

June 2020

THE  **BRITANNIA UNITED CHURCH**
Britannian

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Editorial

Spring break

The Covid-19 pandemic is forcing everyone to take a break from business and life as usual. Now things which we took for granted, like going to church, eating in a restaurant, or working in an office, are on hold. As Joni Mitchell said, “you don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone.”

Many people and organizations are looking at their old practices and choosing to give them up or change them. Businesses and employees who disdained working from home are now enjoying the time saved not commuting. Families are communicating more than they did before thanks to video chat. Leigh and I are participating in fitness activities the same way, even from the cottage. We are also giving the environment a break, with fewer cars on the road, cruise ships in the ocean, and planes in the sky.

The pandemic is a challenge but also an opportunity. Maybe with all the new ways we are learning to do things, we won’t go back to that “old normal.” We will also enjoy the things we have and value, like an old-fashioned church service and choir, even more.

Peter Bain
Editor

Minister's Message

Well...it has been seventy-seven days since we last gathered at Britannia United Church! Who could ever have predicted that something like this would happen?

Valerie and I have both been working from home. She has had to learn a whole new way of teaching, but it is going well and she has managed to discover ways of presenting information that have been welcomed by the other teachers and students alike. Shannon and her boyfriend, Faheem are also teaching in Malaysia, so they are able to work from home, and Val and Shannon have had some great conversations about how they share their knowledge.

Jaclyn is finding it a real challenge to work from home with a toddler, as construction has opened up and Andrew is back at work. Jason was laid off and is loving looking after his son while Caroline returns to CHRI half-time. Shawn and Kristen are in retail, so they have had to work this whole time. Thankfully everyone is well.

If you have been following the online services, you will know that Val's mom had a fall at home and has been in hospital for about a month. It is a real challenge trying to care for someone you can't visit, and particularly when they don't really understand why. Jane will be moving into a senior's residence for respite, until a decision can be made about her long-term care. It is a wonderful residence, with no cases of Covid-19, so we are hopeful she will be able to stay, if she needs to.

I miss my Britannia United Church family!!! Thank you to everyone who has stayed in touch. I'm very grateful for social media right now. We even have weekly face time calls with our family, so even if we don't get to hold our grandchildren, at least we can see them, sing to them and play peek-a-boo.

What all this means long term for the church, only time can tell. There has been no indication of when we will be able to return to Sunday worship and we want to make sure we wait until it is truly safe. I've read several reports about how the virus is spread through droplets. Singing is one of the worst things you can do! So we will have to find creative ways to worship at the start.

My Pentecost sermon does speak about new beginnings and I am hopeful that some of the lessons we have learned during this time will help us to thrive when we return to public worship and ministry. I know that several committees will be speaking to this in this newsletter. Take the time to really listen with your hearts, and if you have any suggestions... send them in! We're all in this together – no matter how far apart we may feel.

Rev. Jim

In the Pines (at Mud Lake)

In the pines, in the pines
There are many natural finds
There are blue scilla and yellow trout lilies
In the pines, in the pines

In the pines, in the pines
There are garter snakes a-sunning and
turtles big and small
There are fish a-swimming in the muddy
waters of the lake
In the pines, in the pines

In the pines, in the pines
The geese are honking and ducks a-
quacking
The ravens are cawing and the song birds
flitting
In the pines, in the pines

In the pines, in the pines
There are beavers chomping and frogs a-croaking
There are people smiling and children poking
In the pines, in the pines
D. Cullen and M.-T. O'Sullivan



Clusters

Clusters, while not formal governance bodies, are central to living out the faith of the United Church. Their purpose is to provide community and support focused on worship, mission, learning, collegiality and strategic planning (The Manual, 2019, p. 42).

For Times Like These

In response to the need for physical distancing what better time to connect online and reconnect with scripture through these online meetings:

[Psalm Circle](#) — reading and reflecting on one Psalm per week (following the Revised Common Lectionary selection for the upcoming Sunday). Thursday mornings, 10:30 a.m. – 12:00 noon (EST).

[Opening the Book](#) — listening together to podcast or video interviews with leading biblical scholars followed by a facilitated online discussion. Monday evenings, 7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. (EST).

These are open to anyone to drop-in. Please sign in each week, using the Zoom links above. After signing in, you will receive a confirmation email with directions for joining the meeting. See [Online Resources](#) for information about the Zoom software.

Britannia Woods Community House (BWCH) and Food Pantry

Support from the church in the form of food donations left in the box at the front door stopped mid-March. So did most of the work by the approximately forty people who were volunteering in different aspects of running the Food Pantry. Physical distancing by volunteers was not possible and most of the volunteers were in the high risk age group. Up until that point, volunteer shoppers had shopped each week for items that the Food Pantry had run out of, using the funds donated by area churches including Britannia United. In mid-March grocery stores stopped permitting volunteers to buy in the large quantities that were needed each week.

The Food Pantry has received a number of spontaneous donations from members of the community and at this time does not need funds for shopping. The wider community has been very generous in its contributions to the Ottawa Food Bank which in turn has been very generous with the amount of food they are supplying to local food banks like the Food Pantry. Organizers are aware that churches are not receiving the level of contributions that they did before COVID-19 and suggest contributions to the Food Pantry can be suspended until further notice.

All of the non-food related programs run by the Community House were suspended in mid-March. Community House staff took over the running of the Food Pantry to serve people who need food. It is now open by appointment only, four days a week from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. On Mondays, the Food Pantry receives the food delivery from the Ottawa Food Bank.

Mohamed Sofa, the former director of BWCH, moved to a position with the United Way in mid-May. He has been succeeded by Faduma Yusuf who previously was Community Health Promoter at Somerset West Community Health Centre.

It is recognized that the Food Pantry is not sustainable as a completely volunteer run and operated service. The Ottawa Food Bank enabled BWCH to hire a part-time Food Pantry coordinator Alyssa Moore for the next couple of months. The hope is that this can be a more permanent position.

Online Resources

Online Services

You can attend our regular Sunday services with prayers, music, and a message from Reverend Jim at the “[Service Media](#)” link on the church’s website <https://britanniaunitedchurch.ca>.

Zoom videoconferencing

This is a great way to hold video chats with family and friends. The software is free (<https://zoom.us>) and easy to use. One-to-one and short group meetings are also no charge.

Memorial Garden

We work to create floral beauty both inside and outside the church throughout each season, Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, and Summer. Our team members are Roelie Jackson, Heather Wallace, and Dianne Tupper.

Our work includes:

- Saving the display of Geraniums during last summer in hopes of re-planting again.
- Regularly watering through a hot summer in all the gardens, thanks to Norm Toone.
- Trimming and weeding by all members of the committee.
- Tree wrapping to protect them from salt damage during the winter months.
- Replacing two of the Emerald Cedars with rose bushes in the hopes they will survive.
- Refurbishing the bench outside the front door, providing rest for weary feet.

Contributions to the Life of our Church:

For those who may not have been part of our congregation, or who have just forgotten the beginnings of this beautiful addition to our church, a little history as follows:

The garden was established in 2013 to commemorate the 140th anniversary of Britannia United Church. It was dedicated to the memory of those whose faith inspired work and worship in this community for 140 years. It is a living memorial, a legacy that we leave for future generations.

It is maintained spring through fall by a small group of faithfuls: planning, fertilizing and planting the lovely flowers, and keeping the weeds at bay. At times, when it is required to replace damaged trees and plants, we have had anonymous donations to help defray these costs and which are gratefully received.

If you wish to help out, you can use an envelope and drop it in the collection plate, marked for “memorial garden”. New ideas are always welcome. The committee thanks you for your continued support.

Dianne Tupper

Pastoral Care

The Pastoral care team along with several volunteers from our congregation have been very active during this time of the Covid 19 virus situation and the resulting isolation.

The phone list of our congregation was divided between our team and our volunteers. I am very happy to report that we have spoken or contacted over 120 families and have continued to make follow up calls. It was a big endeavour but it was well worth our efforts. Our phone calls were much appreciated by our congregation and it was a wonderful way to stay connected to one another during this time.

We also offered to deliver groceries or medicine if needed. That service was offered by a member of our congregation and was much appreciated.

We would like to offer our condolences to the Stanke family on the passing of Helga, Kelvin's mother, and of Jennifer Sullivan, Kelvin's sister-in-law.

Our team will be meeting in person once it is safe to do so. At that time we will discuss the outcome of our visits. We will also talk about what we have learned from this situation and discuss ways to improve our pastoral care for our congregation.

Dori Jensen
Chair of Pastoral Care Team

Civilization

Years ago, anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked by a student what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a culture. The student expected Mead to talk about fishhooks or clay pots or grinding stones.

But no. Mead said that the first sign of civilization in an ancient culture was a femur (thighbone) that had been broken and then healed. Mead explained that in the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, get to the river for a drink or hunt for food. You are meat for prowling beasts. No animal survives a broken leg long enough for the bone to heal.

A broken femur that has healed is evidence that someone has taken time to stay with the one who fell, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery. Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts, Mead said."

We are at our best when we serve others. Be civilized.

Making your donations during the lockdown

Are you wondering how to make weekly donations while the Church is closed? You can make donations by:

- Mailing cheques to the Church
- Using PAR (Pre Authorized Remittance) to make monthly automatic withdrawals from your bank account. Contact Verne Bruce ,verne.bruce@sympatico.ca to set this up.
- Making electronic transfers (e-transfers) from your bank account directly to the Church. See below for more information.
- Donating via our [Facebook page](#)

To make an e-transfer, log in to your bank's website, select "send an Interac e-transfer", add "BRITANNIA UNITED CHURCH" as an e-transfer recipient using bookkeeper@brituc.ca as the email. If you wish the entire deposit to be made to the General Fund, nothing more is required. If you wish to have your donation credited to other funds as well (e.g. M&S, Benevolent) just include that information in the Notes section when you make your payment. There are no security questions required to make the transfer.

Thank you for supporting Britannia United.

Dreams for Britannia

From the history file: A Synthesis of Group Reports from November '89 Workshop.

Many of the things on the wish list in 1989 haven't really changed.

A simplified statement of faith	2 portable micro-phones
Making our faith attractive to youth	Viable youth group of at least 10 people
Imaginative advertising	Active UCM
Commitment to Mission	Paved parking lot
Caring for the West End Community	Larger nursery
Chaplaincy	Larger Sunday school - facilities, (more)
A CBIT for boys	teachers
Lots of group leaders	More youth choir members
A musical band	(Senior) choir director and members
Total involvement of the Congregation in	Unmasking the congregation
Christian Education	More inclusive language
	Full church every Sunday
*Youth involvement	
*Better attendance at committees	Travelling mic
Lower ceiling for the Sunday school room	More youth
Get an estimate on a paved parking lot	Computerization
Paint inside and outside of the church	Raise for Myron
Better lighting	Church building 2x and fill every Sunday
	Church steeple and peaked roof
Church Bells in the Steeple	Large, fully equipped nursery
Pipe organ	Paved parking lot
A waiting list for positions of responsibility	Younger people to take leadership roles, i.e.
Name tags for all	Session, Stewards, etc.
MMHS would go away	Waiting list - willing people to serve
BUC reaches out in the world in brotherly	Budget with \$5,000.00 that we don't know
and sisterly love	what to do with
Stained glass on all windows	M&S equal to our operational budget
Automated office system	Pipe organ
Green song books for all (Songs for a	That no members are in need any more
Gospel People)	Evelyne lived closer to the Church
BUC shuttle bus for shut-ins	Open fellowship club enrolment
Bible proceeding ahead of the Choir	More cooks for fellowship
More communion services (Varied)	Air conditioning/ceiling fans-lights
Taped services for shut-ins	mr/mrs/ms fixit club for church/manse/
Congregational retreat	congregation
-no consensus on destination	Antipendia in colours of church seasons

Our Sympathies

Our thoughts are with the Stanke family on the death of Kelvin's mother Helga on May 6, and Jennifer Sullivan, Kelvin's sister in law, on May 15.

We also are sorry to announce the death of Audrey Martineau on May 11, 2020.

YAYA (Youth and Young Adults)

Officially we are The Ministry for Youth and Young Adults (aka YAYA) in the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council (EOORC) of the United Church of Canada and provide leadership and support for people between the ages of 10-35 years.

Resources for Youth and Children During COVID-19

Please find resources for Children, Youth and Young Adult and even Adults to access for entertainment, faith formation, conversation and prayer. All of these resources have been suggested by UCC Minister's and Staff and offer free materials.

- <https://vibrantfaith.org/>
- https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXIPslx_Ov1u8Z-QOOCQDrw/videos
- <https://www.illustratedministry.com/>
- <https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/>
- <https://buildfaith.org/>
- Daily Zoom Camp with GO Project – <https://thegoproject.ca/virtual-camp/>
- Daily Youth and Young Adult Check-In Zoom call with Shanna & Dana (3pm Monday to Friday) – <https://united-church.zoom.us/j/415462002>

PDF Printable Activity Pages – by Tom Schwarzkopf (Barrhaven United Church)

- [Homonym](#)
- [Make a New Word](#)
- [The Thing is its Colour](#)
- [Their Name is What They Do](#)
- [TRICK QUESTIONS](#)
- [Where in the World](#)
- [Wordy](#)

YAYA also...

- Supports existing regional ministries and activities such as Worshiplude, CAMP AWESOME, RendezVous, Open Table, international trips, as well as monthly programs and events.
- Visions with Communities of Faith to determine appropriate youth programming.
- Guides in building YAYA programs through funding access and program development.
- Engages with community partners to strengthen networks, build resources and support other youth ministries.
- Encourages gatherings for local and regional youth and young adults.
- Organizes youth delegates at Regional meetings
- Promotes opportunities to engage in relationships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth and young adults.
- Works with the YAYA Committee, Networks and Clusters and other Regional Councils.

Sunday School Graduation

Sunday, June 7, 2020 was scheduled to be the Sunday School Graduation. While we will not be together to celebrate our milestones and while our year together was cut short, we do have a lot of accomplishments to recognize.

Activities

During 2019-2020, the children explored stories and themes from the Spark curriculum based on the Revised Common Lectionary. They learned about spreading love to others, forgiveness, humility, and carrying out the work of God in their daily lives. Following a music session led by Valerie Baldwin, the children listened to a Bible story, engaged in a conversation about it and enjoyed theme-related crafts, activities and games.

These are some of the special activities that the children and youth participated in during the school year:

- Jennifer Trewartha coordinated a sharing project with the children. They were encouraged to bring in used clothing and other items to share with those who need them.
- The children and youth had a lot of fun judging the photos that were submitted for the 2020 Britannia United Church calendar.
- Diane Tremblay led the children and youth in a yoga-based class.
- The children and youth learned about the Operation Christmas Child Shoebox Project from Lorraine Montgomery who managed the project. They helped her pack the boxes for shipment to children living in extreme poverty in a third world country.
- The children, under the guidance of Mary-Lou Farrell, Lana Czelenski, Jessica Carey and Jennifer Trewartha, made Christmas cards and ornaments that were sold at the Church bazaar and to the Congregation, raising more than \$220 for the Church's general operating fund.
- 2019 was capped off with a very successful Christmas pageant with 14 children and 7 adults participating in the pageant as performers and singers. A special thank you is extended to Valerie Baldwin, who coordinated the music and production, to Jessica Carey, who narrated the pageant, to the parents and guardians, and to the many volunteers who helped the children prepare for the rehearsal and performance and contributed to the final production.
- On February 16, 2020, the children, youth and young adults organized a Valentine's Luncheon for the members of the Congregation.

Students

Attendance was steady, with about 10 children and youth participating on average each week.

We wish to recognize all the children and youth who attended, whether they came once or twice or nearly every Sunday.

Adrien	Chloé C	Eva	Sara
Amelia	Chloe H	Georges	Rory
Bill	Cybèle	Hailey	Violet
Brookelyn	Ella G	Jake	Vivienne
Carlie	Ella W	Jane	
Charlotte A	Elodie	Mila	
Charlotte M	Ethan	Oliver	

Teachers and Leaders

We used a team-teaching approach. It takes a lot of leaders and assistants to run the Sunday School program. The following leaders are recognized for their contributions:

Diane Tremblay
Jennifer Trewartha
Jessica Carey

Joanna Hughes
Lana Czelenski
Lorraine Montgomery

Mary-Lou Farrell
Mat Saindon
Valerie Baldwin

And of course, we need to recognize each of the parents, grandparents and guardians who bring the children to church every Sunday. Without your dedication, there would be no Sunday School.

Thank you everyone for your contributions, enthusiasm and commitment to Britannia United Church's Sunday School Program.

[Jesus] told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches."

Helen Hutcheson, Sunday School Coordinator

Garage Sale

I don't know about you, but with all this extra time on our hands we have been tidying and cleaning like crazy and we have a pile of boxes of great garage sale items... which is postponed indefinitely.

We will be hosting our famous sale when the pandemic restrictions are lifted, so please bear with us while we explore possible dates and formats; we will let you know when we can proceed. We cannot accept donations now, so we must ask your help in saving items, particularly high-value merchandise, for when we are able to host the sale.

Peter Bain

Financial Update

The word recession doesn't really capture how bad the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will really be, [according to the former chief economic analyst](#) for Statistics Canada, Philip Cross, with the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. "It stands to reason if you close down all non-essential parts of the economy it's going to be devastating," he says.

Many of you are asking, "How is Britannia United Church doing financially in these unprecedented times, since the Church closed its doors in mid-March 2020?"

From January 1 to April 30, 2020, Britannia United Church saw its revenue decline from the budgeted amount of nearly \$69,000 to the actual amount of about \$65,000. However, expenditures also declined from a budgeted amount of almost \$90,000 to approximately \$76,000. Expenditures, therefore, exceeded revenues by about \$11,000. It should be noted that nearly \$5,000 more than the budgeted amount was transferred from restricted funds. In May, the Church's big fundraisers, the Murder Mystery Dinner Theatre and Garage Sale, were postponed.

On April 23, 2020 a virtual meeting of the Committee of Stewards was held to discuss what measures could be accessed to support Britannia United Church financially during the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of the Church. Stewards presented its financial plan to the Church Council, which met virtually on April 28, 2020 and approved the following measures and applications:

- Temporary Wage Subsidy for Employers (TWSE): This subsidy is a three-month measure that allows organizations, including charities, to obtain up to 10% of payroll costs incurred between March 18, 2020 and June 19, 2020. Britannia United Church was approved for the TWSE and started receiving instalments of the benefits in May 2020.
- Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS): This subsidy is intended to cover 75% of salaries for qualifying businesses, including charities of all sizes, for up to three months between March 15, 2020 and June 6, 2020. The CEWS is available to organizations that see a drop of at least 30% of their revenue. Britannia United Church applied and was approved for the CEWS and started receiving payments in May 2020.

Note: Britannia United Church will receive a total of 75% for wage subsidies as the CEWS deducts the amounts being received through TWSE.

In addition to the above subsidies, Britannia United Church has applied for the United Church Emergency Response (UCER) \$10,000 interest-free loan. If this loan is re-paid on or before September 30, 2021, \$500 is forgiven, for a repayment of \$9,500. Interest at 2% starts to be accrued on October 1, 2021. Our application, along with the supporting documentation, is scheduled to be reviewed by the financial team at the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council (EOORC), beginning May 29, 2020.

It should be noted that, as of April 30, 2020, Britannia United Church holds restricted funds of nearly \$163,000 in the Manse Investment Fund and \$442,000 in the Isabel Elizabeth Smith Fund. At a special meeting of the Church Council held on March 15, 2020, it was moved that, “for the Smith Fund, the Trustees be authorized to transfer funds to the Church operating account but only in such a manner that the original amount of \$290,000 is not touched.”

If you have been wondering how to make a donation while the Church is closed, donations can be made by cheque and mailed to Britannia United Church, at 985 Pinecrest Road, Ottawa ON K2B 6B4. You can also submit your a weekly donation by applying for Pre-authorized Remittance (PAR); consult the Church Office, by email at office@brituc.ca or by telephone at 613-828-6018, for further information.

You can also make an e-transfer from your bank account directly to the Church. To do this, log-in to your on-line bank account, select e-transfer, and add Britannia United Church as a payee. Verify that bookkeeper@brituc.ca is selected as the email. If you want the entire deposit to be made to the General Fund, there is nothing more to do. If you want part of your donation to go to Mission, Service and Outreach or another special fund, include that information in the note section. No security questions are required.

While times are difficult, we must remember the assurance of God’s protection: “*He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge*” (Psalm 90)

Helen Hutcheson, on behalf of the Committee of Stewards

Coping strategies

From the National Association of Federal Retirees May Newsletter

Ottawa Public Health Ottawa Public Health (OPH) now recommends that any Ottawa resident 60 years of age or older, who is experiencing any [COVID-19 symptoms](#), to go for [testing](#). Testing is available at any COVID-19 [assessment centre](#) or COVID-19 [care clinic](#).

OPH has also launched a new Facebook page to share COVID-19 health-related information for residents aged 55 and older and their caregivers at facebook.com/agingwellinottawa.

Stay or go – Decision aids

Researchers from Ottawa Hospital, University of Ottawa, the Champlain Local Health Integration Network and the National Institute of Aging have developed tools to help seniors decide if they should temporarily move out of their retirement, assisted living or long-term care home, due to the risk of COVID-19.

These decision aids help seniors understand their options and the outcomes of these options so that they can make trade-offs aligned with what is most important to them, while meeting their care needs too.

You can access the decision aids at decisionaid.ohri.ca/decaids.html.

Musings in My Garden in May 2020

It is now raining and I have had to leave my special place, my garden. The beauty of my hyacinths, daffodils and tulips has peaked. Many folks have been cheered up by seeing them. The vegetables, including garlic, kale, lettuce, green beans, snow peas and tomatoes are bursting forth.

This year, I have 9 Jack-in-the-pulpits and they are beautiful wildflowers and a treat. When you are near them, it is like being in a holy place with many priests and priestesses of varying sizes in their pulpits with outstretched arms. They all have the same name, Jack, and they all have something to say, and are all saying different encouraging words.

I imagine that they are saying things like – How are you this wonderful day which the Lord has made? Be thankful and rejoice in the name of the Lord! Welcome and come and enjoy this special place of contemplation. Share your blessings and gifts with everyone. Make a joyful noise unto God the Creator! Be kind and caring to all we meet. Greet everyone with a friendly word, wave, smile or bow. Watch over our essential workers and pray for them and for families dealing with loss and illness. Sing Hallelujah...Hallelujah...Hallelujah...Amen... Amen.

Don Cullen

Sermon

Pentecost 2020

On Monday, I was chatting with a friend about Pentecost – and how I might decorate the church for worship. In the past I have used red, yellow and orange streamers to symbolize the tongues of fire that descended on the people of Jerusalem that day.

Sometimes I use a fan to recreate the sound and movement of wind – representing the Holy Spirit.

And one of my favourite traditions is to print three versions of the Acts reading in the bulletin, so that when we read it in unison, we recreate that tremendous “babble sound” where the people around us are speaking different words, and yet, we can still understand them.

Other times, we have used helium filled balloons in the fire colours to symbolize the breath of the Holy Spirit, and the descent of the flames, as we celebrate what has come to be known as the birthday of the Christian Church.

Pentecost happened on Shavuot, an ancient Jewish celebration that took place seven weeks after Passover. Jerusalem would have been filled with hundreds of thousands of Jewish pilgrims from many nations, gathered to celebrate the gift of God’s Word to the Hebrew people on Mount Sinai.

The Christian church celebrates Pentecost – which literally translates as “fiftieth” — as the day when the Holy Spirit descended upon the crowd, unifying them in thought and word.

Some people recall the story of the Tower of Babel in Genesis, where the people of God decide to build a temple that will reach the heavens. As the story goes, God confounds their speech so that they no longer understand each other and they are scattered around the world.

This story brings them back together fulfilling the words of the Prophet Joel who said that God would pour out the Holy Spirit upon all people as a sign of that great and glorious day when everyone who calls upon the Lord will be saved.

As I explained the significance of Pentecost to my friend and told him where he could find it in the book of Acts, he asked me if I knew the story of the Phoenix.

I was familiar with the story of the bird that rises from the ashes, but wanted to know more.

The story of the Phoenix comes from ancient Greek folklore. It is associated with the sun and with rebirth. The most familiar legends say that it dies in a show of flames, but rises again from the ashes. Some accounts say that the Phoenix lives for 500 years or more and that its rebirth is symbolic of renewal. It comes as no surprise that some cultures adopted the story of the Phoenix as an allegory for the resurrection of Christ.

As an animal totem, the Phoenix is the keeper of fire in all of creation. It represents transformation, death, and rebirth in its fire. As a spiritual totem, the Phoenix is a symbol of

strength and renewal. As a fire and solar symbol, it is symbolic of the sun – which “dies” as it sets each night, only to be reborn as it rises the next morning.

In a sense, it never truly dies. It is an immortal creature that continually rises from the ashes.

And along with the traits of rebirth, transformation, immortality and power, the phoenix is associated with protection, balance and hope.

The Phoenix has made its mark on many cultures. The Chinese believe that this spiritual bird was sent to earth to assist in the development of humankind. Typically, they view the Phoenix as coming in twos – male and female, yin and yang – symbolizing the necessity for balance in the world.

The ancient Greeks embraced the Phoenix as a symbol of rebirth and immortality. The Romans used the image of the Phoenix on their coins, so that all who touched them would be reminded of the invincible strength of the Roman Empire.

After the collapse of the Empire, people from the Adriatic region held on to the symbol of the Phoenix as a representation of Christ, sacrificing itself willingly to die, only to be reborn after three days.

One site I found on the internet has this to say about the Phoenix as a totem:

When the mighty phoenix animal totem presents itself to you, it is sending you strong messages of hope in the midst of despair. We all experience tough times that drag us down and make us feel engulfed in negativity. It is sometimes hard to imagine pulling ourselves out of them.

During these times, we can call upon this **phoenix symbolism** for strength and a renewal of energy to keep us fighting the good fight. No matter what trials we encounter in our lives, the **phoenix symbolism** is always there to remind us that we can endure. By helping us to transform our lives and live more purely, it allows us to get into deeper connection with our spiritual awareness.

As I read the story of the Phoenix and its symbolism, I couldn't help thinking about how relevant it was to the church and this time of Covid-19.

The church has been forced to look at new ways to minister during this time of social distancing. Now, Britannia United Church is one of the more progressive churches when it comes to change – some churches would rather go down in flames than to try anything new – but even our church has been forced by this pandemic to find new ways to worship, and to try new ways of reaching out so that we can stay connected during this time.

The challenge for us will be to consider what we have learned, and how we can incorporate these changes into our work and worship, once the pandemic is over and we have the opportunity to return to our old ways of doing things.

The same can be said for our society as it has struggled to do business and to interact on a professional and a person basis. Some businesses have gone down in flames. Some are struggling to restructure and find new ways to stay alive. Sadly, some personal relationships

have ended as the pressures of the economy and social distancing have left their mark on marriages that were already in trouble. More tragic still are the lives that have been lost, because the added pressure pushed them beyond the edge of being able to cope.

As for the rest of us, what have we learned?

As a person of faith, I don't believe that God sends suffering and hardship, so that we can learn lessons. I do believe that there are lessons around us, all the time. And for me, faith helps me to discern the wisdom and to use what I have learned to put some positive energy back into the world.

Just last week I saw a post on Facebook that really sums up any hope we have for returning to our normal, pre-pandemic existence:

We will never go back to normal.
Normal never was.
Our pre-corona existence was not normal, other than
We normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction...
We should not long to return, my friends.
We are being given the opportunity
To stitch a new garment,
one that fits all of humanity and nature.
Sonya Renee Taylor

Another post asked what we have given up, that needs to stay given up, once the pandemic is over. There were responses like unnecessary meetings, a lack of quality family time, non-stop travel, and this one "the need to always be doing more" shared by Carrie McEachran, an executive director, from Sarnia, Ontario, who said:

This pandemic has shown me how the simple things are truly the most essential to live a happy and healthy life. I have no plans to go back to my previous norm of the constant need to have my feet on the ground and running in several directions, not taking the time to focus on what my mind and body need. We don't need a constant pressure to be doing more. The new norm is serving me and my family well, and I have no intention of returning to our pre-pandemic way of life.

I had originally planned to end my sermon there, with a series of questions: What have you learned during this Pandemic? What have you had to give up, that needs to stay given up? How will you use what you have learned to put some positive energy back into the world?

But the very day that I was thinking about how I would decorate our church for our Pentecost celebration, a video of an African-American man being detained by a Minneapolis police officer started circulating on the internet. This is what has been recorded on Wikipedia about the incident:

The death of George Floyd, an African-American man, occurred in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, when Derek Chauvin, a white Minneapolis police officer, knelt on Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds; 2 minutes and 53 seconds of which occurred after Floyd

became unresponsive, according to the criminal complaint filed against Chauvin. Floyd was handcuffed and lying face down on the road, while Chauvin had his knee on his neck. The three other arresting officers were identified as Thomas K. Lane, Tou Thao, and J. Alexander Kueng. Officer Kueng held Floyd's back while Lane held his legs, and Thao stood nearby and looked on.

Floyd's death has been compared to the 2014 death of Eric Garner. Garner, also an unarmed black man, repeated "I can't breathe" eleven times after being placed in a chokehold by a New York police officer during an arrest in Staten Island.

The article goes on to say that:

Police across the country were sharply critical of Chauvin's actions. Leaders from organizations which include hundreds of thousands of police officers condemned the conduct of the arrest. National Association of Police Organizations Executive Director William Johnson called the incident egregious, and said, "I don't know the entire story, but I can't see any legal justification, any self-defense justification, or any moral justification." Fraternal Order of Police President Patrick Yoes said that authorities must ensure justice is served in Floyd's death, "whatever the consequences".

The images of Police Officer Chauvin with his knee on George Floyd's neck were soon replaced by images of demonstrations that grew violent as people waited for charges to be laid.

One video in particular caught my attention. Watching footage of the Minneapolis precinct burning, after protestors set it on fire, took me back to the image of the Phoenix.

Accusations about racism, the excessive use of violence against African-American and Indigenous populations, racial profiling and the blind eye that is turned towards abuses of this kind have been rampant for decades.

And while white America has acted like it doesn't exist, the advent of social media is forcing us to look it in the face, and at ourselves in the mirror. I watched the video of George Floyd dying and it made my heart sick.

Someone I know posted a video of a black woman being abused by a police officer. She was 14 years old. She looked like she was about 80 pounds and she was literally being thrown around like a sack of potatoes; with her head being pounded into the ground.

This has to stop.

I worked on a forensic ward at a psychiatric hospital for two years. I was often called upon to restrain a patient that had become violent. You used necessary restraint, and when the person stopped fighting, you released the restraint. If you got injured during the process, well, that was your job: you did not retaliate.

I recall watching a video of a female guard at the courthouse in Ottawa who was accused of using excessive force on a prisoner. I was actually involved in a debate with someone who

was defending the guard, saying that the man had punched her, and following with, “You don’t understand what it is like to work with these people.”

I had watched the video. Whatever happened leading up to her reaction, the man was subdued; he was on the ground; two other officers were dragging him into the cell and she was kicking his legs! And the reality is, if the assault had not been caught on video, no one would likely ever have known.

I remembered that debate, as I watched George Floyd dying, while three officers held him down and a fourth one stood by and did nothing.

The officer who had his knee on George Floyd’s neck has been charged with third degree murder and manslaughter. In my opinion, the other three officers also need to be charged, because two of them helped to hold the man down, and the third one stood by and did nothing.

The systemic violence against minorities and Black people in particular needs to stop. The silence that surrounds these crimes needs to stop. People need to be held accountable so that the violence stops, and we as North Americans – need to stop turning a blind eye to the reality of racism in our communities, and stop living in denial.

The image of the Minneapolis precinct burning is symbolic of what needs to happen to our justice system and to our system of beliefs that allow racism to happen in our midst. Only then can something be reborn that ensures justice for all.

There has been a lot of talk about “White Privilege” over the past few years. A lot of white people deny that it exists, or believe that non-white people are just using it as an excuse, but I had it explained to me in a way that helped me to see it in a new light.

I’ve shared this story before, but I think it is worth sharing once more.

Anthony Bailey is a minister in Ottawa, at Parkdale United Church. He is of Caribbean descent. His father ministered at Union United Church in Montreal. When Anthony was a teenager, he and his brother were victims of a racially motivated assault. Anthony escaped but his brother was killed.

I was attending a workshop on racism, led by Anthony and sponsored by our Montreal Ottawa Conference. As I listened to Anthony speak about racism, I - as a middle-class, white male felt uncomfortable. I felt like I was lumped into a larger group of people that I did not want to associate with. After all, I wasn’t racist, and I also wanted the group to know that – even though I was white – I had experienced prejudice and exclusion in my life that surely gave me some insight into what it must be like to be the victim of racism.

Anthony listened to the examples I gave. Then he said, “I appreciate what you are saying, and it certainly helps me to see what you have experienced.” Then he said, “Do you remember when we met up at Carlingwood a couple of weeks ago?” I did. I think I was wearing jeans and a t-shirt. Anthony, as always was immaculately dressed. He was coming from a meeting and wearing a three-piece suit.

Then he said, "After you left I went into the drug store to pick up a few things. While I was standing in one of the aisles, I had a feeling someone was watching me, and I looked up to see a staff member standing at the end of the aisle. As I moved to the next aisle, the staff member moved as well. It was readily apparent that I was being watched because they thought I was trying to steal something. That happens to me, just because of the colour of my skin."

The following is something I shared on Facebook this week. It is a list of people, some of them *children*, who were killed by police officers, and the activities they were engaged in at the time:

I have privilege as a white person because I can do all of these things without thinking twice:

- I can go birding
- I can go jogging
- I can relax in the comfort of my own home
- I can ask for help after being in a car crash
- I can have a cellphone
- I can leave a party to get to safety
- I can play loud music
- I can sell CDs
- I can sleep
- I can walk from the corner store
- I can play cops and robbers
- I can go to church
- I can walk home with Skittles
- I can hold a hair brush while leaving my own bachelor party
- I can party on New Years
- I can get a normal traffic ticket
- I can lawfully carry a weapon
- I can break down on a public road with car problems
- I can shop at Walmart
- I can have a disabled vehicle
- I can read a book in my own car
- I can be a 10 year old walking with my grandfather
- I can decorate for a party
- I can ask a cop a question
- I can cash a check in peace
- I can take out my wallet
- I can run
- I can breathe
- I can live
- I CAN BE ARRESTED WITHOUT THE FEAR OF BEING MURDERED**