



Highlands United Church

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OUR MINISTRY

Ordained Ministry

Rev. John D. Burrill, BA., M.Div.

Minister Emeritus

Rev. Peter Lim, PJK, M.A.

Ministry of Music

Wendy Nieuwenhuis
Carol Bergum

Ministry of Administrative Assistance

Gail Wichert

Children's Ministry

Louise Hill

Ministry of Caring

Members of the Congregation

BOARD OF ELDERS

Judi Fearon - Chair

Les Lutic - Chair Elect

Gary Wilson - Budget and Banking

Donna McFadyen - Christian Dev.

Jill Ottewell - Christian Dev.

Betty Forfylyow - Outreach

Ann Blakely - Pastoral Care

Lorne Fearon - Property

Wayne Youngward - Regional Council

Ed Langkamp - Secretary

Dave O'Brien - Spiritual Engagement

Colleen Evanishen - Treasurer

Carol Logan - Worship

David Brookes - Member at Large

It is the last week of August. Summer has passed, and we're heading into the autumn season. It is such a beautiful time of year filled with many symbols of life: the crisp morning air, the leaves falling to the ground. This morning I had my walk and it was full of mystery. The fog could have been cut with a knife. What lay beyond was out of my sight, but not God's! Such is the story of our faith, which we hold onto dearly as we sojourn through this time of the unknown. The fog of our circumstances blinds us as to what lies ahead, but the "Son" disperses this to reveal a clear blue sky. What a treasure!

Friends, we are in the midst of a journey which no one has experienced before. I read the other day that in 2015, everyone was asked where they would be in 2020; no one answered correctly. It seems that as parishioners of Highlands United Church, we have had more than our share of adversity. First the fire, and now the pandemic. We have had to dig deep, and we worship One who knows about real adversity.

For the last six months, we pulled together and put stopgap measures in place. Decisions were made on the fly and everything was very fluid. As a congregation, we received the best professional advice we could and erred on the side of caution. We were one of the first churches to close the physical doors and in hindsight, none too soon, as unfortunately some congregations experienced COVID-19 outbreaks. We have managed to keep worshipping, making use of a table, a music stand, and a single iPad for a camera. Thank God for the Internet and the possibility that it brings. We found how this opened the spiritual doors to many who normally wouldn't or couldn't come to our church building. There were many rainbows in the midst of the storm. Together, we did flatten the curve and entered the summer wondering where we would be in the fall.

A committee met recently to question where we go from here. With the safety of our parishioners and staff at the forefront, we decided to proceed cautiously for the well-being of all. When we ceased meeting in our church facility, Edmonton had about 30 cases of COVID-19. Presently, we are about 2000% higher, and it is predicted the coming couple of months are going to see a second wave and a real spike in numbers. Trying to weigh a multitude of factors including: the demographics of our congregation, the number of members we have who are immunocompromised, our dense urban setting, our custodial challenges and our current status as a hot zone. We decided wholeheartedly that we maintain the current course and accept that this is a marathon we are running, not a short sprint.

Hope for tomorrow, Healing from yesterday, And a home for today!

Now that we have caught our breath and the fog is starting to lift, we see where there is potential and opportunity. We hope to fine-tune some of our recording technology, such as purchasing a microphone for our iPad. We will continue to record our services remotely, as this seems to be the safest for those leading and those participating in worship. We want to put considerable energy in reaching out to those who have fallen between the cracks. Not everyone is able to attend church virtually because they don't have internet, and so we desire to "take the church to the people." We will be purchasing DVD duplicators and looking at ways to get these recordings and DVD players if necessary, into your hands. For those of you who do not have Internet, do you have family or friends who do? Or family or friends who can perhaps find other avenues to assist you in watching the service together within your bubble?

We also hope we can embellish our worship services with soloists and instrumentalists so that our voices are not the only ones we will hear. This will come at a cost, but we feel called to make our services as worshipful for you as possible. We are so blessed to have two of the finest musicians on our team and we trust their leadership in this endeavor.

Next to *worshipping together*, I have heard what people are longing for is *fellowship*. It is written "where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there." In what I would title "Re-entry Level Two", we need to strive to experience what is called "*relational therapy*". This simply means getting together. How do we do this virtually? For those who have invested in the stock market with shares in "Zoom", you are now smiling and so are we. It has allowed us to meet within the safety and comfort of our own homes using a smart phone, tablet, or computer. The Southside Seventh Day Adventist Church was using this technology long before we even worshipped in their facility. Many attended their meetings from all over the city with a push of a button in their own homes. We will be forever changed by this whole experience. We may have entered it kicking and fighting against it, but now an 80-year-old parishioner does not need to drive at night in the cold of winter to attend a meeting of our church. How great is that! The challenge we have is to acquaint everyone with these possibilities and enjoy seeing and talking and listening to one another. The Chair of our board, Judi Fearon, hosted a time of fellowship after Sunday's service back in June. It was a successful trial run and we will be experimenting with this again on September 13 and Sundays to follow. Information will be forthcoming about this. I look forward to seeing you!

This "zoom" time fellowship is just one of the opportunities we have at our disposal to connect and experience *relational therapy*. Bel Canto has been meeting together in this manner, as well as the official board. I hope our UCW, Choir, the Alpha program, coffee chats, and possibly a book club and more, will also be able to make use of these. Let our imagination create new paths for us.

We also want to expand our telephone tree. This is a ministry of outreach. Personally, I would like to call it a bamboo telephone tree. Bamboo can grow so quickly, up to 35 inches per day, and I pray this ministry will grow quickly as well. Most people feel comfortable on the phone and this is a resource we all have in place right now. Why not make a call to a brother or sister in Christ who you have been thinking about? Ask them how they are doing, how they are *really* doing.

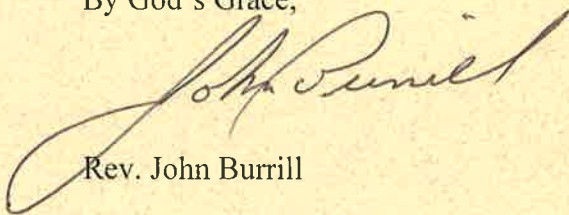
It is called the *Ministry of the Inclined Ear* and it's so powerful and necessary. Please reach out and in doing so you will be touched also. It's how God works and it's heavenly!

Last, and farthest from the least, the greatest resource and gift we have is prayer. Nothing can separate us from God! The fog will lift and the Son will shine. I was out on a walk a few months ago and I met a parishioner who just turned 99 years old. In conversation, she shared how every night she has prayed for me these past five years. I was so moved and I am so thankful for all your prayers. We are a house of prayer and we need to reach out by bending down on our knees and lifting up one another in prayer!

I draw this letter to a close with the recognition that all of us long to be back in our sanctuary where we can raise the rafters in praise. That day will come, but let me share this quote by Daniel Benson: *"So, why haven't we opened the doors yet? Because we, as family, care for one another: not just spiritually, but bodily as well. Therefore, we need to work out a lot of details. Most businesses are trying to figure this all out. We are too, but with an additional layer of complexity; these are not our customers we are talking about; this is our family. The beloved, the crazy, and the weird ones, all together. Many are vulnerable and frightened, all of them are concerned about their own well-being and that of others. Somehow, we will figure this all out; and, sooner or later, our doors will reopen. In the meantime, it's only the bricks and mortar of the church building that is closed; the church itself has not been closed for a minute! It continues to live, serve, and thrive because the people – our family – are open to how God is always doing a new thing in the world, even in a world of COVID-19."*

This is, without a doubt, the longest pastoral letter I've ever written. Though the past several months have dragged on and taken their toll, I sense a new horizon, and the 'Son' is shining through as we are being called to come closer to what the true meaning of the church is. Let's keep the faith, explore together the possibilities, and trust we are not alone!

In His Service,
By God's Grace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John Burrill". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Rev. John Burrill