

# Oak Bay United Church Annual Report

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## July 2021-June 2022



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## Minister of Word & Sacrament

*“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God... We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labour, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” (Romans 8:18-19,22-25)*

Dear friends in Christ,

When Paul wrote the above lines to the church in Rome, he encouraged them to be steadfast and faithful, patient and full of hope, in the middle of difficult times.

We too have been called to practice the same virtues, as we experience the groaning of creation: the third year of a global pandemic, the ongoing climate emergency, and increasing political and religious extremism, to name only a few of the “pains of labour” of our world.

We have especially been called to “hope for what we do not see”, as we continue to emerge into whatever a “new normal” will look like. Thank you for your faithfulness and commitment to God and to each other, over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and its various restrictions and changes.

## **Worship**

Over the course of this past church year, we adjusted several times to varying provincial health restrictions, based on the severity of the pandemic. In late spring 2021, we were excited to return to worship in person while wearing masks, and with unlimited numbers. In mid-December 2021, in response to a public health order, the Board mandated proof of vaccination for Sunday morning worship, and all ministry activities. Following our church region's strong recommendation, the Board moved Christmas Eve worship to online only, which continued to the end of January 2022, when we returned to worship in person again, with proof of vaccination required.

As of March 2022, all gathering restrictions were lifted, although the Board continues to recommend wearing a mask in worship, especially while singing. We continue to be mindful of the various health conditions of those in our community (many that may be invisible to us) as we respect one another's needs for space and/or masks.

Over the course of the year, we also livestreamed worship each Sunday from our sanctuary via Facebook Live and our congregation's YouTube channel.

We shared meaningful worship together with our friends of St Mary the Virgin Anglican Church, on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, as well as for our Easter sunrise service, and I'm very grateful for the warm friendship of their priest, the Rev. Canon Craig Hiebert.

## **Children, Youth and Family Ministry**

Children's ministry was a challenge over the last church year, for a number of reasons: the lack of an approved vaccine for children under age 5; the "Zoom fatigue" of many children, youth and parents; the lack of well-ventilated spaces for Children's Church on Sunday mornings. However, activity baskets were provided in the sanctuary including books, appropriate colouring pages, soft toys, and packets of modeling clay.

We again provided to each family, the Faith@Home packs provided (at a subsidized cost) by the First Third Ministry of Pacific Mountain Regional Council of the UCC. Kits were distributed by Rev. Michelle for Advent/Christmas/Epiphany, Lent/Easter/ and Pentecost/Summer. About 30 kits, as well as a supply box for the kits, were distributed to church families. The kits included a Faith@Home magazine filled with prayers and other spiritual practices, theological reflections for families, and seasonal crafts and activities.

We were excited to host Camp Spirit again for a week in August 2021. This ministry of the First Third Ministry of PMRC is a travelling, multi-team summer day camp, rooted in United Church theology and values. We welcomed 14 campers (aged 5-11) and 7 leaders in training (aged 12-14), along with 3 youth crew (aged 15-17) and Camp Spirit staff. They enjoyed a wonderful week of Godly Play stories, songs, crafts, prayers and play. Special thanks to our own OBUC volunteers who provided the classic favourite Stepping Stones creation!

The Point of Grace Play Group returned in late spring 2022, and continues to meet weekly on Tuesday mornings for a relaxed and informal time of community and support for babies and toddlers and their caregivers.



## **Spiritual Deepening for Adults**

This past year, I led study groups both online, and in person. Over the fall of 2021, we studied some of Jesus' most familiar parables with the book *Short Stories by Jesus: the Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi*, by Dr Amy-Jill Levine. During Advent, we continued with Dr Levine's next study, *Light of the World: a Beginner's Guide to Advent*. During Lent in 2022, we shifted gears and read Kate Bowler's book, *Good Enough: 40ish Devotionals for a Life of Imperfection*, which was accompanied by a sermon series. Each had a high turnout and participants appreciated the chance to keep growing with and from one another. Some even preferred taking part by Zoom!

I also led a bible study at Carlton House via Zoom and in person (depending on the COVID cases), for about 8 residents. Together, we finished exploring the Gospel of Luke, and read through the book of Genesis.

Rev. Dr. Susanne Abbuhl led the third year of the "Read the Bible in 3 Years" group over Zoom, and her deep knowledge, insight and openness were so valued by participants.

The learning and action group "Christianity and/against White Supremacy" changed their name to "STARS: Seeking Truth, Anti-Racism and Reconciliation", to more accurately reflect their commitments and areas of growth. They invited the congregation to read and discuss Wab Kinew's book *The Reason You Walk: a Memoir*; and joined with the community network ReconciliACTION Oak Bay in advocating for concrete steps toward truth and reconciliation in our community.

## **Thank you!**

I am grateful to all our staff for their dedication and faithfulness, and especially their willingness to continue to experiment, learn, change and grow over the last 2 ½ years of pandemic life and ministry. Thank you Devon, Zach, Annalise, David, and Keith! It is a blessing to be part of a ministry team with you.

I am equally grateful for the lay leadership in this congregation. And, I am grateful for you, and the ways you have continued to be the body of Christ in the world, online or at a distance. Thank you for your prayers, for your phone calls and cards, for your financial offerings, and for the ways you continue to care for one another.

in Christ,  
Rev. Michelle Slater

## **Minister of Pastoral Care**

Our new pastoral Care minister, Rev David Drake, came 'on-board' mid-March 2022 with a time commitment of 8hrs (average) per week. David works with the guidance of our Lead Minister – Rev Michelle Slater.

Since beginning the work of Pastoral Care, I have been in contact with many of you either by phone or in person, in your homes or coffee shops, or just having a visit during a walk. That will continue and I look forward to such conversations when the opportunity presents itself.

There are a number of people in personal care homes whom I have been honoured to visit and spend time with ... introducing ourselves, listening to stories, and hopefully just being present. There are also many congregational members who we might call 'shut-ins' who have, where appropriate, received a visit. It is good for all of us to remember that the good souls that I visit, were once very active, participating members of our

congregation. They are quite interested in what is ‘going on’ in the church and miss the activities and fellowship terribly. We hold them all in our prayers.

Along with myself, there are many others who make intentional visits to shut-ins and those in care homes on a regular basis, offering care and support, sharing the ministry of pastoral care in the ways they know how. We are truly blessed to have such energetic, focussed volunteers!

In addition to the already mentioned, a Prayer Phone Tree continues to function well. There are 14+ volunteers who “respond prayerfully to concerns of people who may request prayers for themselves, families, or a community situation or circumstance”. You will notice this in our weekly bulletins where you can call on a member of the prayer chain to add a confidential prayer request to the phone tree.

And last, but certainly not least, is the work of the Thrift Shop ministry. The impact of Oak Bay United Church is felt through the community by this ministry. It is not a stretch to understand that pastoral care is offered in abundance to those it serves. It offers ‘real’ service to the community and is not simply another Thrift Shop selling goods. It is so much more!

The volunteers: church folks and those who may not be church members, offer a dedicated, sensitive ministry to anyone who walks through our doors on a Friday morning. Many are regulars who often show up just to see a friendly face. For this reason, a return of the ‘coffee time’ for visitors and shoppers brings more opportunities for conversation, connection, and support on the first Friday of the month.

In my role as pastoral care minister, I have visited in hospitals and homes, coffee shops and at the church, many of these dedicated volunteers. It has been my joy and honour.

The Thrift Shop has many aspects to it and is without doubt a vital ministry of the church. Think of it as ‘Pastoral Care to the Community’. I do ...

Blessings to All,

Rev David Drake, Pastoral Care Minister

## **Music Ministry**

At the beginning of September 2021, we were sad to say good-bye to our music minister Amy van Wensem, and along with her, our technical director, Casey van Wensem.

Over the course of the church year, we were blessed by the musical leadership of Dale Rasmussen (October 2021 through January 2022), Gordon Miller (February through May 2022), and Christine Chephya (February through September 2022). At times, we also called on the talents of our own church members and friends, like Cam Culham (guitar), Sari Alesh (violin) and Jamie Hillier (voice). We also made new connections, like Anna Bigland-Pritchard, Evelyn Hawes and Amiel Elfert. We are so grateful to each one who helped us bridge the gap until we found our new music minister, Anna Bigland-Pritchard, who will begin with us on October 11, 2022.

Although our Christmas Eve worship had to move online in 2021, Dale Rasmussen and Rev Michelle hosted an outdoor Carol-sing at 9 pm that night. About 35 people gathered in the blowing sleet to sing again the old story of God coming to be with us, to be one of us, in the Christ Child.

## **Choir Ministry**

The Worship Choir met regularly over the course of the year to sing together. They began with wearing specially designed 4-ply cloth singing masks and sat spaced in the congregation. As pandemic restrictions

eased, choir members felt comfortable to move back into the choir loft (while still socially distanced), to great rejoicing!

Although challenged by the rotating schedule of substitute musicians, choir members faithfully met on Thursday evenings, as well as on Sunday mornings before worship, to prepare to lead the congregation in singing with joy and heart. Choir members even continued to meet each Sunday before worship during the summer (when choirs usually take a break), because they had missed singing together during the pandemic.

## **Youth Ministry**

This past year the Youth Group has gone through a lot of changes. Starting in January 2022, Youth Group was meeting entirely online via zoom with Zach. By March however, the Youth Group had fully transitioned from online to back in person meetings, and not to mention with a whole new youth leader. Despite the changes, the youth have been super welcoming and supportive. They wish all the best for Zach in this new stage in his life as a full time lawyer/dad, and want to thank him for all the hard work and dedication over the years.

With a new youth leader came new challenges and new adventures. Over the past few months with Annalise the youth have enjoyed visiting Fired up Ceramics, movie nights and water fights (unfortunately for Annalise, she was usually the sole target of the youth group in said water fights). We have also embraced our surprisingly competitive spirit with a series of competitions, including the first biannual OBUC Bake Off, the Minute 2 Win it Games Night and Timed Photo Scavenger Hunts (a big thank you to our kind and generous parishioners for supporting us) GO SPORTS!

The youth group has also been very involved with the community this year. Over the spring and summer, the youth have been very helpful lending a hand at the Oak Bay Night Market. We also had lots of fun repping the OBUC at Victoria Pride in June along with other community members. In addition, the youth have been involved in other United Church ministries, helping at Camp Pringle as counsellors in training and at Camp Spirit as leaders in training.

Youth group has also been growing a lot! We have had many new friends join us from in and around the community, and, to match this growth we have introduced some new changes. This year the Oak Bay United Youth will be expanding into two new groups, the Senior (ages 14-17) and Junior (12-13) youth groups. We decided to make this change as we thought it would be the best way for us to offer the youth of Oak Bay United a wider range of age-appropriate activities. Despite the changes, we will still host major events as one big group.

Annalise Molony, Youth Ministry

## **The Thrift Shop/Annex**

In spite of another year of Covid 19 restrictions, the volunteers at the Thrift Shop have carried on “calmly, safely and with kindness” through a heat dome, atmospheric rivers, and snow, continuing to offer affordable goods to increasing numbers of customers and providing support to many refugee families and others in need in our community. As examples of our outreach, we were able to assist refugee families from Afghanistan, Palestine, Morocco, and the Ukraine, 2 local families who lost everything in house fires, as well as other families referred by Burnside Gorge Housing Outreach. We also continue to provide needed clothing to Our Place, and other items that are sent in containers around the world including to Ukraine, by Compassionate Resource Warehouse. The ripples of our outreach ministry go far and wide, made possible by the continuing supply of wonderful donations from the Community.

Throughout last summer we were able to continue our sales safely, using a “hybrid model “ -both inside Gardiner Hall and out on the parking lot. In the fall, we again ‘pivoted’ and moved the children’s clothing and toys back into the hall, allowing church programs for children to start again after a 2 year hiatus.

We thank Rev. Margaret Harper for her support as Pastoral Care Minister and welcome Rev. David Drake, who we’ve kept busy visiting a number of volunteers who have been hospitalized.

As this will be our 40th year of operation, we plan on a celebration toward the end of summer, inviting all former volunteers to join us for a time of conversation and story telling.

We hope to be able to restart the important drop in coffee and conversation for customers in the fall. Many of our regulars really miss the socialization and are eagerly awaiting the opportunity to come and chat once more. The Board has requested that a Future Development Task Group be formed to “articulate the mission and ministry goals of the Thrift /Annex with the object of increasing the congregation’s familiarity with and investment in these goals (other than the revenue). and clarifying the short, medium, and long term need for volunteers, space etc. to help make the ministry what it needs to be in the future”. You will be hearing more about this in the next while.

Once again, we thank all our supporters, volunteers, donors etc. who keep this vital outreach ministry thriving.  
Betty Thacker

## **Ministry & Personnel Report**

The Ministry and Personnel (M & P) Team is a confidential, consultative body for the purpose of providing oversight to Oak Bay United Church’s human resources, including such employment activities as recruitment, hiring, performance management, occupational health and safety, separation, compensation, and other employment standards items. We are the link between the mission of the congregation and activities of our staff.

We encourage everyone in the Community of Faith to reach out if they have a specific concern about the Oak Bay United Church's staffing needs.

Stephen Clark, on behalf of the Ministry and Personnel Committee

## **Treasurer Report**

The past fiscal year for OBUC can be summed up by saying we are moving in the right direction. Our overall revenues were up on the strength of additional rental income and strong revenue numbers from the Thrift Ministry!

Our financial givings are down slightly which is not unexpected coming out of a pandemic, but still an area of concern long-term. Our expenses were down overall; however, insurance costs and utilities are trending significantly upwards. We continue to have staffing at an affordable level and are budgeting to be balanced this fiscal year.

As mentioned last year, while we are out of one crisis, we need to move quickly and decisively to prepare for future days. We need sustainable revenue sources that will help us eliminate our structural deficit, fund the goals of the congregation, address much needed deferred maintenance, and help plan long-term.

Al Dubé, Treasurer

## **Property, Trustees and Board Chair Report – *Supplement to follow***

## Seeking Truth, Anti-racism and Reconciliation (STARS)

We met regularly for discussion, book studies, sharing resources and opportunities for learning and action as fellow travellers on this journey. Catalysed by what is happening in our world (eg, racism, discrimination and violence toward Black people and other people of colour, the discovery of unmarked graves at residential schools) we seek to understand the complicated truths about our shared history. Our current priority is to discover ways to participate respectfully in actions toward reconciliation with indigenous people. We read and discussed the book *The Reason I Walk* by Wab Kinew.

We welcome others to join us for our regular meetings, for book studies and discussion and to join our e-mail list for notice of upcoming opportunities.

## Membership Report

In the last year, the following changes were made to the church membership:

Total membership June 30, 2021:		231
New members:	by transfer	0
	by affirmation of faith	4
	by adult baptism	2
Members removed:	because of death	8
	because of request	1
	because of transfer	1
Total membership June 30, 2022:		227
Infant baptisms:		3
Weddings:		1

In Loving Memory of these members and friends of OBUC:

Douglas Asp  
Joyce Brotherton  
Lucy Holland  
Donna Kitson  
Lois Lacheur  
Bette Moore  
Carol Rowling  
Lucie Stuart  
Derek Whittle