Gower Street United Church

Fall Newsletter

Autumn 2026

Minister's Message

"What is your favorite season?" Autumn is becoming a favorite of mine. Here it is, already late Fall! The leaves have fallen off many of the trees, making a crunchy carpet of orange. The colours remind me of a beautiful sunset. When walking in the woods there is often a lovely scent, something like partridgeberries. This is a season of change and transformation. It reminds me to pay attention, to notice, to appreciate all that is around me. Yet we know change can sometimes be difficult. We may not like the changes that comes with this season – wind, rain, cold, darker days, longer evenings. I am reminded of words by the poet, Robert Frost:

Lodged

The rain to the wind said, "You push and I'll pelt.";
They so smote the garden bed That the flowers actually knelt,
And lay lodged – though not dead. I know how the flowers felt.

At times, we too, may feel "lodged", overwhelmed to whatever has been going on around us that seems out of our control. At times, in our personal lives, and as part of the church family too, and even spiritually, we may, at times, feel exhausted, vulnerable, not sure about what is to come. We may feel frustrated, knowing what we hope for, but not sure what else we can do. In "Lodged", Robert Frost shares that very human sense of feeling battered, no longer standing, "lodged" or 'stuck' in the flowerbed. For a moment he sees the rain and the wind as being like bullies, attacking the flowers. Frost shares the truth that he too, knows the feelings of sadness, of feeling defeated. And the Fall can be a challenging time for anyone who knows depression, as Robert Frost did, or anyone who similarly experiences "seasonal-affective disorder". We too, can feel like the bent-over flowers.

But then we hear a glimmer of hope – the flowers *are not dead.* The poet hints us that within the flowerbed, within the flowers themselves, are the seeds for the season of new life yet to come, after the quiet of winter. His words remind me that despite the state of things in the Fall when the wind and rain have 'done their work', God provides us, through the changes of the seasons, a quiet message, a reason to trust and wait in hope.

I connect these words with words from Isaiah 40:8, "The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God will stand forever." (NRSVUE)

This is my prayer for you: Through all the changing seasons of life may you notice signs of God's mysterious presence with you, and may you be strengthened in faith, confidence and courage. God is with us! I hope also that you will continue to give thanks and pray for all your church family here at Gower, for those of us who serve as your ministers and staff, and those share the responsibilities as volunteers and leaders. And as you are able, please continue to support your church with your financial gifts, talents, and time. We really need YOUR help! I hope we see each other again at church as health and strength allows.

May God bless you and yours,
In faith and trust,
Rev. Karen

Opening our Doors to the World

Gower's 2026 Open Doors program had another successful season, welcoming nearly 2,000 visitors from across Canada and around the world to our historic church. With funding support from the federal Canada Summer Jobs program, the province's Summer Employment Program for Students, and a further contribution from the United Church of Canada Foundation, we were able to open 5 - 6 days a week (mid-June to August), continuing into October on selected dates. One specific target again this year was the many cruise ships that visit the Port of St. John's. By opening our church at times when the sanctuary would usually be closed, visitors had the opportunity to experience Gower's unique architecture, hear about our long social and spiritual heritage, and learn – many for the first time – about the United Church of Canada. Our four Heritage Interpreter guides greet visitors, introduce the congregation's historical context, and are available to conduct folks through the sanctuary as they wish. Visitors are also invited to explore and take photos. A brief, looped slide presentation is shown on our large sanctuary screen, accompanied by recordings of Gower choirs. It tells the origins of Methodism in the Colony in 1765, the establishment of Gower's congregation in 1815, the history of fires and other changes to the four church buildings that served the congregation, and ends with a characterization of our church and the United Church of Canada today. Brochures about Gower are also available (in French and English) for visitors to take away with them. While some drop in for a brief look around, most stay and watch the slide show, talk with the guides, or stay for a few minutes of meditation. Many remark on the warmth of the woodwork and our stained-glass windows. Some ask questions about Gower and the United Church, ranging from architectural details to matters of faith, social involvement, Indigenous relations, and our Pride flags. Because folks in need sometimes drop by during Open Doors, we also keep on hand (for distribution) lists and maps of community services – mostly in the downtown area – including resources for meals, shelter, and social and mental health support. NL Health Services also provided training sessions for our guides to help them better support our neighbours.

Robert Pitt – Chair, Heritage and Archives Committee



One of the cruise ships visiting this year



Our Guides: Hannah, Jasper, Erin and Emma

VIBRANT WITH CREATION COLOUR, SEPTEMBER 13, 2026

With gratitude to Artist, Heather Reeves, and to the donor, The Very Rev. Dr. Marion Pardy, The Rev. Karen Thorne and Ken Slaney, Chair of Worship and Sacraments received and dedicated “Orange” Paraments for the Season of Creation (September 13 to October 11) on Sunday, September 13, 2026. The Paraments were dedicated “in memory and honour of the ‘faithful’ of Gower Street United Church, past and present, who valued and value the worship of God in the beauty of holiness within this sacred space”.

Ken, as Chair of Worship and Sacraments, received Marion’s gift with these words: “Dr. Pardy, with gratitude, we accept your generious gift of Season of Creation Paraments. We will care for them reverently and will use them to express our love of God and the world God loves.”

In the Dedication Prayer, The Rev. Karen Thorne said, “In the name of the holy and triune God, Creator, Christ and Spirit, we dedicate these Paraments to the glory of God … Creating God … May the beauty of colours and symbols in this work of art, crafted and offered in praise of you, invite us to ponder the symbols and stories of our faith, and the rhythm of life’s seasons in your presence, and, thus, remind us of the whole of creation, and of you, Creator of us all. AMEN!”





In describing her exquisite “work of art”, multi-talented Artist, Heather Reeves, shared: “Creation suggests its own symbols. New growth leads to the tree, important in many cultures as the tree of life … this slightly abstract orange tree has leaves added to it to reinforce its symbolic use. Furthermore, though based on the early Christian symbol of the fish, the outline shape of the United Church’s logo is the same as that of the leaf … One of our rhythms of life is the cycle of the day, with the dawn bringing light and warmth after the colder dark and its time of sleep … We wake refreshed and ready for new growth within God’s creation. Aware of our interdependency with it, thankful for and respecting its beauty, sustenance and life-giving energy, we are humble in the face of this amazing home.”

These Paraments, together with our awe-some sanctuary, music, words and Word, prayers and liturgical flow, are strong aids to worship. Worship “grounds” me in the faith and provides the joy, comfort, courage and challenge to “go, make a difference” within our world, loved by our Creator God.

Marion Pardy (The Very Rev. Dr.), Minister Emeritus, Gower Street United Church
Photos: courtesy of Lloyd Gill and Rob Pitt

Youth and Families

Gower Learners – both youth and some adults – recently enjoyed decorating pots for some small “Zebra Hawartha” succulent plants.

We plan to deliver one of these as a small birthday gift to our seniors.

They serve as a small reminder that our seniors are important and remembered by their church family on such a special day.





Terri, Robbie, and Cleo enjoyed celebrating communion recently in the sanctuary’s family space.

Welcome to Our Caregivers

FAMILIES FAITH EVERY DAY

Meet Dorcus and Grace, our new caregivers and supports to our young families at Gower! Soon we will be ready to celebrate the completion of the space we need to get going on our Families Faith Every Day (FFED) programming.

You may be aware that we have been in the midst of renovations to make our gathering spaces more friendly and hospitable. This will benefit our young families with children as well as other members of our church, such as those who are elderly. Our “Nursery” or “Quiet Room” is now complete and it is lovely! The former “Council Room” is well underway to becoming a more comfortable, welcoming space where we can host small gatherings of families for a meal and conversation, with space and care for children near at hand.

Dorcus has been with us on Sundays since September 2026, getting to know folks and being available during Sunday worship. When Dorcus is unavailable, Grace is now arranged to be present in her place. These caregivers will be very helpful when the FFED program is implemented. We are delighted to have their assistance. In addition to our Gower young families being able to get to know our caregivers, they have been a great help during these times of juggling programming while our ministerial staff is reduced.

Hello Gower members! My name is **Dorcus Annika Yohan**. I’m a second year nursing student at Memorial University. I moved to Newfoundland from India 3 years ago with my family. I am delighted to join the children’s program at Gower Street United Church. I’ve always been passionate about taking care of and playing with young children. Outside of University, I volunteer with the United Church of Canada. I’m a member of the Admission’s Board at the Office of Vocation, United Church of Canada. Regionally, I serve on the Executive Board of First Dawn Eastern Edge Regional Council. At my local church, I help with reading the scriptures and singing during worship services.

During my spare time, I enjoy watching movies, working out, dancing, trying new cuisines and spending time with friends and family. I enjoy meeting new people and building new connections. And I look forward to doing so at Gower Street United Church.



Welcome to Our Caregivers



Hello, Gower Street United Church!

My name is **Grace Sparks**, and I'm excited to be a new part of the Gower Street United Church community! Although I am new to St. John's, I have lived in Newfoundland for the past five years. I am currently a first-year nursing student at the Centre for Nursing Studies, and I look forward to building meaningful relationships with individuals and families, creating lasting connections, and offering a helping hand wherever I am needed.

Please don't hesitate to introduce yourself! I look forward to meeting everyone, and I would like to extend a special thank-you to Rev. Karen for inviting me to be part of this wonderful church community.

A Little About Me!

I grew up in Niagara Falls, Ontario, before my family made the decision to move to Newfoundland in 2021. Although it was a sudden change, it brought many blessings into our lives. Experiencing the beauty, close-knit communities, and unique atmosphere of rural Newfoundland was an incredible experience.

During my high school years, much of my time was spent studying and working. Living some distance from the city meant that I had fewer opportunities to build connections outside of school and work. Although this sometimes left me feeling lonely, my faith became an important source of comfort and strength. Through those quieter seasons, God taught me to trust in His timing and reminded me that I was never truly alone. He helped me find purpose in those moments of solitude, allowing me to focus on my academic goals, save money for post-secondary education, and secure a place in nursing school.

My faith has also played an important role in shaping the person I am becoming. As I began spending more time in St. John's, God blessed me with friendships centred on faith, encouragement, and shared values. These relationships have been a reminder of the importance of community and the difference that genuine care and compassion can make in someone's life.

My decision to pursue nursing has also been shaped by my faith and my desire to care for others. I have seen how much individuals and families can go through during difficult seasons of life, and I hope to offer others the same compassion, comfort, and support that have helped me along my own journey. I look forward to growing into a nurse who not only cares for people physically, but also recognizes the importance of emotional and spiritual support.

Thankfully, after moving to St. John's just over a month ago, I have had more opportunities to build friendships and become part of a community. I am excited for this new chapter in my life and look forward to seeing what God has in store for the individuals and families at Gower Street United Church. I feel truly blessed to be here, and I can't wait to see what the future holds!

Annual Block Party



On Sunday, September 13, Gower gathered for the Annual Gower Street Block Party with our neighbours and friends from The Anglican Cathedral, The Basilica, and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church.

This annual event celebrates our community with live music, entertainment and food. A great time for all!







Congratulations, Marion!

GOWER STREET UNITED CHURCH CONGRATULATES THE VERY REV. DR. MARION PARDY ON RECEIVING THE PREDTIGIOUS AWARD OF ORDER OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR.

On October 8, 2026, at the Investiture Ceremony at Government House, The Very Rev. Dr. Marion Pardy, together with seven others, was awarded the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Citation for Dr. Pardy reads as follows:

Throughout her distinguished career, Dr. Pardy has championed peace, justice, and human dignity for all people, regardless of race, religion, class, or gender. A respected leader within The United Church of Canada, she served as the denomination's 37th Moderator from 2000 to 2003, becoming only the fourth woman to hold this prestigious office since the church's inception in 1925, and the first person from Newfoundland and Labrador to be elected Moderator while serving in the province. In this role and throughout her ministry, she used her voice with purpose and conviction, promoting interfaith dialogue, social reform, and greater understanding among diverse communities.

Dr. Pardy's commitment to faith-based collaboration led to her appointment to the Governing Council of the Canadian Council of Churches in 2003, where she later served as Vice Chair from 2004 to 2009. Recognizing the power of shared action, she joined the Religious Social Action Coalition in 2007 and has served as chair for many years. Bringing together Christians, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, the coalition has worked to address poverty and advance the common belief in the dignity and kinship of all people.

Through ministry in rural and urban communities across Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador, including Gower Street United Church in St. John's, Dr. Pardy developed a deep understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty. Drawing upon these experiences, she has been a persistent advocate for meaningful social policy reform, including a guaranteed livable income.

Long past retirement age, Dr. Pardy remains actively engaged in pastoral care, public advocacy, and community leadership. Her enduring legacy is one of compassion, courage, faith, and a steadfast commitment to justice for all.

Please join me in congratulating Marion on being a recipient of this high honour.

Ken Slaney,
Chair, Worship and Sacraments Committee



Affirm Committee
Radical Inclusion: A Journey

Rev. Pamela invited me to talk a bit about the work of the Affirm Committee this year at Gower Street United Church. And because it is related, I wanted to also share with you something I have been reading about called “radical inclusion” and the faith community.

On January 27, 2019 a vote was held on the following motion: … that Gower Street United Church become an Affirming Ministry – meaning that as a congregation, we commit to ensuring that our policies and practices are intentional and explicit in affirmation of LGBTQ+ individuals and families; and, more broadly, to make social justice and equity front and centre in our faith community – **radical inclusion**.

Affirming Ministries are congregations, within the United Church that publicly declare their commitment to inclusion and justice for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. But their commitment to justice is far broader. Affirming Ministries work to challenge all oppression by

- working to end discrimination based on race, appearance, culture, class, age, sexual orientation or gender identity;
- promoting economic justice;
- increasing accessibility;
- caring for the planet.

In other words, radical inclusion!

Last summer the Gower Affirm committee discussed ways of raising awareness of these broader social justice goals of Affirming Ministries. Toward that end, we planned the “Moments for Affirm” series of presentations. Each month we chose a national or international day of recognition, oriented toward a range of social justice issues.

In **October**, in recognition of United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty Rev. Marion Pardy offered a presentation on her work with the Religious Social Action Coalition advocating for a guaranteed livable income (GLI).

Our **November** Moment for Affirm focused on the Transgender Day of Remembrance, an annual observance that honours the memory of those whose lives were lost in acts of anti-transgender violence that year.

In recognition of Day for Persons with Disability (**December 1**) in our moment for Affirm we discussed the importance of allyship in circumstances where we witness discrimination in the context of structural mobility restrictions.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day in **January** was held up as an occasion to come together to learn, remember, reflect and consider what action we can take to stand up to all hatred, discrimination and racism in the world today.

Radical Inclusion

In **February** in recognition of Black History Month, we hosted a lunch and learn event with the authors of *Black Harbour: Slavery and the Forgotten Histories of Black People in Newfoundland and Labrador*.

In March we presented a brief overview of why we celebrate PIE Day on **March 14.** It is our calling for a renewal of Gower's commitment to being Public, Intentional, and Explicit in our collective journey towards creating a more inclusive world.

We recognized Earth Day In **April** with the distribution of potted plants to the congregation. With suggestions of how to consume less, but better, in order to reduce our impact on the planet – promoting a simpler, more inclusive and sustainable way of life.

In **May**, in our Moment for Affirm, in recognition of Mental Health awareness we talked about the importance of connection and community.

And in **June** we held a screening of the film No Other Land – a documentary about the forced displacement of Palestinians by Israel's military the occupied West Bank.

So while it is a priority for Affirming Ministries to lift up the voices of LGBTQ+ individuals and families who have been historically marginalized in faith communities with events like Pride Sunday, PIE Day, and activities like joining the Pride Parade, we are mindful of God's call for radical inclusion.

Radical inclusion in the church is the commitment to unconditionally welcoming and celebrating all individuals, regardless of race, gender, sexuality, ability, or socioeconomic status. With our moments for Affirm this year, we have worked to integrate marginalized voices and experiences more fully into our faith community. It's radical because it's a departure from the ordinary, and often requires fundamental shifts in the way we think about things and people. It's radical and therefore inherently challenging.

Trust me when I say there are elements of the Pride Parade that are outside my comfort zone. However, God reaches others through our acts of radical inclusion; even and maybe especially when it is uncomfortable and disruptive and when we are forced to confront our own biases. In our work with Gower as an Affirming Ministry, we believe it is when we invite respectful authentic relationships, especially with people who are different from us, we truly become an extension of God's hand and divine affection.

Radical inclusion, radical hospitality as a faith community, is what God calls us to provide. The Gower Affirm Committee will carry on with our Moments for Affirm next year. If you have ideas or feedback or a social justice issue you would like us to lift up during our Moments of Affirm or other Affirming activities, please let us know. Thank you.

Gail Wideman
Chair, Affirm Committe



Photo Mystery

Guess who is in this photo?



