

As of last month, I now have a two-year-old in my house, which means big feelings and lack of ability to communicate what is going on. So, daily we have crying. This has led to another challenge, namely Reid. He adores his little sister but is getting frustrated and not wanting to be around her because it hurts his ears, but also wants to play with her because they have fun together. He is now at the age where he is starting to see that two contradictory feelings can be at least partially true at the same time. It is fun watching him take steps beyond black and white thinking into shades of gray (or if you prefer the rainbow of possibilities).

This expansion of his thoughts has got me thinking about the wrestling that I often run into around focusing on only the positive things that are going well or being really honest about the large challenges we face as a congregation. But maybe it is just for simplicity's sake I am setting up a false dichotomy. Maybe like Reid wanting to get away from his sister and wanting to play with her, both the positives and challenges can coexist. The more I think about it the more I believe, we need to see both sides of the coin to get a clear and accurate picture of what we are dealing with and figure out our best path forward.

I have recently reread *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* by Thom S. Rainer. If this book sounds familiar, it is because 4 years ago it was used by Jane as a framework for starting discussions on a plan to move the congregation to financial stability. In this book, Rainer takes his years of work as a church consultant and looked for patterns in churches that have died. What he discovered was that congregations that had died had a few characteristics in common and keys markers that could empower any church to reflect on their own journey. Here is what the post-mortem of deceased churches showed us happened:

**Slow Erosion** – Decline, unlike growth, is usually slow, imperceptible and members don't see it at first. The decline is not only in numbers but also in vibrant ministries that once existed, prayer lives of members, outward focus, connection with community and in the hopes and dreams of those who remain.

**The Past is the Hero** – The spark, the thing that was driving people was not doctrine, biblical truth or moral convictions, it was the past, "The good old days." There was a clinging to the past, the way things have always been done, what was comfortable and familiar and fought to maintain personal preferences. People who dissented saying "we can respect the past but we cannot live in it" eventually left.

**The Church refused to look like the community** – As church members moved further from the neighborhood there were few attempts to reach out to the changing community. The church became a fortress, focused on self-preservation and protection, instead of adapting to serve the community. The church didn't look "outward" and became increasingly about their own needs. Differences in race, age, and socioeconomic status often are observed between church and community.

**The Budget Moved Inward** – The money which use to be balanced between inward ministry to members and outward ministry to community shifts. Cuts in funding tend to occur in programs that are outreach and community ministries. These are justified by decline in receipts. The financial pattern that emerges is greater use of financial resources to “keep the machinery of the church moving and keep the members happy”. Without funding for the Great Commission and the Greatest Commandment dry up.

**Great Commission Becomes Great Omission** - churches stopped acting on Jesus' words to "Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20) They stopped going and they stopped depending on the power of Christ. They remember when the church was full but have forgotten the work that made it happen.

**The Preference-Driven Church** - A significant number of members moved their focus from others to self-desires and personal preferences. Christ-like attitudes of servant hood, obedience to Christ, self-sacrifice and doing whatever it takes to seek the best for others and our church are low. There is a country club mentality, I pay my dues, so this is what I expect.

**Pastoral Tenure Decreases** - Length of ministry relationship normally decreases, and ministers leave before the most productive phase of ministry leadership. Conflict and frustration increase. Occasionally ministers become complicit in the congregation's death spiral.

**The Church Rarely Prayed Together** - While churches still prayed during formal worship, sustained, fervent and passionate prayer was missing. The passion for and power of prayer was lost and prayer was often treated as an add-on. In the early church prayer was a serious thing, but not for dying churches.

**The Church Had No Clear Purpose** - The church is meant to be gospel focused, however dying churches had stopped living out the greatest commandments, the passion had faded. Reflecting after the church's death members expressed that they were just going through the motions, that it felt like they were in a rut or bad routine and that they stopped asking what they should do for fear that it would require too much effort or change.

**The Church Obsessed Over the Facilities** - In failing churches, arguments over facility use are common. Typical arguments revolve around who can use a space, whether or not to replace something, the role of memorial gifts in the work and life of the church or colour of pain for the walls. Sometimes physical space is preserved at all costs but more often one area is kept up while others slowly degrade. Building becomes the focus, not mission and ministry.

What are you thinking having read through the list above? I'm not a doctor, but I would say we are showing signs of illness. But before we sink into despair, remember where we started this enews. With two things being true at the same time. I have also seen some amazing signs of new life, of our immune system kicking. Signs like new people stepping into leadership roles, productive discussions and exploration with UPRC/Kindred Works and within the Downtown United project, our outward facing programs to provide food are still well supported by our congregation and the board recently voted to support the cooling center to help keep people safe from the heat of summer. We

may be showing signs of sickness, but we still have some fight in us. With knowledge of the pitfalls that have led other churches to death, let us lean into God and discern our way forward. Remembering that the one who parted the red sea and raised Jesus from the dead, wants to show us the way and bring us to life too.

This is our last Sunday hosting summer worship, where we will be hearing a story about two sisters so I hope you will join us in person or on-line. However, before then a celebration of life will be held for our sister in Christ Mary Levison at the church (St. Paul's) on Saturday at 10:30am with a public visitation at McAdam's tomorrow (Friday 15th) from 2-4pm.

As we head into the weekend let us pray,

God, open our eyes that we might see our church as you see it.

Let us see where change needs to take place, even if painful.

Give us courage to take the steps you call us to make

Give us strength to be part of your resurrection right here

Give us grace and humility that we may come to rest not on our own power but on yours.

For you are the great physician and we are your nursemaids serving you and your mission. Amen.

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## FEATURES OF THIS JULY 14<sup>TH</sup> EDITION OF ST. PAUL'S ENEWS

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**WORSHIP THIS SUNDAY JULY 17<sup>TH</sup>**

**FELLOWSHIP HOUR ~ SUMMER 2022**

**PICNIC IN THE PARK – JULY 16<sup>TH</sup>**

**WARK/ST. PAUL'S SCHOLARSHIP**

**COOLING CENTRE NEEDS VOLUNTEERS!**

**PANTRY**

**UPCOMING EVENT DATES TO REMEMBER**

**NOON HOUR CONCERT AT CHRIST CHURCH PARISH CHURCH**

**SUMMER DOWNTOWN UNITED + WORSHIP SCHEDULE**

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## WORSHIP THIS SUNDAY JULY 17<sup>TH</sup>

Please join us in person to worship at St. Paul's Sunday at 10:30am. Covid protocols still in place are: masking, hand sanitizing, sitting in marked pews, and social distancing.

As always, if you are not ready to join us in person we hope to see you on Zoom - link is <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86854718551> Passcode: 165090

You can **also join by phone only**, if you don't have a long distance plan charges would apply. All you need to do is call 1 647 558 0588 and follow the prompts to enter Meeting ID: 868 5471 8551 and Passcode: 165090

## FELLOWSHIP HOUR ~ SUMMER 2022

July 17 - Board ~ Erin Hayes



### PICNIC IN THE PARK – JULY 16<sup>TH</sup>

Bring your blanket and packed lunch and join us for a summer gathering in the park at noon on July 16th. We will be meeting at the gazebo in Wilmot Park. Families are encouraged to join us in an early afternoon of community building and activities. RSVP appreciated, but not required. Contact Rev. Michelle at [michellenarmstrong@hotmail.com](mailto:michellenarmstrong@hotmail.com) for more information.

### WARK/ST. PAUL'S SCHOLARSHIP

Students who are members or adherents of St. Paul's and who plan to pursue post-secondary studies this fall are invited to apply for financial support from the Wark/St. Paul's Scholarship Funds. Details on eligibility and application guidelines are available at <http://www.stpaulsunited.ca> under "Resources". Applications must be received on or before July 31.

### COOLING CENTRE NEEDS VOLUNTEERS!

St. Paul's in partnership with the John Howard Society are hosting a cooling centre Monday through Friday from 1-4pm. Volunteers are needed to spend time with visitors and provide support at the door. To volunteer, please contact Rev. Michelle at [michellenarmstrong@hotmail.com](mailto:michellenarmstrong@hotmail.com)



### PANTRY

The pantry would appreciate donations of the following items: flour, honey, mayonnaise, cheese whiz, smooth peanut butter, cereal (Corn Flakes, Rice Krispies). Thank you for your continued donations.

### UPCOMING EVENT DATES TO REMEMBER

**July 16<sup>th</sup>** – Picnic in Wilmot Park at the Gazebo at noon.

**July 22<sup>nd</sup>** – Messy Church at Wilmot. 5-7pm.

**August 16<sup>th</sup>** – Meditative Walk by the River. Meet at footbridge by library at 9am.

**August 26<sup>th</sup>** – Messy Church at Wilmot. 5-7pm.

## NOON HOUR CONCERT AT CHRIST CHURCH PARISH CHURCH

Noon Hour Concert - Thomas Gonder, organ. Wednesday July 20, 12:10-12:50pm, Christ Church Parish Church (corner of Charlotte and Westmorland Streets.) Admission by freewill donation to support the music programs at Christ Church Parish Church.

## SUMMER DOWNTOWN UNITED + WORSHIP SCHEDULE

### At St. Paul's United Church

July 17<sup>th</sup> – Rev. Michelle leading

All services at St. Paul's can be viewed via Zoom at <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86854718551>

Passcode 165090 or view later on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/St. Paul's>

### At St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church - July 24<sup>th</sup>, July 31<sup>st</sup>, August 7<sup>th</sup>

All services at St. Andrew's can be viewed via Zoom at [St. Andrew's Zoom](#) Meeting ID: 836 7375 6287 Passcode: 839092

### At Wilmot United Church - August 14<sup>th</sup>, August 21<sup>st</sup>, August 28<sup>th</sup>, September 4<sup>th</sup>

All services at Wilmot can be viewed online at <https://www.youtube.com/c/WilmotUnitedChurch>

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### St. Paul's United Church

*190 Years of Glorifying God through Worship, Proclaiming the Gospel of Christ and Serving others in Christ's name*

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