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#### FROM GOOD GRIEF TO HOPE

As we live more deeply into the meaning of grief and hope, we're discovering that they are interconnected. Indeed, lots of what we've taken for granted, we are discovering, is strongly interconnected to our health and the health of God's creation.

Inside this issue, are our stories of grief and hope. Our true stories of God's Spirit moving us through this changed reality.

- Grief is part of life
- Oxford's prayers of thanks
- News for UCW groups
- Camp Tanner reaches out
- A leaving, a birthday and a retirement
- Woodstock United Leaders celebrate the Anniversary of UCC
- Someone new stretches beyond their comfort zone to use YouTube
- Gratitude for the continued outreach of Operation Sharing
- The OURS Committee offers hope for new refugees
- In a national online event, the Canadian Council of Churches celebrates Pentecost
- Racism isn't new but the victims change spurring the need for a new heaven and a new earth
- Five Oaks provides take-home meals tasty!
- June 25 prayer vigil for Peace in Korea
- Indigenous History month speaker series with Tony Snow
- From grief to hope in Social Justice issues, online resources, long term care facilities
- See page 11 for details of worship services in Oxford



# FOOD FOR THE SOUL Good Grief

The relationship between loss and grief is with us at birth. Take away one of our

creature comforts and we will let anyone within earshot know. As children we soon learn that we have entered а world where things get lost and things get



broken. We respond with grief. We don't choose grief, it chooses us.

The world of Covid-19 is a world of losses the like of which has not been seen before. It is a world of loss and grief. Out of grief can come change.

If you were close to students, especially those in grade 8 or 12 when Premier Ford announced that schools would not be opened in June, **you may have noticed grief.** Students would not get to see their classmates, their best friends, their teachers. They would not experience the traditional graduation ceremonies. With the help of parents and teachers they would find other ways of celebrating.

The deficiencies of long-term care homes have been pointed out for years. It took the tragedy of multiple deaths by the Covid-19 virus and the report of the Canadian military to elicit enough grief to call for major change.

In the last week in May, every gun owner in Canada received a letter for the R.C.M.P. outlining which guns were prohibited and what had to be done with them. That action was taken as a result of **the national grief** 

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**and outrage** following the murder of 22 people in Nova Scotia.

Two young men, Mussie and Kidane Habte, escape Eritrea and became refugees in Ethiopia; Kidane five years ago, Mussie, two years ago. Each morning they would wake up with hope of hearing of sponsorship. Each evening they would grieve a little when no word came. The OURS Committee heard their story and recommended sponsorship to St. David's UC. Churches are already grieving. Members worry about the future. In spite of that worry, a greater grief was heard and heeded. St. David's UC agreed to sponsor. Can you imagine the joy when Mussie and Kidane along with the Zekarias family got the word?

And the Biblical connection? In 587 BCE, the Jewish Temple was destroyed and the Jews taken into captivity in Babylon. They were plunged into grief. They realized they had to do things differently. They began to write down their oral history. We have that. It is a good part of our Old Testament. And just to make sure readers would not forget, they wrote another book called Lamentations. It is a testimony to loss, grief and the road to hope, for them – and perhaps for us. *GW* 

#### FRIENDS OF OXFORD

In time, we'll gather together. In the meantime, let us know how you are. <a href="mailto:oxfconnections@gmail.com">oxfconnections@gmail.com</a>



https://www.grandriverbooks.ca/open and selling books online

#### **PRAYER CHAIN**



"Birds are singing, woods are ringing, with your praises blessed king; Lake and mountain, field and fountain,

to your throne their tributes bring."

What are our tributes from the UCC in the former Oxford Presbytery?

Thanks for the marvellous spring weather that has made seeding and planting go well throughout the county.

Thanks for the many temporary workers who have made Five Oaks their home while they served their quarantine periods and then have gone on to work on local farms.

Thanks for progress made in many local congregations searching for new ministerial leadership and special thanks for those congregations who have found their new ministers: Knox UC, Embro, Dundas St. UC, Woodstock.

<u>Thanks for</u> local prayer chains and groups who faithfully hold up their own communities in hope and expectation to God.

In this time of pandemic, we all need help as we deal with isolation in various forms. Most of us by now know of friends and relatives who have been very ill or have died without our usual forms of support and sympathy. Thank God for the efforts of caregivers of all sorts who are helping us through. Give us imaginations to try new ways to express our virtual hugs; give us patience to follow the rules given by our Medical experts who are helping us all to move through this difficult time; keep our hope and joy bright as we raise our "Glad hosannas, glad hosannas, joyfully" to You.

> Olga McKellar going prayer

Contact Olga McKellar for on going prayer concerns. o.mckellar@sympatico.ca

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#### **PRAYER CYCLES**

- Former Oxford Presbytery update in July (<a href="https://tinyurl.com/Oxford-prayer-March-11-2020">https://tinyurl.com/Oxford-prayer-March-11-2020</a>).
- United Church of Canada Antler River Watershed

https://www.prayercycles.ca/antler-riverwatershed26c697c9

• To Join Regional Prayer Rooms: https://mailchi.mp/038704d73777/regionalcouncil-prayer-cycle-june-7-with-prayerrooms-schedule?e=6b6367b642

# Ministerial Leadership sought for congregations in Oxford:

Avondale UC (Tillsonburg) working with Otterville UC; Hickson UC, Norwich UC, Oxford Centre-Curries Pastoral Charge, Princeton-Etonia Pastoral Charge, Sweaburg - West Oxford Pastoral Charge, Foldens UC, Burgessville UC, Richwood UC (after June 28, 2020).

**Innerkip UC –** seeks short-term Ministerial Leadership during medical leave of Rev Karen Low.

**Dundas Street United, Woodstock** has called Rev. Sherpherd Munikwa, effective July 1, 2020.

#### **CHANGES IN OXFORD:**

Congregation of **Curries UC** is selling their building.



#### OXFORD UCW Events cancelled till end of June.

Lorna Gardner, President-Elect of Oxford UCW, from Hebron UC

#### **Keeping in Touch: News for UCW Groups**

The national church has put Infopacs online. The Keeping in Touch folder is full of the latest news and updates from UCC Women National President, Beulah Hayley.



Follow on
Facebook or
Instagram
@CampTannerInc
for fun activities

throughout the summer! Currently, there is a poll for 'Who should be hosed?' amongst the staff. The readers get to pick which staff!

# COMINGS AND GOINGS AROUND OXFORD...

Our best wishes to Rev Mary Elford in her move to Ridgetown, closer to family. We join Mary in her prayer for guidance as she discerns her path forward: Holy One, please quiet my fears and worrying. Remind me, remind each one of us, how much you love and care for each one. Nudge me to perhaps different, undreamed of patterns of being, of serving. Above all, please let me know you are with me always, no matter the circumstances. Amen

# Ruth Skillings, former Editor of Church Mouse,

celebrates her 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday amid Covid-19 with family drive-by.



Wonderful memories of Ruth's smile and wiling hands.

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# "TAKE COURAGE!" A REFLECTION ON RETIREMENT

As I take a few minutes to reflect on what it means to retire from twenty-two years in congregational ministry the words of the prophet Haggai resound in my heart and in my mind.

The people had returned from exile and had begun a new chapter of their lives. They were "home" again, but it wasn't really home anymore. It didn't look like home; it didn't feel like home; and it certainly didn't resonate with their memories of those former glory days.

They were "supposed" to be re-building the temple but hadn't quite gotten to it. Somehow it just seemed overwhelming. (perhaps a bit like me attempting to pack up my church office!) They knew the new temple would never look, or be like the former temple, and so they just let it go and instead focused on what they could do, like build houses for themselves, plant crops etc.

Until the prophet Haggai upsets their apple (or date) carts and speaks to their hearts, "Take courage," says the Lord, "take courage all you people of the land," says the Lord; work, for I am with you," says the Lord of hosts. (Haggai 2:4) The people nodded their heads. Surely the Lord was right. It was time to begin a new chapter. It was time to risk and to build anew. It was time to let go of old pictures of the former temple and build one that would perhaps be far less magnificent, but more reflective of who they were now, and more importantly, it would speak to their relationship to God - a relationship that had grown far more intimate in the years they had spent in exile leaning on God and on each other.

I am learning, just like my ancient brothers and sisters of so long ago – I am learning that beginning a new chapter in my life

takes courage! In many respects it would be far more comfortable to remain in my congregation until I am mandated by the United Church of Canada to retire at the designated age of 71 years.

After all, I love Dundas Street United Church (DSUC)! I have been in ministry here for 13.5 years and it has been a rich experience with all kinds of opportunities to grow in my faith and leadership skills. It is a congregation where my longing to provide creative worship and liturgy has been welcomed; it is a place where folks have been willing to risk, grow together, and pray together.

But just as God called me into ordained ministry and eventually here to Dundas Street, I am feeling clearly that **God is** 



nudging me to find the courage to embrace a new chapter in my life.

You see,
ministers
aren't like
many other
folks who
work at a
job and
then count
the days (or

years!), until they don't have to go to work anymore. Ministry is a vocation – we are men and women called by God to live out God's desire for us in this world.

And so when we "retire" from a congregation or a particular ministry, we are called to discern in concert with God what is next. That's where I'm at. I'm standing with the people of ancient Israel about to begin a new chapter and I'm not quite sure what its going to look like, or how it will turn out, or even what it will be! But in the midst of

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it all, I hear the voice of God saying to me, "take courage, for I am with you."

As I summon up my courage and begin to imagine what will be next, I am filled with gratitude for all the people who have been such an important part of my ministry. I have been a part of what was once Oxford Presbytery and is now Antler River Watershed Region for my duration in congregational ministry. I have served three charges in Oxford: Burgessville – Newark, my settlement charge; Innerkip – Eastwood; and DSUC.

Each community of faith has blessed me and become important chapters in my faith journey. The former Oxford Presbytery as well as London Conference were also spaces where I was encouraged to live out and share my gifts and I am grateful to my friends and colleagues for those amazing opportunities!

Thanks be to God for new chapters and the courage and faith to begin a new adventure! Blessings Rev. Bonnie Pilkey

# **GATHERING for Worship -**

Practicing social distancing, **Woodstock United Church leaders** Lloyd Bennet
(College Ave UC), Jane vanPatter (St.
David's UC), Bonnie Pilkey (Dundas St
UC) **celebrated the Anniversary of United Church of Canada** (June 10).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiCcL9pphEI&f
eature=voutu.be



Norwich UC Licensed Lay Leader, Kathleen Welch is the latest to use You Tube message. A promising start surely to be followed by others in her congregation. Go to YouTube. Search Norwich UC!



https://www.operationsharing.ca/

We extend best wishes to Vanessa Page who has left Woodstock for London after 20 years in various capacities with Operation Sharing and the Salvation Army. Read the tribute in Oxford Insight June issue:

https://tinyurl.com/Oxford-Insight-June-2020

# Bullwinkle's Eatery and Hospitality Training Centre in Woodstock

Running temporarily out of College Avenue United Church, takeout lunches are available on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays (from noon to 1 p.m.). People are asked to donate a minimum of \$1 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On Wednesdays, lunches are free.

PLEASE NOTE: Bullwinkle's is in urgent need of a few volunteers for food prep.

# Oxford County:

#### **Food for Friends**

Please remember to give your 25 cents each time you shop at supporting grocery stores in Woodstock and Ingersoll.

#### The Inn

The Inn homeless shelter, which serves all of Oxford County, is at Old St. Paul's Anglican Church in Woodstock. Free of charge for those 16 and up. It operates nightly from 7:30 p.m.

Mail financial donations for Operation Sharing to Treasurer of Operation Sharing, P.O. Box 20081, Woodstock, Ontario, N4S 8X8.

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#### **OXFORD** UNITED **REFUGEE SUPPORT COMMITTEE (OURS)**

As COVID 19 takes control of our lives, the plight of refugees becomes more deplorable and intolerable. And so, the work of the OURS committee continues.

Following



the withdrawal of Freweini Mebrahtu and daughters from the sponsorship program, 2 young men, nephews of Habte and Abrhazion Zekarius, indicated their desire to come

to Canada. Mussie Yohannas Habte and Kidane Esavas

Habte fled their home in Eritrea due to a new "policy of service", literally slavery. They now reside in

public

Ethiopia with little food and poor living conditions. Funds are available and forms will be filed with our government to begin the process which takes up to 2 years.

At the same time, Bisrat Behre Yemane, son of Freweini Mebrahtu, made his wish

known to leave his home and family to come to Canada so our need of fundraising continues. Our goal is to raise \$7 000.00 over 2 years to assist Bisrat to begin a new life.



All 3 young men will be housed by the Zekarius Family in London on their

If you are able to support this cause, cheques made out to ST. David's U.C. with REFUGEE SPONSORSHIP on the memo line and should be sent to:

The Treasurer, St. David's United Church, 190 Springbank Ave., North, Woodstock, Ont. N4S 7R1

Your support, the sponsorship of St. David's and the help of Brian Jackson, Treasurer are greatly appreciated as we continue God's work in helping to improve the lives of others. Carol Ewing, Chair of Oxford United Refugee Sponsorship Committee

**Editor's note**: For ease of reference, all **OURS** stories published CONNECTIONS are stored online at:

https://tinyurl.com/OURS-Committee-2020

#### **CANADIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES**



"Together in One Place" was an online Ecumenical

Prayer Service for Pentecost on May 30, 2020. Over 750 people registered for the event, held via Zoom. Prayers, Scripture readings, and reflections were offered in English and French. I felt a deep privilege to be part of this unique service. The Spirit was moving! MM https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-

HLJkAs7K0&feature=youtube



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# BIBLICAL CONNECTIONS – A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

Rev. 21:1. Acts 2:11

John, the author of the book of Revelation, was convinced there would be a new

heaven and a new earth. John knew that racism was part of the old earth. First the Jews, then the Christians were the persecuted visible minority. Rome had



finally lost patience and brought in the military. John escaped with his life and his pen; a pen that proved to be mightier than the Roman sword.

Racism has raised its ugly head once again in these last few weeks with the death of George Floyd by four police officers.

I am writing this the day after Justin reporter's Trudeau answered а question with a 21 second silence. At this point he has not explained the pause. He needn't rush. There will be plenty of pundits and perhaps a few preachers who will weigh in. Here is my version. The question that I heard was in two parts. What do you think of Donald Trump's tear gas and rubber bullet treatment of those gathered in front of the White House and if you do not want to what does that answer, mean? Trudeau answered both parts. The 21 seconds was followed not by the anti-Trump old earth diatribe that the reporter hoped for but a new earth statement about racism of which all of us are capable and culpable. The 21 second time may have been accidental, but we have it. In our cultural liturgies 21 shows up in the 21-gun salute, the highest honour given to royalty or head of state dignitaries. If we leave out the guns, we have a 21 second silent salute to George Floyd, a member of a race that long ago we should have treated with much more honour and dignity.

When the brother of George Floyd visited the spot where George was killed by a knee on his neck, George's brother knelt to pray. Others knelt in support and prayer. Those who stood were asked to "take a knee"; a symbol of the protest against racism from Colin Kaepernick, the NFL player who knelt during the US national anthem. The knee on the neck that symbolized the old earth racism for so long just got replaced. A new earth was emerging.

Another sign was and is the thousands of mostly young people of every race colour, creed, language, and nation across the US and beyond, marching for a new earth without racism; people with many languages but with one understanding and one purpose. Like the gathering at Pentecost it is the hope of a new earth that is "blowin in the wind." GW



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#### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

When on-site gatherings are prohibited, being flexible is challenging! But some online initiatives are being explored: a webinar with John Philip Newell; a minicourse on Leading Communities through Grief and Resilience; short presentations; interviews; learning opportunities and online nature encounters on the land at Five Oaks. Check out the Five Oaks website www.fiveoaks.on.ca or their Facebook page for details as plans develop.

Five Oaks continues **to host migrant** workers for the quarantine period so they can enter Canada safely.

**Volunteer opportunities** are still available at Five Oaks. If interested, e-mail <a href="mailto:hospitality@fiveoaks.on.ca">hospitality@fiveoaks.on.ca</a> or call 519-442-3212.



The Kitchen at Five Oaks is now preparing delicious take-home meals. Available dates vary.

Details available here:

https://www.facebook.com/fiveoakscentre

**Five Oaks appreciates your ongoing support.** If you are able to donate, at this time, you can do so by e-transfer to <u>finance@fiveoaks.on.ca</u> or by cheque sent by regular mail to Five Oaks, 1 Bethel Road, RR 3, Paris ON N3L 3E3.

#### **KOREA PEACE NOW**

The UCC is adding its voice to the global A Light of Peace Prayer Campaign for Peace and Reunification on the Korean Peninsula. On June 25, join Moderator Richard Bott for an online prayer vigil with HyeRan Kim-Cragg (Timothy Eaton Memorial Church Associate Professor of Preaching Emmanuel College) at and representatives from United Church partners the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCK) and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK).



A Light of Peace will be livestreamed on The United Church of Canada's YouTube Channel. You will be able to observe the vigil as well as chat and comment through this page.

For background information see:

https://www.united-church.ca/social-action/act-now/korea-peace-now

# New Facebook page!

#### **Oxford United Ministries**

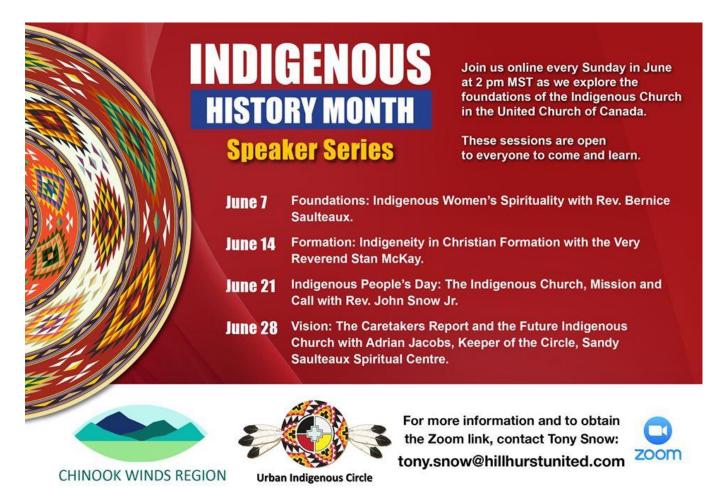
https://www.facebook.com/OxfordUC Ministries/

If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.

esmond Tutu

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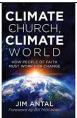


# **FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS**

#### From Good Grief to Hope

Grieving is work. Unproductive work when we are encouraged to 'get over it' and be positive. Good grief is hard work, a spiritual process of facing the harsh truths of reality. Good grief is hope sent by God that there is a new story waiting to take hold. Hope is an action not merely an attitude.

So while the harsh crises of climate change, covid-19, racism etc, disappoint me, when I can share that grief in a safe place with others, I'm hopeful that together we will develop new possibilities for loving neighbours, doing justice, and walking humbly with God.



Reading Jim Antal's <u>Climate</u> <u>Church</u>, <u>Climate World</u> helps. Although primarily about climate change, the process of moving from grief to hope filled action is generic.

One possible action: Recently, Ontario government, used the excuse of COVID-19, to get rid of the need for public consultation to 'get Ontario going again'. Lack of public consultation means loss of important green space, wetlands and farmlands. I invite you to write to the Provincial government to demand public accountability. https://tinyurl.com/ontarionature-ltr For those interested in a more detailed review of the book see, https://tinyurl.com/From-Grief-to-Hope1, Murray, member of Social Justice Network of ARWR.

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# SOCIAL JUSTICE -Online Resources

- United Church of Canada https://www.united-church.ca/
- Facebook page United Church of Canada

https://www.facebook.com/UnitedChurchCda/

- Facebook page Antler River
   Watershed Regional Council
   https://www.facebook.com/groups/ar
   wrcucc/
- Facebook page Oxford United Ministries (former Oxford Presbytery ) <a href="https://www.facebook.com/OxfordUCM">https://www.facebook.com/OxfordUCM</a> inistries/
- KAIROS https://www.kairoscanada.org/
- Citizens for Public Justice, www.cpj.ca

**Mandate Magazine** United for God's Mission (not available online but subscriptions available from UCRD)

# LONG TERM CARE (LTC) FACILITIES CRISIS

The conditions in Ontario's Long Term Care Facilities have been documented for years (see Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition- ISARC letter May 29, 2020 at <a href="https://isarc.ca/endorseltc/">https://isarc.ca/endorseltc/</a>). The LTC facilities are ill prepared to deal with the Coronavirus. This appears to be true in for-profit-nursing homes which have had 4 times as many covid-19 deaths as non-profit-nursing-homes (see <a href="https://www.thestar.com/business/2020/05/08/for-profit-nursing-homes-have-four-times-as-many-covid-19-deaths-as-city-run-homes-star-analysis-finds.html">https://www.thestar.com/business/2020/05/08/for-profit-nursing-homes-have-four-times-as-many-covid-19-deaths-as-city-run-homes-star-analysis-finds.html</a>)

The Ontario Health

Coalition (OHC) is a nonprofit, non-partisan
public interest activist

coalition and network, working to protect

and improve our public health care system. In OHC's open letter to Premier Doug Ford, signed by more than 100 organizations, they request that the LTC Commission of the crisis in LTC facilities be open and transparent, not include for-profit operators or owners, and invite participation from families and the public. They also highlighted immediate measures to be taken.

Both the Antler River Watershed Regional Social Justice Network and Social Justice Network of Ontario Regions endorsed the OHC open letter and an ISARC letter. If you wish to sign the open letter to Premier Ford, you can find it here https://www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca/index.php/open-letter-open-letter-to-doug-ford-signed-by-100-orgs-1-5-million-ontarians-ltc-commission-

<u>immediate-measures/</u>. Email it to <u>premier@ontario.ca</u> with a copy to OHC ohc@sympatico.ca.

It was 25 years ago, this week that the Government of Ontario increased the number of privatized Long Term Care Facilities. The former Premier, Mike Harris is the Chair of the Board of Directors for Chartwell Homes. <a href="https://spon.ca/mike-harris-expanded-the-privatization-of-long-term-care-doug-ford-is-discovering-that-wasnt-a-magic-cure/2020/05/05/">https://spon.ca/mike-harris-expanded-the-privatization-of-long-term-care-doug-ford-is-discovering-that-wasnt-a-magic-cure/2020/05/05/</a>



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https://arwrcucc.ca/

#### NEWSLETTER:

https://mailchi.mp/abee10e71e8c/stage-2-newprovincial-quidelines?e=0878d108a5

Previous Newsletter contains Covid-19 Toolkit for the Board, Minister, Church Staff, Committee Members

Minutes of the Commissions (Human Resource, Covenanting, Mission and Discipleship) of Antler River Watershed Region are available on the website. https://arwrcucc.ca/

On their Facebook page, Diane Matheson-Jimenez, Minister, Social Justice for Antler River Watershed, Western Ontario Waterways and Horseshoe Falls Regional Councils offered this prayer on COVID-19 at their staff team meeting in Mav:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/arwrcucc/perma link/540477103309486/



#### **AVAILABLE IN OXFORD**

#### Services

**Dundas St. UC** 

https://www.facebook.com/dsuc285/

#### Kintore/Brooksdale UC Facebook live feed at 9:15 am:

https://www.facebook.com/morethanSunda ymorning/ or www.kintorechurch.com

#### Mt Elgin UC website:

https://www.facebook.com/MtElginUnited

#### **Norwich UC:**

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMplr X3w-f6iEa5dqJmvqbw/featured

#### Peace UC, Plattsville at 10:am

https://www.peaceunited.ca/

#### Trinity United, Ingersoll

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDcxY bhDAUqxEx2vd4kjx0Q

Westminster UC, Thamesford 10:30 am https://makingconnexions.com/live/

# Services (message and/or

**video** available by email request.

College Ave UC pastorlloyd@collegeave.ca Hebron UC - rsstock@execulink.com

St. Paul's UC, Tillsonburg

stpaulsunited@execulink.com

St. David's UC, Woodstock

stdavidswoodstock@gmail.com,

# **CONNECTIONS - News and Views of Oxford County** United Churches

**Next Publication: Wednesday,** 

July 8, 2020

#### **SUBMISSIONS DUE:**

Noon Monday, July 6, 2020 You may share widely.

#### To add or remove your name to this mailing list, email

oxfconnections@execulink.com Submissions and feedback welcome.

Past Issues for 2019 stored:

https://tinyurl.com/Oxford-CONNECTIONS-2019

#### Past Issues for 2020 stored:

https://tinyurl.com/Oxford-CONNECTIONS-2020