



Report From Your Board Chair

A lot has happened since our last report. As we welcomed in 2022, we were pleased to announce the appointment of Rev. Cindy Bourgeois as our interim minister, with a full-time position running until the end of June. As you know, Rev. Gretta Vosper has been on an extended medical leave of absence since the end of October 2020. We do get periodic updates from Scott and official reports through our Ministry and Personnel Committee. Our M&P Chair, Anita DesRosiers, has done a terrific job with the support of her committee and direction from the Shining Waters Region of the United Church of Canada. We all miss Gretta, but must respect the time and space she deserves in her recovery. Messages of support will be forwarded through the church office, but a response from Gretta will not be forthcoming.

We are hoping that Gretta will return to her position as our minister. In the meantime, we are being well served by Cindy and have enjoyed getting to know her, to learn of her interests and passions, and we are benefitting from her leadership. At the March board meeting, and with the recommendation of the M&P Committee, it was agreed that, pending a mutually satisfactory assessment between Cindy and the M&P Committee, her contract with us could be extended for 10 months, from July 1, 2022 to April 30, 2023. In the event that Gretta is able to return, we would anticipate at least a one-month transition and would exercise the 90 day termination clause. If Gretta is not able to return, Cindy would be eligible to apply to become our permanent minister. Adhering to UCC policy, we would have to establish a formal search committee.

Our progress in the strategic/action plan process has seen us start the implementation of recommendations that arose from the time spent with Joe Manafó and his Listenology program. Our Planning Guidance Committee, led by Jean Skillman, is working with Joe Manafó on revising and implementing the action plan. Ongoing widespread input is welcome and expected. Your comments may be sent to Jean or myself. In addition, we anticipate congregational meetings or forums to review and discuss our plans. The Board will also be updated on a regular basis.

As I prepare this report on March 11, I note that this is the second anniversary of the World Health Organization declaring the COVID-19 pandemic. This has clearly been a milestone in our lifetimes and in the life of WHUC. We have resumed in-person gatherings with no limit on the numbers attending, and we are seeing about 20-30 people on Sunday mornings. Our ability to use Zoom technology for our Sunday Gatherings and our board and committee meetings has allowed us to continue to function as a church. Sincere thanks go out to Peter, Glenn and Scott who have worked diligently to enable those who join us remotely to experience an interactive presence at our gatherings. The evolution of our community extending well beyond the West Hill community and the GTA has been remarkable. On any given Sunday, we have a community that extends across Canada, the USA, UK, Africa and beyond. A solid contingent from the UK has brought us many new friends, including our Treasurer and Finance Chair, John McKechnie (and Ann) from Edinburgh, Scotland. We are now truly a hybrid community that welcomes those who are able to walk to the building, those who drive or commute in, and the wider group that join in virtually. Our board is dedicated to providing the necessary resources to maintain this.

For several months, we have welcomed in-person attendance to the church building. Board member, Barb Russell (Friendship and Hospitality Chair), has assembled a team to welcome and guide our Sunday morning crowd, while keeping everyone as safe as possible and following all of the current COVID guidelines. I attended the service recently (a 125 km drive) and it was great to see so many people for the first time in 2 years. Kudos to Barb and her team.

This and That from the March 8th Board Meeting:

Randy Bowes has decided to retire from his lead position of managing and promoting PAR (pre-authorized remittance), a program by which people contribute weekly or monthly donations to West Hill, automatically transferring the funds from their accounts to the church. There is no need to handle cash or cheques. The donor knows their commitment will continue until changed or stopped and WHUC can be assured of this amount of revenue. We are therefore giving an appreciative tribute to Randy for performing this task. **THANK YOU, Randy!** We are now looking for a volunteer or two to promote and administer the PAR program. Please contact Mike, John McKechnie or the church office.

(Continued on page 7)

First Nations Study Group

TWO-TIERED SERVICE: THIRD WORLD CONDITIONS

What do you think? Has much changed for First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people in Canada since November 2013 when members of our WHU's First Nations Study Group and Gretta attended the House of Commons in Ottawa where our petition, which called on the government to take urgent action on the substandard housing, water, education and health care on reserves and to uphold our duties and obligations as Treaty people, was read before parliament and became a part of the public record?

March 1, 2022, APTN News:

It has already been a deadly year for house fires on First Nations. In the span of one month, nine people, mostly children, died in house fires on three different First Nations in Ontario, Alberta, and Manitoba.

October 25, 2017, Statistics Canada Census report:

One in five Aboriginal people live in a dwelling that needs major repairs. Of the 1,673,785 who reported an Aboriginal identity on the 2016 Census of Population, 324,900 lived in a dwelling that was in need of major repairs. This group accounted for 19.4% of the total Aboriginal population in Canada. In comparison, 6.0% of the non-Aboriginal population reported living in a dwelling in need of major repairs.

One quarter (26.2%) of Inuit, 24.2% of First Nations people and 11.3% of Métis lived in a dwelling that was in need of major repairs in 2016. These proportions are down from 2011 by 3.6 points for Inuit, 2.0 points for First Nations people and 1.9 points for Métis. (*Statistics Canada 2017*)

January 25, 2022, APTN News:

Jurisdictional void makes housing on reserve substandard, raises risk of fatal fires, say experts.

More money for on-reserve fire safety programs would certainly help communities mitigate the risk of potentially deadly blazes, experts and advocates agree. But they also warn that simply writing cheques won't solve long-standing problems around building codes and fire codes in First Nations communities – namely, that there often are none. Emergency management expert, Blaine Wiggins, stated recently on *Nation to Nation*. “A standard for fire prevention within communities does not exist right now.”

Wiggins is from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory and, as the executive director of the Aboriginal Firefighters Association of Canada, he works with organizations to address the policy gaps facing First Nations emergency responders.

In Ontario, the provincial government has passed the Building Code Act the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, but these laws cease to apply on reserves like Sandy Lake, a fly-in community



Bobby Narcisse, Deputy Grand Chief of the Aroland First Nation in Treaty 9, served as NAN director of social services for nearly nine years. Photo courtesy: NAN

600 km west of Thunder Bay, where three children died in a fire on Jan. 14, 2022.

On many First Nations territories, the Indian Act or the First Nations Land Management Act takes over. Under these regimes, it's up to each First Nation to legislate, adopt and enforce its own building code using whatever power, authority, and cash it has. The result is a patchwork of policies countrywide.

Risk greater in the North

This jurisdictional void is a recipe for disaster when mixed with systemic underfunding, said Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Deputy Grand Chief Narcisse in a phone interview. “Fatal house fires are all too common in our communities,” he said. “A chronic lack of firefighting services and the fact that we have substandard housing – that's a deadly combination.”

NAN has about 50,000 constituents in Treaty 5 and Treaty 9 territories in northern Ontario. Of the 49 communities NAN represents, Narcisse said about 34 are fly-in. That remoteness isolates communities from provincial infrastructure. It makes partnerships with municipalities impossible and raises the cost of living. There are fewer economic opportunities, so communities are more likely to rely on federal cash.

“A dollar is different in Attawapiskat or Sandy Lake than it is in Thunder Bay, Toronto or Ottawa,” said Narcisse. “It still perpetuates that discrimination against our First Nations from both levels of government. It always takes a tragedy to set up Band-Aid solutions. We're looking for long-term reform.”

One of those unthinkable tragedies struck when three generations of a single family died in a devastating house fire in Pikangikum in 2016. NAN launched the Amber's Fire Safety Campaign in response, naming the educational initiative after five-month-old Amber Strang who perished in the blaze.

Movement from government has been slow.

The Ontario branch of Indigenous Services Canada signed a 10-year bilateral deal with Ontario's fire marshal in 2018, according to internal records obtained by APTN. Nationally ISC invested \$10 million to establish an Indigenous Fire Marshal Office in 2019.



Blaine Wiggins, Aboriginal Firefighters Association Exec. Director, says there are many challenges facing fire prevention in First Nations communities but a major one is a lack of standards. Mr. Wiggins is from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory. Photo: APTN

But between 2019 and 2021 the department saw emergency declarations triple among First Nations in Ontario largely due to the pandemic and growing social emergencies like suicide and addiction. Eighty-six per cent of these emergency events already happen in the North.

APTN asked Narcisse how many NAN communities have passed their own building and fire bylaws. He wasn't sure. "It's kind of sad to say that currently to date there's no regulation," he replied. "It's left to the communities to mandate and enforce these codes, and we know for a fact **too many of our communities are very substandard. They're third-world conditions.**"

Funding and bylaws aren't enough. But even having enough cash, a local fire bylaw, and well-resourced emergency responders won't make all problems disappear.

As the fire chief and director of emergency services for the Chippewas of Rama, Jeremy Parkin is in an enviable position as far as First Nations fire departments go. He has sustainable and predictable funding via an operating agreement with Casino Rama, about 150 kms north of Toronto, Parkin told APTN. The band council also has bylaws in place governing the appointment of a building inspector and fire prevention officers.

Still, challenges remain.

"It's that whole jurisdictional issue. Fire services are governed provincially and funded municipally," said Parkin. "There is no federal oversight. There is nothing at that level that we can really latch onto and use." While bylaws are sometimes the only tools communities have, "the problem is there's no enforcement mechanism," added Parkin.

Communities can end up with "a case of the fox looking after the hen," which is how project manager John Kiedrowski described on-reserve construction and renovation standards in his 2017 House of Commons committee testimony.

Without support from any provincial, federal, or Indigenous government agency, band councils can end up simultaneously being the owner, builder, regulator, and inspector of construction projects.

In that case, the pressure to build fast risks conflicting with the duty to build right. The danger, Kiedrowski testified, is that expediency will win.

"What you have is homes being built but not necessarily meeting building codes or fire codes, especially on renovations," he explained. "That's really where the death traps are, and it's not being done."

Non-profit organizations like the First Nations National Building Officers Association, on whose behalf Kiedrowski addressed committee, have emerged to try, and help, but they're still not enough.

Problems well documented

The committee's 2018 report, titled *From the Ashes: Reimagining Fire Safety and Emergency Management in Indigenous Communities*, revealed Canada has been chronically underfunding emergency response programs including fire safety for many years.



Assembly of First Nations Ontario Regional Chief Stan Beardy says the federal government benefits from the lack of minimum standards for fire protection in First Nations. CBC



IN THE SPIRIT

Yoga Studio & Wine Lounge



REMINDER — YOGA CLASSES (SENIORS DISCOUNT). We still offer special seniors classes (yoga in chairs and for those with mobility issues) Mondays at 10:15-11:15 a.m. and Thursdays 9:00-10:00 a.m. (\$15/class includes tea/coffee & cookies). (Highland Creek Plaza, 376 Old Kingston Road)

We have many more options for all ages. Please check out our website for our class schedule, rates and more information (647-352-4879): www.inthespirtityoga.com, email letsconnect@inthespirtityoga.com

Ottawa has known about this since at least 2013 when an auditor general review found Aboriginal Affairs had budgeted a paltry \$19 million for the program annually.

The Harper government more than tripled the program's budget the next year, and cash for the program doubled again after Trudeau delivered his first budget in 2016.

But there was still far less cash available than communities actually needed, and the department continued to exceed its budget by tens of millions per year.

The Ontario coroner picked up the thread in a 2021 report that found Ottawa provided an annual average of \$47,700 for fire safety on reserves per First Nation between 2008 and 2017.

First Nations kids under 10 are 86 times more likely to perish in fires than non-First Nations kids, the coroner's probe found. To explain this inequality, the coroner latched onto the concept of "jurisdictional neglect."

The concept refers to situations where provincial and federal governments refuse to co-operate delivering services to First Nations communities. The coroner identified building codes as one of many areas where this neglect occurs. **It often leaves First Nations without equal access to housing, clean water, health care, and social supports.**

It often also lands Canada in court for allegedly running a two-tiered service delivery system that discriminates against people with Indian status.

Narcisse said now's the time to start the discussion about legislative solutions. "Get rid of the discrimination," he urged. "Provide equitable fire prevention services and protection under a regional, co-developed fire law."

Parkin agreed. "To me that's what fire legislation would look like, is making sure communities have the resources to provide community fire safety," he said. "There is a need for something just to address that governance gap."

What can we at WHU do? Write to your Member of Parliament on this issue (this is an overview but keep your letter brief), and also cc: Marc Miller, Minister of Crown and Indigenous Relations as well as Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services. All are postage-free to the House of Commons, Ottawa, ON, K1A 0A6.

To find your MP, go to: <http://www.ourcommons.ca/parliamentarians/en/members>. Enter your postal code to get your MP's name.



The chief of Mishkeegogamang First Nation sought a coroner's inquest to expose inadequate funding for fire protection and housing after a fire in this house killed four people in February 2014.

submitted by Ruth Gill on behalf of First Nations Study Group

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Ukraine ~ How Can We Help?



The horrific invasion of Ukraine by Putin has moved us at West Hill United to want to offer our help. A suggestion was made during Thursday coffee time to reach out to our local Ukrainian church here in West Hill (Ukrainian Orthodox Church of St. Anne) to find out how they are responding to this crisis and whether we can participate/help through them. Walter Shouldice approached the church and was told that at this point they are making donations via the Canadian Red Cross. They also indicated that in the near future, once Ukrainian refugees start arriving here in Canada, there will be a need for specific tangible items to help families settle, so this could be one way that we might help out locally. We will hear more as the situation unfolds.

Here is how to donate through the **Canadian Red Cross**:

- ♥ Online at <https://redcross.ca>
- ♥ By phone: 1-800-418-1111.
- ♥ By mail: With credit card info or cheque made out to Canadian Red Cross along with donation form (https://www.redcross.ca/crc/documents/mail_donation_form.pdf). Be sure to write **Emergency Response - Ukraine** on the memo line on the front of your cheque.

The United Church of Canada is responding to the crisis in Ukraine with **Mission & Service partners ACT Alliance and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank**. Donations can be made in the following ways:

- ♥ Online at <https://united-church.ca>
- ♥ By phone: 416-231-5931 or toll-free 1-800-268-3781 ext. 2738 (Visa or Mastercard)
- ♥ By mail: Make out cheque to United Church of Canada and send to United Church of Canada, Philanthropy Unit - Emergency Response, 3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 200, Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4. Be sure to write **Emergency Response - Ukraine** on the memo line on the front of your cheque.

UCC Moderator Right Rev. Richard Bott has posted a letter condemning the actions of President Putin against the people of Ukraine. The letter can be found on the Knox United Church (Parksville, BC) website: <https://www.kucparksville.ca/news/we-join-with-all-who-witness-and-work-for-peace-and-justice-around-the-world>

Anita DesRosiers passed on a link that we can share with others to help hold Putin accountable for the crimes he has committed against the people of Ukraine: https://secure.avaaz.org/campaign/en/prosecute_putin_loc/?fpla

submitted by Mel Crossley and Adel Francis





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Message From Cindy Bourgeois

I have been at West Hill United for a couple months now and the experience has been delightful so far. I have felt welcomed and supported. There is a hunger for social justice and a desire for learning. There are well-defined values and meaningful and intentional gatherings. The potential for the “hybrid” community is exciting. There is a good community here in East Scarborough and around the world.

Still, entering as a new minister to a community can be challenging. You enter a community that has a life and a way of being, but you come in with a prominent role. The minister is in charge of the Sunday gatherings, which is a special role. I am the only full-time employee and there are many things that fall to me because of my role. But I must always respect the already formed community and its way of being. It is not up to a minister to arrive and proceed to change the community.


At my last Community of Faith in Regina a young reporter wrote an article about me in the local paper. At one point in the article, he wrote, “Cindy runs her church like....”. The next morning before our Sunday gathering two women came up to me independently and said, “The minister does not run the church.”

The minister does not run the church. I had already decided after my first couple of ministries that the next time I began a new pastoral relationship I would focus on taking the time to understand the community before even thinking of trying to change anything. In order to lead you have to be led. What I mean is it is unproductive for a minister to try to change a community. A community is always changing, always growing but its established way of being must be honoured.

I really believe that the community must come first. It is not what the minister wants that matters. I must defer to what the community wants. My understanding of ministry is one of servanthood. I serve at the pleasure of the community. If I am to be an agent of change, the change must not come in a top-down manner from me. Instead I must listen to the needs and desires of the community, help it to discern how it wants to change and grow, and encourage and facilitate the desired change.

This is a slow process, but it is the best process. I am delighted and honoured to walk with West Hill United in this journey.

Yours Truly,
Cindy



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We are also commending and thanking Glenn and Peter for their diligence in handling the tech and AV needs for our Sunday Gatherings. They have been tireless in their efforts and always on hand. The board wants to hire two or three people with the necessary technical skills so that Glenn and Peter would not have to be on hand or available each and every Sunday. Our first appeal will be offered to members and participants of the Boys and Girls Club of East Scarborough. The selection process, hiring and training would be overseen by the M&P Committee and Glenn.

Adel Francis has spoken out about the Ukraine invasion by Russia. She joined our coffee time, was present at the last board meeting, and at the last Sunday gathering encouraged all of us to keep up to date, to research, to discuss and to find ways to assist individually and collectively. Walt Shouldice visited the local Ukrainian church in West Hill and has passed on information to directly support efforts in our community, as well as credible support agencies like the Canadian Red Cross and other groups including those affiliated with the United Church of Canada. For detailed information please see Mel and Adel's announcement on page 5.

As always, your questions, comments and input are valued (Mike Lawrie 519-740-0761, lawrieclan@rogers.com).

Travelling our journey together
May love abound
Mike Lawrie

Outreach News

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to the Second Harvest HERO campaign!

West Hill Raised \$545, providing over 1090 meals!

Each month, over 100,000 hungry Torontonians depend on Second Harvest for healthy meals. The Food Rescue & Delivery Program is the core of Second Harvest's work. With seven trucks and a van on the road, it connects surplus food with those in need.



Thank you for your generous support!

Outreach Committee (Gill C., June D., Donna L., Marilyn L., Vilma R., Barb R., Ingrid S.)

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Helping People Is What We Love To Do!

Zoom and Room with West Hill

Our weekly gatherings include not only Zoom, but some in-person as well as hybrid (Zoom and In-Room) options. If you wish to join a Zoom gathering but you don't have Internet, you can simply access Zoom by telephone to listen/participate. Contact the office for phone and meeting identification numbers.

Sunday Morning Gathering/Perspective(s), Zoom and In-Room ~ 10:30



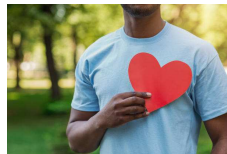
Tuesday Morning Labyrinth Walk, In-Person in the church parking lot ~ 10:30)



Tuesday Afternoon Crafting Group, In-Person in the church ~ 1:00



Tuesday Afternoon Wellness Group, Zoom ~ 2 to 3



Thursday Morning Coffee, Zoom ~10 to 11



West Hill United Board of 2022

Board Chair: Mike Lawrie

Property Chair: Gary Megson

Ministry and Personnel Chair: Anita DesRosiers

Communication and Marketing Chair: Vacant

Education and Growth: Vacant

Friendship and Hospitality: Barb Russell

Community Care: Babette Oliviera

Celebrating the Spirit: Vacant

Finance Chair & Treasurer: John McKechnie

Secretary: Vacant

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Donna Hall, Peter Thomas, George Oliver, Florence Soknacki

Regional Representatives: Annemarie Leepel and Louise Lawrie

Trustees: Glenn Cockwell (Chair), Jim Hyland, Marion Cruikshank, Frank Kilroy, Gretta Vosper

Minister: Cindy Bourgeois

West Hill United

A warm place to find yourself

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