

# COMMUNICATOR

## ADVENT 2017



### **Fenwick United Church**

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Minister: Alan G.E. McLean

Music Director: William Outred

Children's Ministry: Linda Sharpe-Pietras

Secretary: Patrice Walker

## *Dear members and friends of Fenwick United Church;*

I have always been a bit of a news junkie. Even before I get out of bed, the first thing I do when I wake up is to turn on the bedside radio to catch the news. The same thing as I am going to sleep. In between are the various news programs I like to watch if I am in a situation of access to a TV. However, I have noticed that things are different lately. The mood seems harsher, less hopeful, even for many, despairing. It seems that mostly all I get to see is bad news these days. Refugees forced out of their own situation because of war, intolerance and genocide. Boatloads of homeless people capsizing in the Mediterranean. Politicians not hesitating to lie, brazenly, over and over again and when caught out, still claim an ‘alternative’ truth. Corruption and sexual harassment, threat of nuclear war, an opioid crisis killing so many, housing beyond the reach.....the list seems to go on and on and become more upsetting with each telling. I overheard someone talking the other day about how she cannot even watch the news any more, she finds it too upsetting. Her listener agreed. I can understand that with a lot of sympathy.

We in the church are about to enter what we often call “The Season of Hope” – Advent and then Christmas as we celebrate the coming of Jesus to bring us new hope and a new way of looking at ourselves and the world in which we live. To bring us a new way of living in that world.

At the centre of the Gospel is “Hope.” It is no accident that we enter the Advent season, the beginning of the church year, reminding ourselves that we are a people of hope. The first candle on our Advent Wreath is the candle which symbolises and reminds us of the hope we carry within us. That wonderful hymn by Brian Wren that has become a favourite with many of us in recent years begins:

*Hope is a star that shines in the night  
Leading us on till the morning is bright.  
When God is a child  
There's joy in our song.  
The first shall be last  
And the weak shall be strong.  
And none shall be afraid.*

The people of the Bible were not so different from us as they awaited the coming of the Messiah. They were a people ripe for renewal, for re-commitments, for new beginnings, for a re-hearing in a new way the old message. They were, despite the differences in time and expectation, very much like many of us. Every one of us longs for renewal and new hope. For change in our lives. For freshness and new beginnings. All of us here, at some level, hope for change, desire to deepen whatever it is that motivates us to fuller life, to deeper joy, to love and faith and commitment. The darn thing is that it is so hard to find in any way that really touches us.

We are, living in these difficult times, called to be the People of Hope, people called to hold to the ancient, yet ever new, promises. We are those who aspire to be midwives while creation groans and strains as in childbirth, bringing forth a new thing. We are those people whose lives are bounded by hope, by the promises of our God.

Yet, to be honest, God is a God who often seems as much absent as present. Advent and Christmas is a season to remind ourselves that in spite of all, we are not alone. This is a season to rekindle that hope, to allow ourselves to be renewed by the God who is constantly new.

As Christians we have been given the message, the promise, the HOPE, that underneath the turmoil, and fear, and difficulty of life there is still a God whose steadfast love for us is sure and dependable. At this time of year, we latch on to that promise found in a peasant refugee baby born in a barn. Hope nestled in a manger.

It is my prayer that during this season of preparation, you will join us for our various worship services at Fenwick United Church. Enclosed is some information about time and special events at the church. It would be lovely to see you there. Enclosed, as well, is a special Christmas season offering envelope if you wish to show your support for our faith community in that way.

It is my prayer that as we move through this Season of Hope, we will remember who we are. May that star of hope shine in your night and lead you on to that bright morning for which we all hope.

*When God is a child  
There's joy in our song.  
The first shall be last  
And the weak shall be strong.  
And none shall be afraid.*

All blessings to you and your family and loved ones during this holy season.

*Rev. Alan McLean*

### **Journey to Bethlehem**

Fenwick's Christmas Journey begins on Friday December 1 at 5:30 pm. The children and their families are invited to a pizza supper, crafts and decorating evening with Linda Sharpe-Pietras and her helpers to prepare for Advent and Christmas.

On Sunday December 3, we will celebrate Advent 1 and begin our journey to Bethlehem. Communion will be celebrated. White Gifts, non-perishable food items or gifts of money will be collected for Pelham Cares. In the evening the choir will participate in carol singing at Wesley United Church at 7:00 pm with a massed choir from Central, Wesley and Fonthill United churches.

On Sunday December 10 we celebrate Advent 2 and continue our journey to Bethlehem.

On Sunday December 17 we celebrate Advent 3 with the Choir Cantata.

On Sunday December 24, we celebrate our family Christmas Eve service at 11 am. The Children's Bell Choir will perform as we continue our journey to Bethlehem. Hope that you and your family can join us.

On Christmas Eve there will be a candlelight communion service at Fonthill United at 9:00 pm.

Our services will be joint services with Fonthill between Christmas and the first service in the New Year. On Sunday December 31, we will worship at Fenwick at 11:00 am and on Sunday January 7, we will worship in Fonthill at 9:30 am.

Have a very merry Christmas and happy New Year.

### **From the Finance Committee**

The financial results for the first 10 months to October 31, 2017 follow this report.

Donations to date are \$85,000 plus an Extraordinary Income of \$6,090 from the sale of the manse. We require an additional \$29,000 in November and December to reach our budget of \$114,000.

Expenses have been well controlled and should be within budget at year-end.

The manse sold for \$331,500 and after expenses we were able to invest \$306,090.55 in a Guaranteed Investment Certificate. We are able to use the interest earned from this investment to help offset the minister's housing allowance. We must obtain Presbytery consent to use any of the principal.

I remind you that Revenue Canada reduces your income tax payable by 40% of the total amount over \$200 you donate to charitable organizations such as Fenwick United. All donations received by December 31, 2017 will be included on your 2017 receipt for income tax purposes.

All donations you provide are welcomed and received with much gratitude.

May this Advent season bring you joy and peace.

*Morris Looby, Treasurer*

**Financial Statement for the General Fund  
Year-to-date ending October 31, 2017**

	<u>ACTUAL</u>	<u>BUDGET</u>
<b>RECEIPTS</b>		
Contributions	62,804.35	75,166
Mission & Service	6,072.00	6,667
Hall Rentals	6,750.00	6,667
Manse Rent	2,886.00	2,876
HST Rebate	1,958.61	1,670
Men's Group	715.00	600
Outreach Projects	400.00	833
Interest Income	11.44	15
Miscellaneous (Fund Transfer)	3,000.00	250
Net from Sale of Manse	6,090.55	0
<b>TOTAL RECEIPTS</b>	<b>90,687.95</b>	<b>94,744</b>
<b>DISBURSEMENTS</b>		
Salaries & Benefits	49,003.54	48,616
Pulpit & Music Supply	2,679.00	4,043
Administrative Expense	6,473.02	6,163
Presbytery Assessment	2,464.29	2,464
Observer Subscriptions	1,327.44	1,500
Property	10,505.60	22,937
Christian Nurture	0.00	42
Mission & Service	5,537.00	6,000
Worship & Music	265.00	692
Outreach / Harvest Dinners	1,137.16	1,750
Pastoral Care/Fellowship	100.00	625
<b>TOTAL DISBURSEMENTS</b>	<b>79,492.05</b>	<b>94,832</b>
<b>NET RECEIPTS / (DEFICIT)</b>	<b>11,195.90</b>	<b>- 88</b>

**From the Pelham Syrian Refugee Constituent Group**

The Alhamoud Family has made good progress settling into their new community. The Mayor of Welland had an informal gathering to welcome the family and presented each with a small gift. The landlord and his family have been extremely welcoming and actually had gifts awaiting all the children on their arrival and a gift card for the parents. Eryam, Faisal and Mohamad started school in Welland on October 10. Aseel was enrolled in Day Care in Welland in mid-October and both Hamd and Hala attend English as a Second Language classes daily. We attended the children's first parent/teacher interview with Hamd and had a translator join us by phone. The children are all settling in and progressing well.

The committee members have been busy helping the family with the following: completing a significant amount of paperwork to obtain the necessary documentation such as OHIP cards, Personal Identification Cards, school registrations, benefits, finding a dentist and doctor, etc.; orientation to the area; shopping for winter clothing, helping them attend to their immediate medical and dental needs, helping them to learn the local bus system, introducing them to the grocery stores that carry Halal foods, setting up utilities, a budget and banking, and just generally supporting them and visiting to make sure they do not feel alone. When they have mail to review or questions, we are available to help. Rhonda and Lyn have also downloaded a translation program on our cell phones so Hamd can text us when he needs help. This is working pretty well. Hamd and Hala will also on occasion call one of us to ask for our help.

We have tested many different versions of the translation programs and while they do help us communicate, they are not perfect. Hamd has a program on his cell phone as well, so between us we can generally get the message, however for more complex issues we continue to obtain support from a translator. For anyone wishing to download a program, we have found ITranslate most effective. You need to use the UAE Arabic because it is closest to their dialect. The next step is teaching them how to use email which the school and many businesses use to communicate.

We were able to obtain a used laptop computer that had been refurbished for the family. The school strongly encouraged us to get one. We downloaded a program the school uses to help teach the children English so they can practice at home. We have spent time helping them learn how to access and work with the program. We also downloaded a game for the parents on the recommendation of the school. It is aimed at teaching adults English. We were also able to teach Hamd how to use Internet Banking so he can better monitor their finances.

On Monday November 20, we held a Meet and Greet in the lower hall of Fonthill United Church. There was good representation from all four churches involved and the community at large. We were very pleased with the degree of interest shown and how welcome the family were made to feel. The family was genuinely pleased to have the opportunity to thank all those who have been supporting their move to Canada. This also gave us the opportunity to thank Sima Nahli, the translator with the Welland Heritage Committee, who has been a wonderful support to our committee.

On Friday November 24, we will be making a presentation to the students of Glynn A Green School, thanking them for all of their support. They have contributed over \$5500 to our fundraising goal and collected all the food to stock up the home for our family's arrival.

On Tuesday November 28, Gainsborough School (Lyn's daughter's school) will be making a donation to our fundraising efforts. Keith Rae will be attending to accept the cheque. They are also planning for a Christmas gift for each of the children.

As we get to know Hamd and Hala, they are beginning to open up a bit more about their life in Syria and Jordan. They are also showing a genuine interest in our family situations. We are careful to let them share information at their own pace as they feel comfortable. We have even met their family in Jordan through a program on their phones.

We have been thanked on behalf of all of you for helping their family. In closing we found an article, written by a refugee, that gives us some food for thought as we communicate with our family. The article is shared here verbatim:

“... that was the key to being embraced by the population of our town, a community that openly took credit for the fact that we were still alive, but wanted to know nothing of our past. Month after month, my mother was asked to give her testimony in churches and women's groups, at schools and even at dinners. I remember sensing the moment when all conversation would stop and she would be asked to repeat our escape story. The problem, of course, was that they wanted our salvation story as a talisman, no more. No one ever asked what our house in Iran looked like, what fruits we grew in our yard, what books we read, what music we loved and what it felt like now not to understand any of the songs on the radio. No one asked if we missed our cousins or grandparents or best friends. No one asked what we did in summers or if we had any photos of the Caspian Sea. ‘Men treat women horribly there, don't they?’ the women would ask. Somehow it didn't feel OK to tell them about my funny dad with his pockets full of sour cherries, or my grandpa who removed his false teeth when he told ghost stories. Such memories, of course, would imply the unthinkable; that Iran was as beautiful, as fun, as energizing and romantic, as Oklahoma or Montana or New York.”

The Al Zain family is still going through the approval process. Currently they are undergoing the eligibility and security investigations. We will let you all know once a decision has been made.

*Submitted by Rhonda Baker and Lyn Taylor, Co-Chairs*



Back row: Welland Mayor Frank Campion, Hamd, Hala  
Front Row: Faisal, Mohamad, Eryam, Aseel