a relatively mild, 4 degree, Saturday evening on February 28, saw most of our team members walk

the 2 km loop from the Kentville Fire Hall toward New Minas turning around near the Needs Convenience store but a few doing the full 5 km which turned around near the Research Station.

When they returned, walkers were treated to soup or chili with hot chocolate, coffee and snacks. There were also activities before and after including face painting and a photo booth.

Everyone who participated had a fun time and would like to thank all who supported our team in this very important cause.

Team captain Cheryl Hill leads team members Andrea Purvis, Andy and Robert Pitter, Jane McDonald and the Warmington twins along the route through Kentville.



The Orchard Valley team is gathered and ready to set out on the Coldest Night of the Year Walk.

Larry Honey, Joy Waterbury and Krista are bundled up and warm in their CNOY toques.

Our team poses for another photo in the Kentville Fire Hall before the walk.



Refugee Committee Begins its Work

by Thea Koenig-Burton

I am pleased to share this information about the refugee family (Mother and 5 children ages 16 – 24) who have escaped Afghanistan following the execution of the father by the Taliban, and are living in Pakistan.

They are being supported by friends as they are unable to work or go to school, and are under threat of being deported back to Afghanistan.

The request to sponsor them comes from the eldest son who was an interpreter for the U.S. military. He, his wife and young children were rescued by the U.S. military and brought to

the U.S.A, where they are now citizens.

Efforts to bring his extended family to the U.S. were underway, and almost complete when Trump became President and shut down all immigration. They are desperate to bring them to North America.

The Orchard Valley United Church Committee for Refugee Settlement (Gary Dunfield, Gail & Garth Gordon, Dale & Bruce MacArthur, Christina Sappington, Rev Don Sellsted, Helen & Chris Seymour and myself) has been hard at work, applying for grants, and organizing upcoming fundraising events.

A core principle underlying all of our efforts is to ensure that every event has an

element of community development and education. Upcoming events include:

March 27th - A viewing of the recorded live performance of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's choral masterpiece *The Atonement*, performed by two Toronto choirs the Orpheus Choir and Nathaniel Dett Chorale with a chamber orchestra. This was our initial event kicking off what we hope to be a regular candlelight concert series.

April 17th - we will be the recipients of proceeds from the Port Williams Trivia Night, and we will host our own trivia night at the church in October.

June 14th - following the Sunday School Closing service we will offer Strawberry Shortcake for a free will offering.

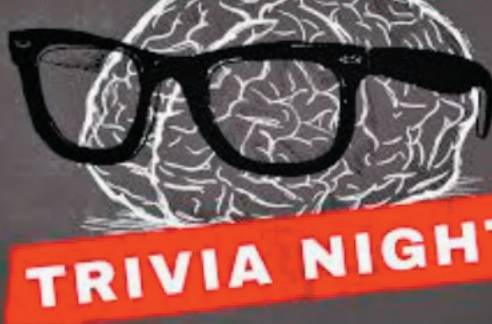
June 27th - will be our Multicultural Bazaar for Peace. We will be building on our carnival success from last year, and hope to have a variety of ethnic food trucks and vendors with games for children and a cakewalk.

We appreciate all the support from the congregation on this ambitious effort.



*The first fundraiser was the viewing of *The Atonement*, the first of what they hope to be a regular candlelight concert series.*

Port Williams Recreation



Go to www.facebook.com/pwrecreation/ for all the details

**Friday, April 17
@ 7 pm**

Port Williams Trivia is supporting the Refugee Settlement Project headed by OVU and involving other churches

Come to the Port Williams Community Centre for a fun night of trivia and to support the Refugee Committee's second fundraising initiative. There will be a box at the door where you can donate cash or e-transfer to treasurer@orchardvalleyunited.ca The suggested donation is \$10 per person.

Come as a team or come as an individual and we'll find a team for you. Each team sits at a table and you are welcome to bring your own snacks. The Port Williams and District Lions Club sells soft drinks, beer and wine as well as a few snacks at their bar.

56,000 copies and Counting: 1939 Grand Pré Cookbook Continues as Covenanter Fundraiser

by Dave Murphy, Committee Chair

The annual Christmas Eve Service at the Covenanter Church was held in December at 11:00 p.m. with approximately 145 people in attendance.

This year's service was particularly special as last year's event, for the first time ever, had to be canceled because of inclement weather.

So we are now planning Summer Services for 2026! Each Sunday Summer Service will be held between 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon followed by lemonade on the lawn which is a time for socializing.

The services will soon be finalized with pulpit supply ministers and will be posted on the Orchard Valley website at <https://orchardvalleyunited.ca/small-group-ministries/covenanter-church/>.

Our annual Anniversary Service will be lead by Rev Don Sellsted on July 12th. This is the Sunday closest to July 10th, the original day the Covenanter Church became a Provincial Heritage Property.

An updated printing of the Grand Pré Cookbook has been received. This cookbook has been a primary fundraiser for the Covenanter since 2013 when the Lower Horton UCW group disbanded and gave the rights to it to the Covenanter Church. Prior to that, the proceeds were given to various United Church and community projects.

The recipes used are from the kitchens of Grand Pré and area cooks and bakers and the book contains, as well, a brief history of the Covenanter Church. As far as can be determined, the cookbook has existed since 1939 and this last printing represents 56,000 copies printed in total over the past 87 years (updated as the years went by but always with the same title and same purpose).

The cookbook is for sale at local markets and stores in the area and by contacting a committee member. Well done little cookbook.



Colette Peng plays the piano for the Covenanter Church's Christmas Eve Service.

Grand Pré Cookbook



The Covenanter Church Committee

Grand Pré, Nova Scotia

“Crafting Community” Theme For P.I.E. Day

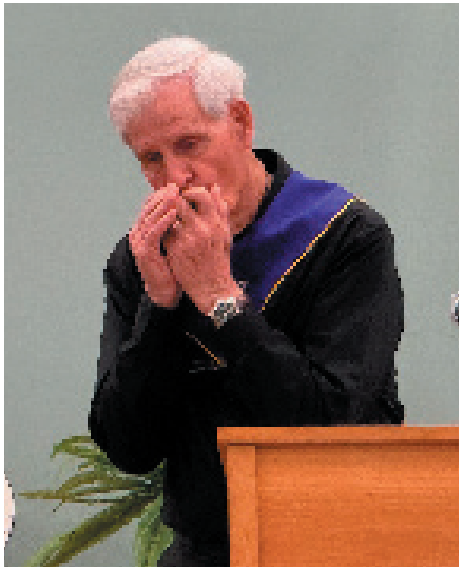
by Sylvia Jacquard

The celebration of the United Church of Canada’s National Affirming P.I.E. Day on March 15 began at Orchard Valley as soon as congregants walked through the door. They were greeted by Betty and Patty who offered them pins recognizing this day on which we are Public, Intentional and Explicit of our inclusion of 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

It continued in the flex space with a book display of some of the children’s and adult books available in our library.

The special elements of this service

Chris Seymour plays “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” during the P.I.E. service on Mar. 15.



began with the playing of the Moderator’s P.I.E. Day message which talked about the theme for this year “Crafting Community”. In her message the Right Rev. Dr. Kimberly Heath spoke about “celebrating woodcarvers, crocheters, painters, gardeners, bakers, everyone who creates something beautiful and helps to weave connection”.

The choir led the congregation in “Draw the Circle Wide”. During the Learning with our Children time, Rev. Don opened a rainbow umbrella that joined other colourful umbrellas on the chancel, lit the Inclusion candle and talked about the meaning of its various colours.

This time concluded with Chris Seymour playing “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” on the harmonica with the choir and congregation joining after a

few minutes to sing the verses of the song.

In his message, “Suddenly an Ally”, Rev. Don talked about the various flags that represent the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Joining the Affirming and the “Everybunny is welcome” banners at Orchard Valley this year is a crocheted bunting representing the colours of the Progress Pride flag made by Polly Leonard.

The offertory chosen for the day, was the on-point “There is Room for All”.

The celebration concluded at the coffee and conversation time where congregants had the choice of apple, blueberry, raspberry and strawberry rhubarb pies and cupcakes frosted in the colours of the rainbow.

Greeter Valerie Mosher is assisted by Betty and Patty Warmington to welcome Anne and Dick Clattenburg with pins on P.I.E. Day.



This new Pride bunting, representing the colours of the Progress Pride Flag, was crocheted by Polly Leonard for P.I.E. Day. Polly is originally from England, where these decorative flags are made for celebrations.

Rev. Don talks with the children about the meaning of the colours of the Rainbow candles.

Songs & Stories: Vignettes of UCC and

by Sylvia Jacquard

Songs and Stories: Celebrating 100 Years of United Church Music, a series of skits written by Rev. Robyn Brown-Hewitt, was performed for the public on January 25 as a fundraiser for Meet Your Feet, our free foot clinic.

Rev. Robyn and our music director Thea Koenig-Burton were responsible for the performance while OVU pianist Carmen Peng provided the musical accompanist and Jane McDonald and Andrea Purvis gave tech support. MYF founder Cheryl Manzer organized refreshments for the event.

The eight skits were each set in a different time period and had the audience

singing a verse from hymns of that time starting with Blest be the Tie that Binds.

Rev. Robyn welcomed everyone to the event and began by providing a brief background to the inaugural service held on June 10, 1925. Everyone then sang O For A Thousand Tongues to Sing, the same hymn which was sung by the 8000 people who gathered at the Mutual St. Arena in Toronto to witness the birth of The United Church of Canada.

The first skit, from the first era, 1925-1950 In the Public Arena, saw four men in hockey jerseys from the denominations who came together: Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational and Local Union Churches tell

the story in a hockey themed way.

In the 20's, 30's and 40's the young UCC grew and faced the challenges of the Great Depression and WWII. The hymn Onward Christian Soldiers from the 1930 hymnary was an example of how our understanding, perspectives and language have changed over the years and why some hymns have been dropped from the hymnbooks.

The second scene was set in the Shirley Street Arena in Sydney, NS featured Rev. Don Sellsted as evangelist Charles Templeton who led a 12-day crusade that brought 40,000 people to the city. The 1940s and early 1950s illustrated the evangelical fevour and

Johann Botha, Dave Murphy, Rev. Don and Thea Koenig-Burton represent the churches that came together to be the new "Team United".

Naarator Rev. Robyn holds aloft the UCC's first hymnary from 1930.



Rev. Don, as energetic evangelist Charles Templeton, brought forth many "Amens" from his audience.

Linda Barkhouse and Cheryl Manzer were church ladies Mavis and Marg.



Hymns Latest Meet Your Feet Fundraiser

hellfire crusades of the UCC at this time. This was followed by a “Just as I Am” from the 1958 Songs of the Gospel.

From 1950 to 1975 it was Babies and Buildings Everywhere with the sod being turned every week somewhere in Canada for a new church building or a manse.

In Scene 3, Women and Children First, two church ladies talked about the growth of Sunday School, creation of the UCW and a controversial topic contraception for unmarried couples. The hymn sung was from the 1971 Hymn Book, “Jesus Loves Me”.

Scene Four Yes, No and Do-Si-Do talked about the UCC’s attempts to keep “uniting” by proposing unions with other denominations through the metaphor of square dancing.

Rev. Robyn talked about the controversy related to songs in the 1971 hymn book, a joint project of the Anglican and UCC churches, like the next hymn sung Lord of the Dance which included the “devil” & “dancing”!

The next section 1975 – 2000 Growing Pains began with Scene 5: Dancing Leads to Sex, set in the 1980s, where therapist

Dr. Paul Apostle talks to his client Jesse Steeple. Sex was a big issue and after the ’88 General Council made the decision that all people were welcome to become members of the church and be considered for ministry there was more controversy.

Rev. Robyn introduced “Voices United” – often described as one of the best hymnbooks as it was the first to intentionally illustrate inclusive language, a variety of images for God, and include global and multifaith perspectives. The audience sang Come In, Come In and Sit Down.

The UCC saw challenges as it faced its racist, colonialist, sexist, ableist, and homophobic history in the 1990s-2000s.

In Scene 6: Sorry one person representing the UCC and one representing First Nations communities begin to talk, about the UCC’s work toward reconciliation with indigenous peoples. They conclude by saying that they have come a long way but have a long way to go.

2007’s More Voices, includes indigenous music from around the world from which the audience sang ‘Hey Ney Yana’ I Walk in Beauty.

The next era was 2000 – 2025 For

Such A Time As This beginning with Scene 7: Unshuttering and Decluttering Decluttering celebrity Marie Kondo came to offer her assistance. Her interview highlighted the UCC response to recent challenges – 9/11, pandemic pivot, restructuring and their declining numbers, financial pains, and conversations about downsizing. This was followed by singing from MV “Deep in our Hearts.”

In the final section, 2025 & Beyond Scene 8 Generation Beta UC, the emcee welcomed everyone to the “spiritual throng and song” time (worship) at their meeting place the Mutual Street Hockey Arena and Pickleball Emporium as well as those joining online through the holographic portal. She introduced the four members of the S.P.I.T. (Spiritual Influencers & Promoters Team) who enthusiastically shared the Sunday morning announcements incorporating a lot of technology, and concluded as they moved through the audience passing the Peace, “elbows up”. The event concluded with words of thanks by Rev. Robyn and the singing of “We are a Rainbow” from the new hymnbook Then Let Us Sing.



Decluttering celebrity Marie Kondo (Sheila Francis on right) tells Thea Koenig-Burton that she has come to help as “Anniversaries can be the perfect time to lose the jumble and find the joy.”

Emcee Nancy Handrigan (at the podium) shares the intricate story of the dance of union, here represented by Sheila Francis (Roman Catholics), Sylvia Jacquard (UCC), Donna Murphy (back to camera) and Linda Barkhouse (hidden but in red hat).

Helen Seymour representing the UCC and Nancy Handrigan representing First Nations communities gradually move closer as the story of the Apologies, the Truth and Reconciliation, the UCC crest and other initiatives are told.



Family Engagement Nights at OVU:

by Debbie Mailman, OV Youth Leader for the Family Engagement Night

At Orchard Valley United Church, Friday afternoons are quickly becoming a special time for our youth families to gather, connect, and grow together in faith. The Family Engagement Night, held weekly from 4–6 p.m., is a vibrant program designed to bring our church families together while nurturing the faith and creativity of our youth.

I am a new staff member for this initiative and serve as the Youth Group Leader for the Friday night family engagement program. Working in consultation with Rev. Don Sellsted, I am responsible for planning and implementing the weekly activities that make these gatherings meaningful and fun for everyone involved.

My role includes organizing the evening meal, coordinating volunteers, and supporting the youth as they participate in a variety of learning and creative activities. With the help of dedicated volunteer and husband Don Mailman and several church volunteers, a warm and welcoming supper is prepared each week for all participants. I also work alongside our very talented Thea Burton, assisting with the weekly music and drama practices that will lead to a special presentation later this spring.

The goals of Family Engagement Night are simple but powerful: to bring families together socially, strengthen community within our church, and provide a welcoming space where youth can explore their faith. The program encourages youth to think about what it means to be a Christian and an active member of the church community. It also offers adults the opportunity to enjoy fellowship and conversation while their children take part in structured activities.

Each week, children and youth ages five and up participate in a variety of engaging experiences. Activities

include group learning opportunities, faith discussions, sharing circles, and interactive games that encourage teamwork and relationship building. The youth are also enthusiastically working together on music and drama rehearsals as they prepare a musical drama that will be presented to the congregation later in the spring.

Another highlight of the evening is the shared meal. Gathering around the table offers everyone a chance to slow down, connect, and enjoy fellowship together. Under the leadership of volunteer Don Mailman, the kitchen has been serving up delicious meals such as tacos, spaghetti and hamburgers. These shared meals have quickly become a favorite part of the evening for many families.

Attendance continues to grow steadily as word spreads about the program. On average, 10–15 youth attend each week, often accompanied by one or two adults per family member. This means that 30–40 people gather together each Friday, filling the space with laughter, conversation, and meaningful connection.

The response from families has

been overwhelmingly positive. Youth participation has been enthusiastic and consistent, with many young people eager to return week after week. The energy in the room is vibrant, and families have shared encouraging feedback about the sense of belonging and community the program is creating.

Programs like Family Engagement Night remind us that church is more than a Sunday morning service—it is a place where relationships grow, faith is explored, and community is built.

Through shared activities, meaningful conversations, and meals enjoyed together, Orchard Valley families are creating lasting connections rooted in faith and friendship.

Volunteers are always welcome to lend a helping hand, especially in the kitchen. Anyone interested in helping with meals or supporting the program is encouraged to contact me at deblmailman@gmail.com. Together, we are building a joyful and supportive community where youth and families can grow in faith—one Friday evening at a time.



Families share a meal together every Friday.

The adults have a social time prior to the meal.

Building Community in Faith



Eating together is a friendly social time for the youth.

The youth participants appreciate the tacos prepared by the volunteers.



Don Mailman, meal organizer, is one of the many volunteers who help out each week.

The youth participants serve others in the making of the meal.

Each week the youth sing and play their instruments as they practice for their June musical presentation.



Sunday School Learns About “Fruits of the Spirit”

by Cheryl Hill

The Sunday school children/youth and leaders have had fun getting to know each other and learning together. Volunteer leaders have been using the GO Project curriculum for fun and interesting programming. We have looked at some of the ‘I am’ statements of Jesus - I am the Bread of Life, I am the Good Shepherd, and I am the Light of the world. During Lent we are learning about “the Fruits of the Spirit” - Faithfulness, Love, Kindness, Peace, Joy, Generosity, Gentleness, and Patience.

Through stories, games, videos, crafts, and discussions we are learning that these spiritual gifts guide our actions and our thoughts, and teach us how to live in the way of Christ.

On Valentine’s Day we had a fun event for the children/youth. We made lunch together (pizza and ice cream), watched a movie (Lady and the Tramp), and made cards to give out to the congregation.

We have enjoyed having a few younger children attending in the nursery.

Our child/youth numbers are growing and we are fortunate to have a dedicated group of volunteer leaders.

When everyone decorates their blank puzzle piece with a design that represents them, the pieces will come together into one.



The children work together creating links to make a paper chain.

The Sunday School students made and handed out Valentines to members of the congregation.



Meal-in-a-Bag: Kids Help With Outreach Project

by Jennifer Gillis-White

On Sunday February 22nd, the Sunday School students put together 15 Meal-in-a-Bag packages. Each Meal-in-a-Bag provides a complete meal that is contained in a gallon ziplock bag. One of the meals, made up of canned turkey, instant mashed potatoes, a gravy packet, and canned vegetables, creates a turkey dinner. All Meal-in-a-Bags use canned or “instant” ingredients, meaning they are shelf stable and require no refrigeration. Meals do not require the



use of an oven as all elements are able to be cooked by microwave or on a stovetop.

Meals are also accessible to those with various motor or cognitive delays, as ingredients are pre-made and there is no requirement for a knife to chop ingredients. Each meal comes with a recipe card which gives instructions on how to prepare it. Working in teams, the children put together five turkey dinners, five beef and bean chilis, and five vegetarian soups. They were responsible for reading the recipe cards and ensuring the correct ingredients were placed in each bag. After they finished, we talked about the times Jesus helped others by serving those who needed help. The children were reminded that all of us can show God’s love by helping others.

Nobody is too young to be a helper.

This project has become a part of Benevolent and Centre 130 Outreach Programs and meals are given out by our staff as well, with seven given out this month. It encapsulates the mission statement of the church to offer “radical hospitality.”

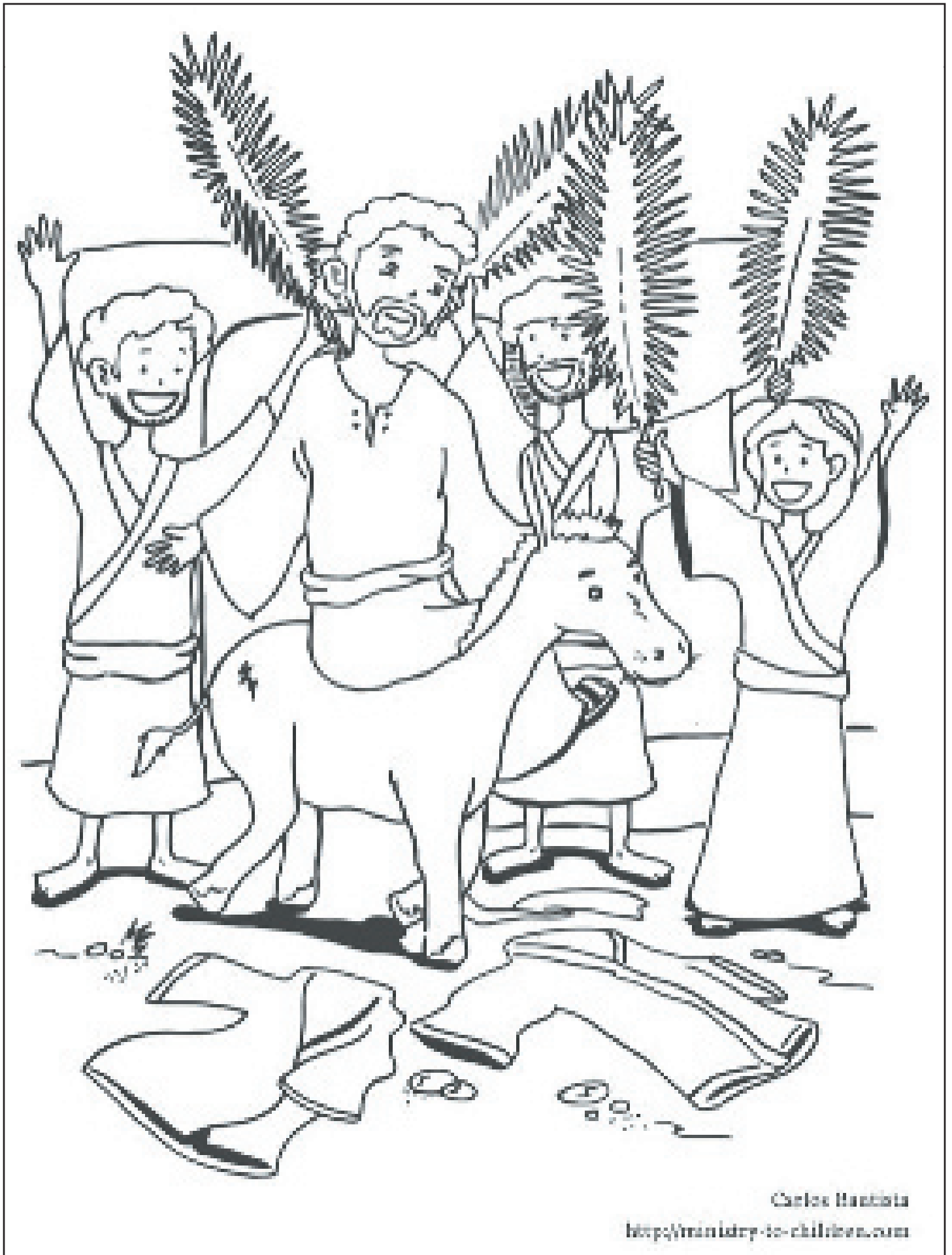
In April, we will be holding a fundraiser so the congregation has an opportunity to support this valuable new addition to Outreach. If you have further questions, ask anyone on the Outreach Team.

Rev. Don and the kids make music during the Learning with our Children time.

Diana Dunn and two Sunday Schoolers play Sink or Float.



Debbie Mailman and the Sunday Schoolers do the Pass the Love activity where they pass a ball of yarn and share what they love about each other. Holding the yarn shows they are all connected.



Carlos Bustos

<http://ministry-to-children.com>