

Gower Street United Church

Advent Newsletter

Already – and NOT YET!

Perhaps one of my most anticipated seasons of the Christian year is ADVENT. One of my favorite things I look forward to in this season is worship and sitting in the beauty of the sanctuary at Gower with the church dressed in its finest.

If you have happened to be out and about the city you will notice that once again, there are already Christmas decorations up in the stores. I spotted them before Halloween this year! Ugh!....I admit that I have a helping of Grinch in me, because I want so badly to hold onto the practice of Advent – to say – NOT YET!

Yes, we know the good news of Jesus' coming, but I love the sober stillness of Advent that makes space for those who bear the honesty that the sweet carols on the radio and the bright tree doesn't mean everything is ok.

I actually love Christmas! Once we get there, on Christmas Eve, my heart is always bursting wide open by the time we arrive at that clear, peaceful and hope-filled moment of Silent Night by candlelight in the splendor of our amazing sanctuary. I am so excited to celebrate it here with you again at Gower Street United!

First though I wish to invite you into the PRACTICE of Advent.

We will start on the first Sunday of Advent looking for one glimpse of good news, of the coming of God's kingdom, every day. How shall we do this?

Perhaps make an Advent journal either in photo or in writing and share it with your family through the 12 days of Christmas.

Make an Advent box with your family (decorate it together!!). While sitting around the supper table write one hope-filled Advent thought on paper, place it in the box then on Christmas or Boxing Day open the box and read them together.

How about making an Advent gratitude jar (decorating it is the most fun part!!) with your children and ask them to write one thought on paper before bed time. Read them together on Christmas Day.

Why don't we all catch photos of hope-filled moments during our Advent journey? Send them into the office and we will watch them together on December 19th during our music filled Christmas Worship and again on Christmas Eve. Let's challenge each other to see and hear what good news we have caught a glimpse of in our lives during our journey through Advent! So, before we get to Christmas together don't miss soaking in this beautiful season of stillness and waiting – a season that says with our souls, already – but, not yet!

As Christians we also remember during this season of Advent that through Jesus all has been accomplished, that God has reconciled the world – and yet, the kingdom has not yet come into its fullness. There are still hungry, lonely, and forgotten folks who will need help this Advent and Christmas Season. There are many amongst us who are sick and filled with worry, torment and grief.

There are empty seats around our tables from people we miss and ways in which our own lives and certainly our world is not yet as we hope it will be. This is true in a very deep level in our own lives, especially as the pandemic continues.

For some, this in-between time we live in is not easy. It is good to be honest about these circumstances of our life's journey. Jesus does not just magically make everything better – but in FAITH we keep hearing God's promises that all will be well.

If you turn on the news, tv, radio, phone – you hear about fear, destruction, horrible hurts people cause each other, and natural disasters. How are we to explain these to our children or reconcile them to ourselves? For myself, being a Christian means we can be honest about these things – that together we deeply explore this mystery of the already and not yet. In scripture we have witness to both, as we hear in the gospel readings each week. As Paul says in scripture “We live in a broken world—natural and human made, marred by human sin—and we rejoice in the Lord who is near and guards us with God's peace.”

Already, but NOT YET! May God bless you with a full heart during this Advent season. May hope, joy, love and peace fill your life as we live in this in-between time.

Many blessings,
Rev. Pamela



Hello friends,

It is a blessing to greet you as the cycle of our church year brings us back to the beginning – the Season of Advent. I am glad to serve as your Minister of pastoral/spiritual care amid the changing scenes of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is especially encouraging that our church gatherings and events are taking on more appearance of what we had grown accustomed to – yet, we will never be the same as we process our new experiences and let them take their place in our memories. This year as we look forward to our Pilgrimage to Jerusalem I invite you to reflect, with me, on the cycle of our spiritual year.

When we reflect on our spiritual journey, it is marked by many ends and beginnings. As each season merges into the next, there are ends and beginnings: Advent points toward Christmas; Christmas culminates at Epiphany; Epiphany gives way to Lent; Lent leads to Easter; Easter becomes Pentecost (Creation Time). Altogether the cycle of the liturgical year culminates in Reign of Christ – an end and a new beginning place as we prepare for the wonder-filled birth of the babe in a manger.

At Reign of Christ we move from pondering the mystery embodied in the Christ as one of spiritual maturity, to the wonder of – God with us – in an infant birth – the beginning of an amazing journey taken each year as we move through the Seasons of the Spirit.

Have you ever paused to truly consider that each time we, as pilgrims, move through the cycle of the liturgical year, it provides an opportunity to create a check list, and to take stock of our growth and development into Christian spiritual maturity?

Consider Reign of Christ Sunday and the first Sunday of Advent as a parallel to the secular New Year, December 31, 2021 to January 1, 2022. It is customarily a time when many in our culture pause for reflection, take a look back on personal and community events of the past 365 days, often stopping to reflect on some event or another that holds particular significance.

This allows for deeper thought, before moving on to make a resolution or list of resolutions for the next 365 days.

What would it look like if we applied that pattern to the end (Reign of Christ) and beginning (Advent) of our spiritual year?

Focusing on three notions in the form of questions such as the following, let us create a spiritual check in time,

Questions for consideration include:

1. How would I describe my spirituality at the beginning of Advent last year? Or how am I becoming more Christ-like? Where have I changed? Where are my struggles? What have been my places for growth?
2. What can I do to cultivate my spiritual growth over the next year?
3. Where would I like to be next Reign of Christ Sunday? How might I get there?

Friends, what I've shared is essentially my goal to nurture spiritual growth in the year to come. Sometimes, with the constant impact of information available to us each day (from a myriad of sources), I feel overfilled or under-filled ... a bit of a conundrum. I require wee nudges or a big nudge to remind me to take time to process, rejuvenate, and cultivate my spiritual growth. I sense, while we continue to navigate our 'new world', as the coronavirus pandemic continues to unfold and influence daily living, others may share a similar challenge and I invite you to participate with me in responding to the questions posed above – make new questions and find space to engage in some responses.

With that in mind, may God bless us, as we set out on our 2021 Advent pilgrimage with deeper insight into what will help our spirituality blossom.

Peace health love,
Ettie

It's Advent again! It is that season where we are oriented - in everyday life as well as liturgically - toward Christmas. It is my honour to work in this community at Gower, and I am looking forward to growing our community. I have been listening to a Christmas song by Amy Grant recently called "I Need A Silent Night," the lyrics include:

*December comes, then disappears
Faster and faster every year
Did my own mother keep this pace
Or was the world a different place?*

*Where people stayed home wishing for snow
Watching three channels on their TV
Look at us now rushing around
Trying to buy Christmas peace*

*I need a silent night, a holy night
To hear an angel voice through the chaos and the
noise*

*I need a midnight clear, a little peace right here
To end this crazy day with a silent night*

This part of this song always called to mind for me that more and more each year, the hustle and bustle of Christmas overtakes the waiting and preparing of Advent. Christmas décor fills stores and homes earlier and earlier each year.

While I love Christmas and decorating my home, something is missing when it starts earlier and earlier each year. While I may want to join in and decorate earlier, it also doesn't feel right. This feeling unsettles me every year around this time. I think that is the need to pause not to rush and move so quickly to Christmas.

For me is the pause and reflection; this is what I see the season of Advent offer us all. A time of waiting and preparing ... for more than the presents and the parties. We wait for the joyous birth of a baby in a manger. At the same time, while we wait we are offered the chance to witness God here with us now. Advent is a time for us to look forward, to share in love and community, to pause for prayerful reflections, to look for God's work in the world right now, to pull us into the hope of God's promises for newness, forgiveness, and mercy through Jesus. I hope that you pause during this season and be present in the waiting and preparing.

Sending you warmest blessings this Advent season, may you share joy, show peace, offer love and be surrounded in hope for what is to come.

With grace,
Rebecca



Gower Is Waiting...

Advent Pauses

Join us for a time of conversation, reflection, music and prayer weekly.

Thursday, December 2, 9, and 16 at 11:30 a.m.

Gower Street United Church



SUNDAES ON FRIDAY

DECEMBER 10, 2021

6:30 - 8:00 PM

GOWER STREET UNITED CHURCH

JOIN US FOR AN EVENING OF
COMMUNITY, CRAFTS AND ICE
CREAM

A CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS MUSIC

Featuring Gower Community Band,
Gower Handbell Choir & Gower
Senior Choir

December 19, 2021
at 11:00 a.m.

Gower Street United Church
In-person & Online

Stewardship Committee

Respectfully submitted by Tony Chadwick

The products of the committee's work have only recently come to fruition, delayed in part by the impact of COVID-19 and by Rev. Pamela's medical leave: letters have been sent to PAR donors asking them to prayerfully consider increasing their monthly donations; a new Stewardship Page has been added to the Gower Street United website; testimonials have been solicited (the first was delivered by Tony Chadwick on Sunday, November 14) for presentation on a regular basis; the visit of Rev. Roger Janes on November 7 to preach at the morning service, and, following a light lunch organized by the Men's Club and the UCW, to present ideas for legacy giving, remembering Gower in our wills; and, there is an on-going attempt to address the problem of contacting Gower's members and adherents for whom we have no email or telephone contact information. The highlight of our work was, of course, the 125th Anniversary of the building of our current sanctuary, celebrated with a concert and dessert auction. Please see the separate report elsewhere in this newsletter.


Gifts with Vision

Are you seeking inspiring new gift ideas?

Gifts with Vision presents a new way to celebrate special occasions.

Give a gift that can help change people's lives! The United Church of Canada developed a giving catalogue, Gifts with Vision, in response to member requests to give gifts to relatives, friends, and loved ones that directly support the church's Mission & Service partners across Canada and around the world. Gift funding raised for partners through the catalogue will be over and above the regular member-supported, stable core funding that these partners receive. Everyone can find something in Gifts with Vision worth sharing with the special people in their lives. Gifts are available in a range of dollar amounts and for many areas of need — hunger, shelter, education, health, safety, mobility, and more.

If you would like to learn more or get a catalogue contact the office or visit the Gifts With Vision website: <https://giftswithvision.ca/>.



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Finance Update

Respectfully submitted by Fred Earle

November 2021

The most recent financial report presented to the Board of Directors was for the current fiscal year up to October 31, 2021. At that time, we were showing a shortfall of expenses over revenues of (\$35,628) for the year January 01 to October 31, 2021. This is worse than for the same period in 2020 which showed a deficit of (\$16,853) but much better than we were in 2019. I last reported at the end of July and since then our monthly operations have shown a surplus of \$1,138 for August month, a (\$7,638) deficit for September month and a deficit of (\$301) for October. October month was buoyed by the Successful 125 Anniversary event and fundraiser which provided an additional \$4,557 of income

Congregational support through your contributions has been strong and has helped us operate at the level that we have done so this year. This support has been important as we have seen such a decline in other revenue such as facility rentals. Over the past three years the income for the first ten months of the year has been as follows:

| | 2021 | 2020 | 2019 |
|---------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Donations & support | 162,774 | 151,238 | 135,984 |
| Rentals | 21,190 | 15,300 | 30,980 |
| Covid 19 supports | 10,000 | 22,034 | 0 |

Fortunately, rental revenue has seen some improvement over the past year with the continued support of Etcetera as well as Stella's Circle utilizing some of the space for training and workshops. As well, we were able to maintain operations through the Covid 19 crisis through federal and provincial programs available for organizations such as ours. As well our investment and bequest income remains stable at around \$70,000 per year.

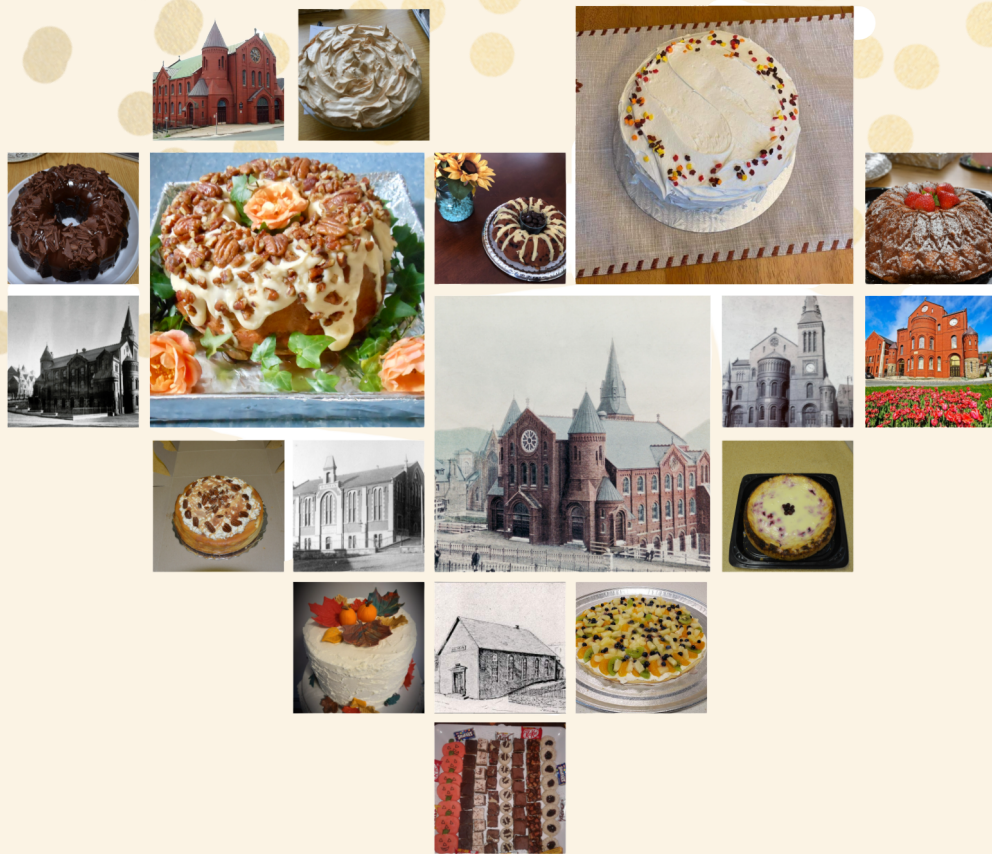
Our expenditures for the first 10 months of the year are as follows, Salaries – 182,143, Heat & Electricity 35,793, Insurance 22,357, Property repairs 11,965, East District assessments 14,456 and all other expenditures 19,820.

We have projected a budget shortfall this year of (\$27,050), and with a traditionally strong amount of support from the congregation and community in November and December we hopefully can stay within the budgeted deficit or reduce it to a break even position.

Christmas Memorial Donations

If you would like to make a donation in memory or honor of a loved one this Christmas please contact Nancy in the office. These will be reported in our Christmas Eve worship bulletins.

Information for memorial donations will need to be received by **4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 21, 2021** to be printed in the bulletin.



125th Anniversary Concert and Dessert Auction

Respectfully submitted by Tony Chadwick

Firstly, a huge thank you to all who contributed to the success of the event on October 16! To the organizing committee: David Robbins, Tony Chadwick, Ken Peters, Fred Earle, and Rev. Rebecca; to the concert organizers: Dr. Doug Dunsmore and Ron Collins; to the performers: Gower Community Band, the Collins Family, Carl Goulding, and Tony Chadwick; to Rob Pitt and Ken Butt who created the premiere showing of the video “The Building of Gower”; to those who baked desserts, and to Rev. Rebecca for creating the Dessert Parade; and to those who donated money to purchase commercial desserts. And to the members of the Men’s Club who manned the door and acted as ushers. What a wonderful team effort! We had to make adjustments to our original plan, eliminating the reception in the Lecture Hall and the auction of donated items, but the Dessert Auction went ahead in the Sanctuary, the photographs of the desserts being projected on the large screen in between the various performances in the concert. The Gower Community Band also donated a lovely basket of goodies as a door prize.

Secondly, the financial results: the dessert auction raised approximately \$2,796.06, and ticket sales a further \$1,500, plus donations of \$145 for a total of \$4,444.06.

Finally, the items that have been donated for the intended silent auction have been reserved for a future event.

A wonderful result for Gower Street United Church! Perhaps this may become an annual event?

Christmas Eve at Gower

