

June 12, 2022
First Sunday after Pentecost / Trinity Sunday

Meditation: “Mystery”

Okay, so who knows what the reflection is going to be about today? Nobody? How about if I give you an idea? How many think I’m going to talk about the mystery of the Trinity? How many think that I had no idea what I was going to talk about today when I had to pick a title early in the week? You’re right! What I was going to talk about was a mystery to me. God may have known, but I sure didn’t. Actually, I knew that this weekend was the annual spring meeting of Antler River Watershed Regional Council, so I was hoping for some brilliant insight to come from that.

Friday evening, after we were welcomed, the meeting was constituted, the guiding rules of the meeting reviewed, the consent docket approved, the Christ Candle was lit, the land acknowledgment was read, we worshipped, and heard a message from the Moderator, we heard from our first speaker, Jennifer Henry from General Council Office. Jennifer shared with us the new Call Statement of the church. It is..... well, why don’t I show you.

Deep Spirituality. Bold Discipleship. Daring Justice..

We said farewell to Diane Blanchard, the Minister of Pastoral Relations for ARWR, WOWR, and HFR, as she heads off into the sunset of retirement this summer, and we welcomed her successor, Micol Cottrell.

We were introduced to and heard from the ministry candidates who were ordained and commissioned last night. Sharon Campbell-Rayment was ordained, following a 26 year journey. That’s right, she started on the path to ordained ministry in 1996, and following an extended period to recover from an acquired brain injury, completed the journey last night at Erie Street United Church in Ridgetown. She said, “It doesn’t matter how far you fall, it’s how high you bounce that matters.”

And Charmain Bailey was commissioned as a Diaconal Minister last night. Charmain was serving Central United Church in downtown Windsor. They are

the congregation that started the Downtown Mission in Windsor. She told a story about a newcomer to the congregation who complained about street people interrupting Sunday morning worship, and suggested that the doors be locked prior to the start of worship to keep these people and their distractions out. She was told, "Looking after God's people is what we do. Nothing is more important than that."

We heard about the 60th Anniversary of the UCW. On January 1, 1962 the WI and the WMS joined to form the UCW.

The evening ended with an update on some revisions to the Workplace Discrimination, Harassment and Violence Response Policy. It was noted that this policy was originally mandated by the government of Ontario. Following that update there was an Anti-Bullying worship, and we adjourned until Saturday morning.

Saturday morning we started with worship and a community building exercise. Then we heard from Tanya Cameron, who is the Office of Vocation representative for ARWR. Tanya talked about the process of search and call for ministers and congregations. She noted that there are currently more than 225 vacancies across the church, and far fewer ministers who are searching for a call.

We heard about the new music resource, I hesitate to call it a hymn book because it will be digital. It is called 'Then Let Us Sing'. All of the music will be in one place, and will be covered by one license..... onelicense. A sampler is anticipated to be released next year, 2023; the digital platform is set to go live in 2024; and a print copy is expected just in time for the 100th anniversary of our denomination in 2025.

Dave Jagger presented on 'Stewardship, M&S, and beyond'. Highlights included two educational modules that will be offered through United In Learning. Stewardship Best Practices will start the week of October 24th and run one night a week for four weeks. The cost is, wait for it, FREE! Dave urged all interested congregations to get together a group of two to three

people, plus your minister so that you can enroll as soon as it is announced. The second module is Congregational Giving Program.

Dave noted that M&S giving was UP from 2020 to 2021. \$19.6M to \$20.2M. The beyond part was about additional appeals that people responded to, like the \$500,000 plus over 8000 vaccines that people purchased through Gifts With Vision, that totaled \$750,000 for Covid relief efforts. Dave also announced that he would be leaving his role as Stewardship Rep for the three regional councils to take on the roll at a national level. A search has begun for his successor at the regional level. Finally, Dave handed out flash drives with information on Stewardship and the UCC Foundation.

We acknowledged those ministers in our region who died this past year; the communities of faith that disbanded – actually, I should say the community of faith – West Lorne United Church; celebrated special anniversaries, including Mary Dillon who is celebrating 10 years of ministry, and David Mitchell who is celebrating 15 years of ministry; and finally, we celebrated those who marked 50+ years in ministry, including the Rev. Lewis Snow who celebrated not only his 100th birthday, but also 70 years of ministry.

A learning exercise was held, just before lunch. The title was Our Words Matter: Reconsidering the Word 'Mission'. Therese Samuel, the Minister of Right Relations and Social Justice for the three regions, and Teresa Burnett-Cole, who currently serves at Glebe-St. James United Church in Ottawa, and is of Mohawk, Scottish and Irish descent led the discussion on how indigenous people view the word 'mission'. The word didn't come into wide use in the church until the Spanish Inquisition in the 1500s, and has come to be associated with both control and the dismissal of the beliefs and culture of non-Europeans.

After lunch, we heard from the two candidates for President Elect of the region, Cheryl Bolton, who said, "Normal is a setting on your dryer," and Abiel Khalema, who said he hopes to help us re-imagine ministry and re-build the church. Abiel is our new President Elect. We also voted on all those who will be serving the commissions – Covenant Commission, HR Commission, and

Mission and Discipleship Commission (I think we may need to rename that last one) – and the executive of the regional council.

We learned about the Korean Peace Appeal. Did you know that when hostilities on the Korean peninsula, which commenced June 25, 1950 and ceased on July 27, 1953, there was supposed to be a peace agreement put into place within three months? That work has never been completed, and a state of war still exists almost 70 years later. The national council of churches in Korea has asked the United Church of Canada to get 10,000 signatures on a petition calling for peace by the 70th anniversary of the cessation of hostilities – July 27, 2023. (show link)

We had a second community building exercise before we covenanted with the 40 LLWLs (Licensed Lay Worship Leaders) in ARWR, who include Tabitha Carey from Dorchester, and Ruth Pilbeam from Ridge Community Church and Jim Stirling from New Scotland United Church in Chatham-Kent, where I served prior to Union United Church. We also covenanted with all the members of the three commissions and the executive, including those who were elected moments earlier.

We were informed that a Retirement Party for Diane Blanchard was planned for June 29 at the Regional office in Carlisle, ON; that the fall meeting of ARWR is planned for October 28 and 29; and that the spring 2023 meeting is planned for May 12 and 13.

After closing motions, courtesies, a thank you to the president, a benediction, and the extinguishing of the Christ Candle, we were adjourned..... until the evening Celebration of Ministries Service at Erie Street United, where the Rev. Joshua Lawrence, from First-St. Andrew's United Church in London, preached, Sharon was ordained, and Charmain was commissioned, and I headed home to prepare this update for all of you.

I know we haven't delved deeply into the mystery of the Holy Trinity, but hopefully I have de-mystified what it is that happens at our annual meetings.

I'm hoping that last night's service was recorded because I really wanted to hear Joshua's message.