

# Rev. Laurie's - What's Happening Here

 *Open Arms, Open Hearts, Open Spirit*

Edition 1 - June 2021

You and I have spent the last 525 days (approximately) doing all that we could to manage the pandemic - something we have never done before! What I have come to realize is that to accomplish that lots of things have changed but the ministry of Exeter United Church has been ongoing and changing. It really is past time that you have some insight into the behind the scenes things that are going on.

*Rev. Laurie*

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## *Worship*

I have provided worship in various formats - audio message, video message, in person worship and print material.

Each format has its own 'work'. It is becoming clear that even when we do start in person worship again there will also need to be an audio message for SermonbyPhone and either an audio or video message for online worship. There are really three communities - SermonbyPhone, online and in person - that will make up our faith community moving forward.

As well as their own 'work' each format needs support in order to be a positive worship experience.

## *SermonbyPhone*

With going to virtual electronic worship, it was very clear that not everyone is comfortable with technology nor do some even have the technology. This was a big concern! We initially sent out monthly print worship material or seasonal print material.

Then... SermonbyPhone! What a marvelous tool to allow access to worship! All that you need to do is call 519-439-6044!

You can listen to the worship message any time that works for you!

## *Words of Care*

Wednesday Words of Care have been an integral part of being connected from the very start of the pandemic. This weekly offering of thoughts has proved to be a very powerful ministry. They have only taken a 'pause' when I have been on vacation or study leave.

I hope you continue to enjoy and engage with them - they are provided from my heart to yours!

## *Children and Families*

COVID has seen our children and families involved in online learning and following health protocols. This meant no Sunday School and with all the other things going on in their world not a big engagement with further online material to replace that. So, how to keep them engaged and know that we have not forgotten them.... the 'In a Bag' ministry was born!

Joanne Bowen and I have created and delivered Advent-in-a-Bag, Epiphany-in-a-Bag and Lent-in-a-Bag to date. Stay tuned for Pentecost/Summer-in-a-Bag! These include activities that families can do together specific to the season.

The pictures and smiles that have been shared are AMAZING! We are so very thankful for them!

## *Church Building and Office*

The church building is monitored on a consistent basis to ensure that all is in working order and secure.

Ann Lindenfield provides cleaning and sanitizing services between meetings to ensure that all remain healthy! We so appreciate Ann and her work!

The church office is available by appointment only at this time. Heather and I continue to work from home as much as possible.

## *AA / ALAnon / NA Meetings*

During the first lockdown of 2019, no meetings were allowed according to the province's health guidelines. We were so very thankful that these guidelines were updated to include the fact that these support meetings could happen and continue. These groups meet in the social hall with a maximum number of 10, following health protocols and they provide tracking information in sealed envelopes in case they are needed. So thankful for this!

## *Annual Meeting*

The Annual Meeting of the congregation was to have occurred in February, 2021. However, due to health restrictions it would not have been possible to have the congregation meet in an integral way. At the moment, the Leadership Team continues to monitor the situation for an appropriate time to hold this meeting to include all members of the congregation in an effective way.

## *Givings*

The Finance and Stewardship Team continue to review and monitor the finances of the church in conjunction with the Leadership Team.

To facilitate givings we have been able to set up E-Transfers together with Canada Helps on the church website and PAR. You are always able to mail in your donation or contact the Treasurer, Lynn Alderdice to make other arrangements for your givings.

## *Congregation Calls*

Some of you may have already received a telephone call from Heather with some questions to help us update our member database. This also provides an opportunity for the Leadership Team to hear things that will help inform our moving forward. Thank you for taking the time to have this intentional conversation with Heather!

## *Sabbatical*

Finally, I will be away on Sabbatical/Renewal Leave from October 1, 2021 to January 17, 2022.

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

What is a sabbatical?

The word 'sabbatical' has its roots in the biblical concept of Sabbath ('to rest' or 'to cease'). Sabbath keeping is setting aside time that God consecrates and makes holy.

Sabbatical leave is a time for me to shift gears in order to rest, disengage, study and reflect in order to return to minister among you refreshed and renewed in body, mind, and spirit. It is not a time for routine work.

My call to Exeter United Church in February, 2021 specifies that I am eligible for a sabbatical leave after five years of ministry with you.

Sabbatical is more than a vacation from meetings, budgets, pastoral care, worship planning and reflection writing. It is a time for me to receive spiritual nourishment and a change in perspective, to deepen my relationship with God, myself, and my family - a season of spiritual growth. This special time will also be a season of growth for the entire congregation!

## *Do other clergy go on sabbatical?*

In short, yes! Currently, Rev. Dr. Kate Crawford of Huron Shores United Church, Grand Bend is on her sabbatical until August, 2021. Her congregation is using this time to continue working on initiatives that they have planned.

## *How long will I be gone?*

I will leave on Friday, October 1, 2021 and return to the congregation on Monday, January 17, 2022. My first Sunday back will be January 23, 2022. I will be gone approximately 15 weeks: 12 weeks of sabbatical, 2 weeks of study leave and 1 week of vacation.

## *What will I be doing on my sabbatical?*

My plan is for self-directed study due to the ongoing limitations and uncertainty relating to COVID19. It is a plan for sabbatical time - Letting Go, Living in God's Presence and ReOrientation.

1. Letting Go - By intentionally disengaging with the congregation and through rest, quiet and intentional spiritual practice, my goal is to regain my passion and enthusiasm for ministry and life.
2. Living in God's Presence - Through study my goals are to re-engage the skill of preaching and study ministry with and for older adults and congregational development.
3. ReOrientation - Combining the foregoing, my goal is to return to pastoral ministry with Exeter United Church renewed and refreshed with a vision of what our future may become.

## *Who will cover my responsibilities during my absence?*

The Western Ontario Waterways regional council will appoint a pastoral charge supervisor who will attend Leadership Team and Trustee meetings and provide oversight.

The Leadership and M&P Teams will be overseeing the day to day administration of the church and congregation.

Arrangements are in the works for emergency pastoral care and pulpit supply during my sabbatical also.

If there are emerging questions, the first step is to contact the office so that the necessary people are contacted to address them.

## *Will the church and the congregation just be in a 'holding pattern' while I am away?*

No! It is important to remember that the sabbatical is a two-way process: while I am on my journey of renewal, refreshment, and reflection, you, the congregation will embark on a journey as well - to reflect on your prior work, to renew yourselves, and to discern God's will for you as a community of faith.

## *How will we get 'reacquainted' when I return?*

My first Sunday back will include a brief 'welcome back' liturgy much as my last Sunday before sabbatical will include a 'leave taking' liturgy. Time and opportunity will be set aside to learn and share our mutual experiences of sabbatical to enhance our ministry and provide input for future planning.

*If you wish to reach me, please call the office 519-235-0860 or email me at [rev.oleary.ucc@gmail.com](mailto:rev.oleary.ucc@gmail.com)*

*Be safe... Be well.... Until the next time!  
Rev. Laurie*