

CASTLEGAR UNITED CHURCH



Men's breakfast celebrated Advent and Christmas with a fine morning feast

WHAT'S THE FUTURE

A small group has been meeting somewhat regularly to grapple with the question, "what's the future of our church?" We are considering how to be a gathered community in Christ navigating uncertain times, and we're also considering the future of our building. Although the impetus for the question is one of decline, we are finding a real sense of possibility and opportunity. Every United Church community of faith is asking a similar question, so we are certainly not alone, and our timing is actually quite good.

CHURCH STRUCTURE

The United Church of Canada is living into the new structure: Conferences and Presbyteries have been combined into regional councils. Ours, the Pacific Mountain Regional Council, is busily but ably learning how to be an effective and re-formed church. We in Castlegar strive to stay in contact with the congregations of the former Kootenay Presbytery, while also seeking new ways to bond with other communities of faith.

BOARD STRUCTURE

We haven't solved the big question of the future of our church community, but we believe we've landed on a new structure for our board for now. The congregation will vote on this at the Annual Congregational Meeting. The proposed structure should allow for greater flexibility in membership, while also lightening the burden on board members. Flexibility and adaptability are part of the new way of being gathered community.

UN-CHURCH

Our Un-Church program continues thanks to financial support from the Pacific Mountain Region of the United Church of Canada. Around a half-dozen families meet on the third Wednesday of the month to explore concepts related to our faith tradition. Sarah Brownlee continues to coordinate Un-Church. We repeated our retreat at Camp Koolaree in August and it was a beautiful success. Clear skies and ideal weather gave a true sense of retreat.

Learning, Leading, and Loving in the Light of God



Friday morning Bible Study welcomes members of other faith traditions, like Sikhism, to deepen our faith

INTERFAITH INQUIRY

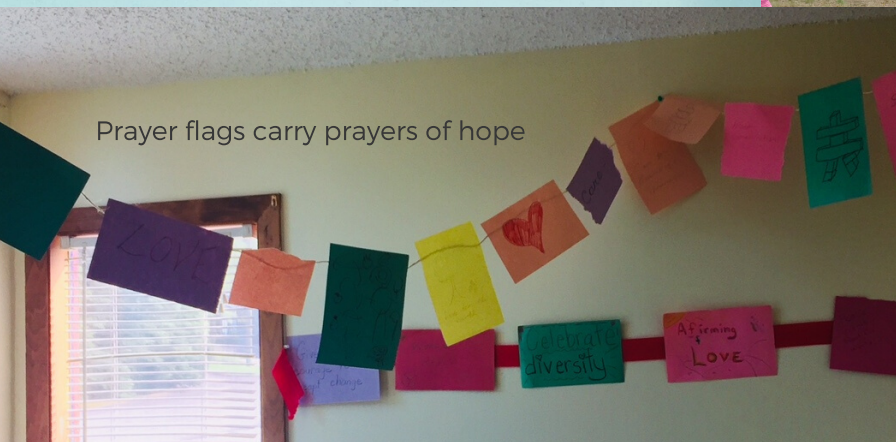
This fall, our Bible Study group changed form somewhat to study other faith traditions. We have read about Islam, Sikhism, and Hinduism, and we've had members of our community who practice these traditions guide our learning. It has been rich and wonderful. Sometimes one's own faith is enriched by learning about another's; and sometimes we see just how much there is in common. Buddhism is next on a long list of intriguing traditions. New folks are always welcome.



Sebastian teaches Kim how to turn swords into ploughshares



A dedicated crew keeps Pie Day a tremendous success, bringing in many from the broader community



Prayer flags carry prayers of hope



Mason, Eliana, and Aspen practiced their four-legged racing

Learning, Leading, and Loving in the Light of God



Anakin and Malakey lead Sunday morning worship at the Un-Church Retreat at Camp Koolaree



Donnaye and Jane transform weapons into farming tools

The candle is always a hit at Un-Church

ADVENT MESSAGE - REV. GREG

The afternoon light fades into nighttime sky awfully early at this time of year. For some this means more isolation and separation. For others, this means time to cozy up under a blanket, maybe with a great book or movie, maybe even with a loved one. I've learned we have a choice to embrace winter or resist it, but the latter never works out in our favour. I've come to know the Danes use the term "hygge" to describe the concept of accepting winter's invitation to get cozy.

Advent is simultaneously about dwelling with the darkness, and finding equanimity therein. It's about facing our fears, and turning them into opportunities. Joy isn't a natural part of the human reaction to December darkness, but Advent invites us to find joy -- and hope, peace, and love -- anyway. God is always with us; and yet we wait for God's coming again. So may we find joy in the darkness; may we accept winter's invitation to get cozy; and may we wait patiently but actively for a God who is already here, and also is still to arrive.



Rosemary turns painting into a performance art to mark the third Sunday of Advent, Joy

FUNDRAISING

Our church community's year-end bonus is to give away half of what we've raised through efforts like garage sales, bake sales, and, of course, Pie Day. This year we're giving away over \$4,000 to groups and organizations in our community. Choosing worthy recipients is always a long process because there are so many candidates, but in the end we all come away feeling good.

The process also reminds us of the scale of the need in our community. Safe, affordable housing remains in short supply; programs for children and youth are expensive; and although we'd like to solve poverty tomorrow, we resolve to do our part. And we hope the church's giving inspires more giving.

HEARING LOOP

Our hearing loop project is complete, and several folks regularly make use of the t-coil feature in their hearing aids so ambient noise stays low enough. Many thanks to the United Church Foundation through the Watkins Fund for Innovative Ministries with Senior Adults, Heritage Credit Union, the Columbia Basin Trust's Community Initiatives Program, and Angela Jakobs of Hear and Beyond, who managed the project (very patiently). We hope the broader community will make more use of our church building, which is now even more accessible for all.

PARTNERS

Part of the emerging way of being a church community is to energize our community partnerships. Several groups are regular users of our building, and we seek to lift them up whenever possible. The Guides and Brownies, the Castlegar Children's Choir, various 12-step groups, the West Kootenay EcoSociety, and others have been meeting in our building for some time, and we expect two new groups to become regular users. All of these present exciting opportunities for partnership. Our strongest partnership may be with Exploration Station Childcare, which has a permanent home in the former Sunday School room. There is tremendous vitality in our building!