

news
@
westhill



Winter 2024

Message From Mike, WHU Board Chair

Happy 2024 to all who are part of this unique community. As we enter this year, we continue with the implementation of the Action Plan and the reality that Rev gretta has officially retired. A partial return to defined ministerial duties for gretta had been planned for December 1, but additional health concerns compelled her to officially retire on November 30. This was sad news for us, and we will plan to celebrate and thank her for her many years of ministry at WHU. We will plan some special gatherings in gretta's honour to summarize our journey of transformation and growth under her leadership. Despite some troubled times and challenges, our community has adapted and is moving to the future with resilience and renewed purpose. There will be a more complete record coming in February for the Annual Congregational Meeting.

We are fortunate to have the leadership, guidance and advice of Rev. Greg Daly as he continues the clergy liaison function at our board meetings. He will continue with this function with us until September. He has a full-time position as Minister at Beach United Church.

The Action Plan Team (APT) has been active planning our future structure, leadership, activities and mission. Our plan is shaping up to identify 3 positions: Visionary Leader, Care Coordinator, and Tech Production and Support. Search Committees will be set up for each position and the roles and responsibilities will be more clearly defined. These positions will most likely be paid positions, and likely not full-time.

The Finance Committee, chaired by Walt Shouldice with Joe Hatlett as Treasurer, are finalizing the 2024 budget with broad input from the committee and M&P. Congregational approval is necessary and will be sought at the ACM on February 25th.

The Finance Committee is anticipating the 2024 budget will see a net loss, but are exploring ways we can balance that; the team will be following up on funding support options in conversation with Shining Waters Region. They also hope to assemble Fundraising and Stewardship Committees this year. If you have some exciting ideas about how we can come together to foster friendships, have some fun, AND generate funds, we'd love to hear your ideas, and we invite you to consider joining one of these committees.

The Tech Team, led by Glenn Cockwell, has greatly improved the AV mechanics in the community hall with the purchase of new cameras, microphones, speakers and sound boards. The tech team staff have happily adopted the new technology, and training is underway for those involved in the technical aspects of our gatherings, meetings and events. See the article written by Glenn, Studio WH, on page 7 in this newsletter.

The Ministry and Personnel Committee, led by Florence, has recognized the extra time that Scott has devoted to pastoral care and supporting those who need that form of support. This is beyond his usual role of music director, and we have arranged to fairly compensate him for his time. In addition, Scott has continued to be a central leader of our Sunday gatherings, including presenting the perspective on a regular basis. A huge thank you to Scott for stepping up in so many areas.

We were thrilled at the safe arrival of Tina, a refugee co-sponsored by West Hill, in November 2023. She frequently joins us on Sunday mornings as she builds connections with new friends and supports in the wider community. Many thanks to Barb Russell who heads up the WHU Refugee Resettlement Committee.

Barb is inviting members of our community to consider donating \$20 a month to the Benevolent Fund. This fund is overseen by our minister, Rev. Greg, who disburses donations to people facing specific challenges that could be eased with financial support. We are hoping to add 25 regular contributors to steadily grow the fund over the coming year.

Travelling our journey together,
Mike Lawrie on behalf of the WHUC Board

Indigenous News & Updates

FIRST NATIONS HUMAN REMAINS DISCOVERED IN RIVERDALE (EAST TORONTO)

Indigenous remains were discovered at a construction site in Riverdale (Toronto) on January 5th. The remains were discovered by workmen who were installing a water line on Withrow Avenue. Forensic Anthropologist Greg Olsen with the Ontario Forensic Pathology Service was among those who examined the remains and is helping to identify them.

The Riverdale area has been known as an archaeological site since at least 1886 when crews excavating the initial construction of Withrow Avenue found communal grave sites there. Withrow Public School now occupies the site of former Indigenous encampments where a spear point dating back about 7,000 years was discovered. Olsen believes the remains are about 500 to 600 years old.

There are some differences between us and our Indigenous ancestors, brothers and sisters. Our teeth have a different shape to them.

"They were farmers so they would grow their food. When they would grind their corn to make maize, the grinding stones were sometimes fairly soft. It would get grit coming off the grinding stones, and of course that would go into the meal. So, as people chewed the meal, they eventually wore their teeth down. I did see a number of molars that were worn significantly, and this was the reason why," said Olsen.

Philip Cote of Moose Deer Point First Nation, a well-known Indigenous artist, activist and historian in Toronto, said "The bottom of the Don River was the largest wetland in North America, and it was a big hunting ground ... another reason why the people were here ... so those ancient people would have been decedents of the ice runners, and the decedents of those ice runners are the Ojibwa,"

The Ministry of Public Business and Service Delivery has jurisdiction over these burial site discoveries, and it is currently working with the city and representatives of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation to establish the next steps.

GRASSY NARROWS CHIEF QUESTIONS FEDERAL COMMITMENT TO BUILDING MERCURY CARE HOME

Please call and/or write your MP about this terrible injustice.

Grassy Narrows First Nation is located about 90 kilometres north of Kenora, Ontario and about 100 km downstream from the Dryden Chemical Company. This company dumped tonnes of mercury into the English-Wabigoon River between 1962 and 1970, over 50-60 years ago.

A study authored by five mercury experts reported that tests showed significantly higher mercury levels downstream of the plant compared with upstream locations — roughly 130 times higher. The report suggests that the area is being subjected to ongoing pollution rather than the aftermath of chemical release that occurred in the 1960s.

The Canadian Government agreed to fund an in-community mercury poisoning care home for Grassy Narrows First Nation more three years ago. Yet construction hasn't been started! Estimated costs are skyrocketing, and the Chief Rudy Turtle is questioning the Prime Minister's commitment.

The federal government and Grassy Narrows signed a \$19.5-million deal in April 2020 for the centre's community-led design and construction, which they followed with \$68.9 million more in 2021 for operations and maintenance.

That brought the cash available to build and run the centre to nearly \$90 million. But Turtle said this week the estimated cost of just construction is now \$80 million — three times more than initially budgeted — which the government has, so far, not agreed to grant.

It is estimated 90 per cent of the population in Grassy Narrows has symptoms of mercury poisoning. Mercury poisoning causes tremors, insomnia, memory loss, neuromuscular effects, headaches and cognitive and motor dysfunction, among other things, according to the World Health Organization.

Indigenous Services Minister Patty Hajdu attributed the cost overruns and delays to the COVID-19 pandemic and the specialized nature of the facility. "I share the chief's frustration at unacceptable delays," said Hajdu, pointing again to the soaring cost of infrastructure projects since the pandemic hit. "The government of Canada, in principle, has said that we will build this treatment facility, and now I need the authorities in order to commit the significant cost overrun related to the delays." She promised to seek approval but couldn't guarantee Grassy Narrows will get the extra cash, or when Turtle will get an answer.

FAMILY SERVICE DELAYS ARE APPALLING HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Please call and/or write to your MP regarding this situation.

The Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ruled in 2016 that the Federal Government had discriminated against First Nations families by failing to deliver child and family services in a timely manner and was ordered to process them within 12 to 48 hours. Urgent applications such as those for a child in palliative care, a mental health crisis, or a mother and children escaping domestic abuse within 12 hours and non-urgent requests within 48 hours.

However, applicants are waiting as long as six to nine months or even a year, and some never hear back at all.

The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, in December, filed a motion of noncompliance against the government with the Human Rights Tribunal recommending that Ottawa be made to comply with the established timelines. Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director of the Child and Family Caring Society, hopes the motion will be heard in April or May 2024.

Hon. Gary Anandasangaree, MP Scarborough Rouge Park (Minister of Crown and Indigenous Relations)
Write: House of Commons Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6 (no postage required)
Phone: 416-283-1414
Email gary.anand@parl.gc.ca

Hon. John McKay, MP Scarborough-Guildwood
Write: House of Commons Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6 (no postage required)
Phone: (416) 283-1226
Email John.McKay.C1@parl.gc.ca



Philip Cote, Indigenous Artist and Historian



A concept drawing of the Mercury Care Home coming to Grassy Narrows First Nation after decades of activism. The design is based on the shape of the fish, a staple in the community's diet.



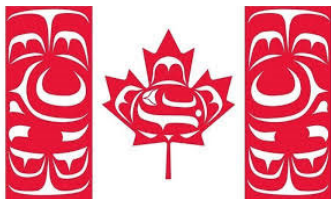
Chief Rudy Turtle of Grassy Narrows



Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director,
First Nations Child & Family
Caring Society of Canada



Dermatitis from mercury poisoning



submitted by Ruth Gill on behalf of First Nations Study Group

Celebrating ~ All in The Room at West Hill

You may have noticed that when we gather on a Sunday you are welcomed into “The Room.” This is deliberate. It is our way of saying that while we gather in different ways/places we are one community – some in the hall at 62 Orchard Park Drive and some online via Zoom, but together in the one virtual space — The Room. I hope you like this way of referring to the space in which we meet together and, if you do, please use it!

It seems like no time has passed since I was writing the November update, yet much has happened in that period!

1. The installation of our new technology has begun and will be completed in the very near future, subject to delivery of some relatively small but important pieces of equipment that connect all our tech together to produce the finished product. We are looking forward to a completely different working model. The complicated weekly set-up followed by tear-down will be replaced by plug-in-and-play, and then simply disconnected at the end. The experience in both the hall and on Zoom will be improved and we hope that this will allow us to improve the overall quality of our gatherings. This upgrade is hugely significant and will challenge us as we implement it fully. Our tech team is very experienced and well able to navigate through this installation.
2. We had two of our signature services: “Singing the Season” and “The Longest Night” this past Holiday Season. We appreciated the enormous amount of work by many people that went into making these happen. There were moments of humour as well as times of reflection which made the time together meaningful and inspiring. It was disappointing that our online community was unable to participate in Singing the Season – tech gremlins intervened, however they have now been banished! It was a huge relief that all went much more smoothly for The Longest Night. We felt connected, better for being together, and strengthened in our intentions to live to our values.
3. It is such a disappointment for us all that gretta has been unable to return after her sabbatical. Nevertheless, the work of ensuring we have speakers to provide weekly perspectives continues. I am very happy to be still receiving suggestions for potential speakers, and these are being followed up. It is impossible to have too many suggestions, as sometimes a speaker is booked up weeks, months, or even years in advance! It is not just speakers, but suggestions of themes that are also appreciated. These can provide focus and challenge regarding the values by which we seek to live here in community of West Hill and beyond. Please continue to share.

Reflecting on 2023, I want to express my appreciation for all those who make our gatherings possible. Their commitment, from setting up the tech, putting out chairs, making the coffee (in the lounge or at home in the kitchen), greeting us when we arrive, welcoming/reading, and offering perspective(s), is what makes us appreciate and enjoy The Room that is West Hill.

I want to record deep appreciation for what gretta shared with us while she was offering perspective(s). It was inspiring, challenging and exciting to hear her unique voice. We will miss her presence amongst us. More later when we celebrate her retirement and her many accomplishments during her time as our minister.

Respectfully,
John McKechnie,
Chair, Celebrations Committee



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Outreach News

Crafty Crew News

The Crafty Crew is busy knitting hats and sewing neck gators to help keep kids and adults warm during the winter months. All are welcome on Tuesdays from 1-3 p.m. There is lots of socializing and solving of the world's problems as well as some of our own!

We'll also be looking for new places to donate our Twiddlemuffs. A Twiddlemuff provides a wonderful source of visual, tactile and sensory stimulation and keeps hands snug and warm at the same time. They are good for those who may have restless hands and need something to keep their hands occupied. If you know of someone who would benefit from having a beautiful Twiddlemuff from West Hill United, please contact the office.

The Crafty Crew sold craft items, antipasto, pickles, plants and earrings and brought in around \$400 for West Hill United over the holiday season.



Outreach Committee

The Outreach Committee held its Wishes for the Holidays campaign through November/December and \$440 was donated to support Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities. We will purchase grocery store gift cards which SCHC will use throughout the year to support families in need. Thank you West Hill United!

The Outreach Committee also donated \$250 to the Thunder Woman's Healing Lodge for their outreach program to help the homeless in Toronto. This money was part of the donation to Outreach from the golf tournament a few years ago.

Through the month of February (the month of love with Valentine's Day right in the middle!) the Outreach Committee will be drawing attention to the need in all our communities for food security. The committee will ask for your support to help Second Harvest, Canada's largest food rescue organization. E-transfers and cheques to West Hill United Church should say "Outreach" on the memo line. For our friends on Zoom, please support your local food bank or food supplier.

On Sunday March 3rd, we will host our Soup Luncheon in support of Feed Scarborough, a food bank local to West Hill United.

Gill C, June D, Ruth G, Donna L, Vilma R, Barb R, Ingrid S

Tina Resettlement Committee

Tina continues to reside in the Crowne Plaza Hotel near the airport as she waits patiently for COSTI and West Hill to find her a place to call home. She would like to share an apartment with her friend Rodgers, whom she met on the plane coming to Canada. Rodgers wants to study to be a nurse, and Tina would like to be a PSW. They are both starting school in February, so good for them!

Tina's and Rodgers' budgets are low (\$1600/month for rent, basic needs, transportation and communication). They will receive this money until November 2025, two years after their arrival in Canada. Their rent will be about \$2400/month, \$1200 each. Rodgers also has a United Church supporting him.

Eve C, Gill C, June D, Ruth G, Donna L, Vilma R, Barb R, Ingrid S

Fundraising ~Benevolent Fund

The Benevolent Fund of West Hill United supports those in need in our community. Dispersing that support is at the discretion of Rev. Greg Daly. We would like to find 25 people who will donate \$20/month for one year to the Benevolent Fund, which would add \$6000 to help those in our community in need. Your donations will qualify for a tax receipt. Thank you West Hill. Your help is much appreciated!

submitted by Barb Russell

Upcoming Special Events

Colloquy Sessions ~ Select Wednesdays February through May (see back page for dates).

Annual Congregational Meeting ~ Sunday, February 25th after Sunday Gathering

Soup Luncheon in support of Feed Scarborough ~ Sunday March 3rd, after Sunday Gathering

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“This has never been about one pipeline. This has never been about one project. This has always been about the defence of the territories, the defence of our sovereignty as Indigenous people... and so we will never give up.”

SLEYDO' (MOLLY WICKHAM)
Wet'suwet'en land defender



Photo: Michael Toledano for Grist

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Studio WH

Welcome to Studio WH. That is what we will say by the beginning of February! For me, it is a dream I've had for several years.

Step by step we had cobbled together technology that would support our hybrid vision. It wasn't pretty but it proved that it could be done. Some things we tried didn't work, of course, and others had limitations, but ultimately we knew what we wanted to achieve — a gathering that was equally comfortable and meaningful to both the people in the hall and to all who joined us online. Added to our challenge was the reality that we had to set up and tear down our studio each and every week. To give you an idea of what that meant, every Sunday we had to plug and unplug over 50 connections.

Realizing we needed to put the tech on a solid and repeatable footing, we asked Aiden Ware, a technical production professional, to design a studio to provide the function we need.

Our first step was to improve our audio. We added a new mixer and replaced the speakers that had gone missing when the Boys and Girls Club remodeled. The speakers and the amplifiers are all now permanently installed. Our next step is to install our new cameras and screens.

This professional-level equipment we are installing will give our production team a wider set of options that should result in a much smoother presentation. Our objective is to make the tech disappear. The tech should never interfere with the message.

So come along with us as we travel down this exciting road. See if you can spot the differences as we learn to use these wonderful tools.


submitted by Glenn Cockwell

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Time-lapse photo by Richard Lee, Unsplash



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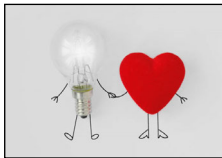
Please Join Us For Our Weekly Service and Other Regular Gatherings

Sunday Morning Gathering/Perspective(s) ~ 10:30 AM (in-person & Zoom)



Tuesday Morning Labyrinth Walk ~ 10:30 AM followed by refreshments in the church.

Tuesday Afternoon Crafty Crew ~ Tuesdays from 1 to 3 PM in the church



Wednesday Afternoon or Evening Colloquy Sessions
2 & 7 PM on Zoom ~ February 28, March 13 & 27, April 10 & 24, May 8 & 22
“Newcomers” are requested to email ellendinerman7@gmail.com prior to the colloquy they would like to attend.

Thursday Morning Coffee ~ 10 to 11 AM (on Zoom)



West Hill United Board of 2023
Board Chair: Mike Lawrie
Ministry and Personnel Chair: Vacant
Communications and Marketing Chair: Vacant
Education and Growth: Donna Hall
Friendship and Hospitality: Barb Russell
Community Care: Babette Oliviera
Celebrating the Spirit: John McKechnie
Finance Chair: Walter Shouldice
Secretary: Vacant
Members at Large: Jean Skillman, Florence Soknacki
Regional Representatives: Annemarie Leepel and Louise Lawrie
Trustees: Glenn Cockwell (Chair), Jim Hyland, Frank Kilroy
Interim Minister: Reverend Greg Daly

West Hill United
A warm place to find yourself

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