

the Voyager

Voices from Synode de
Gitchi Manitou Conference

Uniting the Presbyteries of North Bay, Spirit Dancing and Sudbury

A Fear-less New Year

And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy for all the people: for to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11)

I wonder—is the angel's promise still reverberating in your heart and mind?

"Fear not," seems like a pretty good resolution for communities of faith as we anticipate a fresh new year before us.

It feels like we're gripped with a whole lot of fear in the church today. In some corners of the Conference the fear has to do with questions of survival. We are afraid about money, about numbers, about being inefficient or wrong, about buildings and about all the painful losses that change demands. I wonder how you are making sense of all that when considered in light of the hope-filled Christmas promise.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins University reported that 30 years ago, the greatest fears of grade school children were: 1) Animals, 2) Being in a dark room, 3) High places, 4) Strangers, 5) Loud noises. Today, kids are afraid of

the following: 1) Divorce, 2) War, 3) Cancer, 4) Pollution, 5) Being mugged.

Just in time for Christmas, David Giuliano published a wonderful children's story, entitled, The Alligator in Naomi's Pillow. My granddaughter, Emma, loved it!



People at St. Paul's in New Liskeard were challenged to take pictures of where they see God. This picture, taken by Anne Plaunt, is perfect for the start of a new year.

There is an alligator in Naomi's pillow! And Naomi is pretty sure it wants to bite her neck! She and her parents try to deal with the alligator in various ways—from violence to avoidance. This light-hearted look at fear concludes with "wonder" questions to help us speak with children about their fears, and maybe our own.

The book is a thoughtful continuation of the conversation David initiated in

the church during his time as Moderator. He often spoke of the need to confront our own fears if we are going to speak to a fearful culture. Countless decisions in our churches have been made and actions not taken out of fear. David remarked that, "too many of us cling, like shipwreck survivors, to what we know rather than risking the unfamiliar."

This edition of Voyager invites us to deeper reflection on the Conference priority around, "letting go of old ways of being church." What might we commit to letting go of in 2011?

Let us hear God's prophetic and tender call to, "Be not afraid" and live.

Best wishes for a blessed and fear-less New Year!

Don't be afraid.

*My love is stronger,
my love is stronger than your fear.*

Don't be afraid.

*My love is stronger
and I have promised,
promised to be always near.*

(More Voices, #90, words and music by John Bell)

—Will Kunder
Executive Secretary,
Manitou Conference

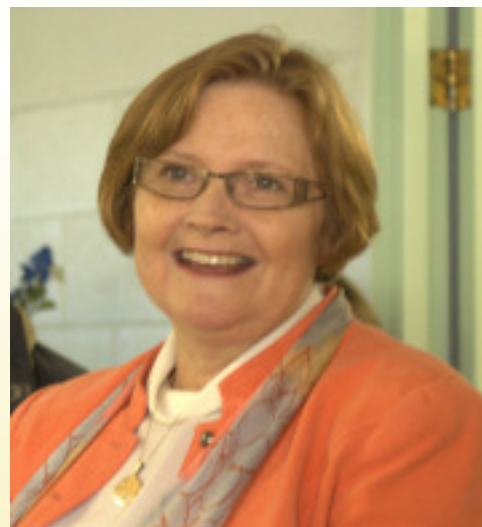


The leadership and planning team for Worship Matters on Manitoulin Island gather with theme speaker John Bell. John, composer and arranger of hymns and student and teacher of practical lived-out theology, engaged the attendees with the theme, "Living in God's World: faces, spaces, voices." He emphasized contemporary ways of experiencing God in both a shrinking and expanding world. While lecturing in his bare feet, John invited participation through laughter and singing in four-part harmony. The 80 registrants also had the opportunity to participate in workshops, tours and a theatrical presentation-all of which drew from a variety of traditions that call Manitoulin Island home. (in the photo, starting back left: Martin Garniss, John Bell, Erwin Thompson, Cory Vermeer-Cuthbert, Faye Stevens, Maxine McVey and Mary-Jo Eckert Tracy)

Photo courtesy of The Manitoulin Expositor

Moderator Mardi Tindal meets with folks after her "Spirit Express" train arrived in North Bay in October. She chose to travel by train as both a practical and symbolic way of emphasizing the need to reduce our carbon footprint. During her time in Manitou Conference, the Moderator engaged people in town hall meetings about their responses to the issues of climate and ocean change.

Photo by Jennifer Bentley.



For this edition of The Voyageur we welcome guest designer Elizabeth Liddell. Thank you for your work, Elizabeth!

the Voyageur

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- The Voyageur seeks to:
- Celebrate God's presence in Manitou Conference, in times of joy and challenge;
 - Build a community that values our diversity and is informed and compassionate;
 - Stimulate interest in emerging issues to encourage dialogue and faith-filled action.

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Printing Schedule

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Please send submissions to the editor. Close-up photos of one to four people are best. Please include the names of the people in the photo along with a statement indicating that permission has been granted for their images to be published. No "photoshopped" images, please.

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Design: Elizabeth Liddell

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Sandra's Trip to Kenya

Letting Go

I couldn't help it. One Sunday, we sang the words, "nobody here has a claim on a pew" and I laughed out loud (then I felt guilty for my cynicism). I mean, *of course* we lay claim to certain pews! *Of course* we try to shape what happens at church, how we worship, what we sing, who joins us, when to schedule events, who runs the kitchen or who chooses the new paint colour.

A large part of most church space is that area we call "sanctuary." The very word "sanctuary" suggests shelter from the outside world and refuge from the chaotic buffeting of that one constant in life: *Change*.

Sometimes we fail to live up to the lofty expectations of our hymnody or the idealized demands of our mission statements. Sometimes we want church to be predictable, homogenous, unchanging. We want to own the church, pews and all. In Ephesians 3:10-11 we are told that the purpose of the church is not static sanctuary, but "making God's wisdom known." And we find therein a much greater challenge than our *squatter's rights* to the third pew on the right.

—Ted Harrison

My name is Sandra Brownlee. I am 16 years old and attend Trinity United Church in North Bay. This past July I was blessed with the opportunity to travel to Kenya with Sandy Foster and the Hope2Kenya team (hope2kenya.org).

We worked in schools and orphanages where many children and widows have been infected or affected by HIV and AIDS. We purchased and distributed 40,000 pounds of food—enough to feed 300 families for 3 months. We sang to the children and they sang to us. We taught them "Jesus Loves Me" (the clapping, stomping version) and they taught us "Making Melodies in my Heart to the King of Kings". They enjoyed making us smile and we loved making them smile.

We spent some time in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, and worked in the Kibera Slum, the biggest slum in Africa (approximately 4 square miles and houses 1.5 million people). We handed out clothes and pencils in schools. We visited a school in Soweto Slum where Hope2Kenya pays for lunch five days a week. For most of the kids, that is the only meal they get.

One of my favorite places was Veronica Home, an orphanage for children who are HIV positive. We painted the inside of the orphanage and we mudded a hut. It was so fun to play with these kids. We gave them blankets, suckers, pencil cases, hats, dolls, toothpaste and toothbrushes and they were so excited to receive all of it. We also did a craft with them, although it was pretty difficult they kept trying and we helped them. It was the same when we struggled to mud the hut—we kept trying and the kids kept helping us.

It was hard not to fall in love with the children in Kenya. Giving them simple things like pencils was so exciting to them and it lit up their faces with smiles

that I will never forget.

I have gained a greater appreciation for so many things. School is a major privilege. So many children in Kenya do not get to go to school. The children who attend love it. School days are long but they are so grateful for the opportunity and they never complain.

I truly see things differently because of this trip. When we discuss minor issues I can't help comparing them to the much larger issues in Kenya. I think about how amazing the people in Kenya are every day. They are so strong and so grateful, even though they struggle for basics like food and water on a daily basis. Then I think about how God has permitted me to make these small changes in their lives and maybe for just a little while they won't have to struggle and children will get to play with a real ball for the first time.

I felt I was truly doing God's work. I was blessed to be able to share with them something so small, yet something so big, to make such a difference to them.

Each of you has been blessed with one of God's many wonderful gifts to be used in the service of others. So use your gift well. If you have the gift of speaking, preach God's message. If you have the gift of helping others, do it with the strength that God supplies. Everything should be done in a way that will bring honour to God because of Jesus Christ, who is glorious and powerful forever. Amen.

—1 Peter 4: 10-11



The closest contact I have with the Church is the Sunday service of Worship. These services are mostly relics of the past—the kind of service I once led myself. I find that worship has no meaningful significance. My current understanding of Jesus and of the Ultimate Mystery of the Multiverse does not make prayer to a divine being realistic.

Prescribed lectionary readings have become too mechanical. Often only one reading is relevant to the worship, yet all are read, and the passages are not recognized as story rather than history.

The hymnody is changing for the better and I do find a sense of interconnection in the hymns that centre on our relationships with one another and with other creatures and aspects of nature. When singing, I struggle to convert the word GOD (even “Creator God”) into a short form for the Mystery that touches my being as an

empowering and motivating force or energy.

My desire for our church is to create litany, liturgy and ritual that will lead us into healthy relationship with the immanent reality of the Holy—in people inside the sanctuary and in the street. Mostly this sense of Presence comes in the “Community Time” that follows or precedes worship. Church needs to find ways to bring the development of community into the common worship time. Sacramental Action needs to be true to its objective in the life of the faith community; imagination should be allowed to discover Symbolic Actions that show forth a grace for living in our world and society.

For many years the Church has been proclaiming that the Mission Field is outside our church doors; we are a people in mission. We carry this tradition into the present. We are still learning to be missionaries in minis-

tering with a Jesus-like understanding of the importance of all people. We claim this discipleship in the Creed when we declare, “We are not alone; we live in (God's) world.”

The United Church, in its various courts, is struggling to share in this type of ministry with us and deserves our continuing support.

I am thankful that people from the congregations volunteer to serve the wider church, offering their wisdom and energy in the committees and boards of Presbytery, Conference and General Council. I rejoice when younger followers of The Way respond to these opportunities. Part of the wisdom of becoming a “Wise Elder,” as Manitou Conference calls us retired people, is to make room for others at the Tables of Decision, yet to be on call to offer the insights that come with mellowing in the ups and downs of our own life time.

—David Bould



At the recent TURN Social Justice Conference in Pinawa, Manitoba, a First Nations elder shared a teaching about “letting go” at the end of the day. This sunset picture was taken by Carole Leukart, as part of the challenge for the people of St. Paul’s in New Liskeard to share in a photograph where they see God.

Being with families in times of loss is one of the great privileges of ministry. Recently I was called to offer pastoral care to a family who were grieving the loss of their dearly-loved mother. Joan (not her real name) was one of the saints of our congregation—she had attended worship at Omond since the beginning. Although not unexpected, her death left a gaping hole both in her immediate family and her church family.

I met with Joan’s daughter to plan the funeral. We hadn’t met before, so I was taken aback by her assertion that Omond was “her church”. Joan’s daughter hadn’t attended in fourteen years, but in a moment of great vulnerability, she claimed us as her faith community.

I wonder if this story is more common than we might think.

What do we need to learn from it? Perhaps this story will prompt a conversation about how we go about being church in 2011. I wonder how many other families claim a connection to our faith communities, but are absent. What would it take to make those connections? What are we willing to let go to make room for the new thing God is doing in our midst?

Jesus says you can’t put new wine in old wineskins. It’s a great image that can offer us direction and hope as we let go of the old ways of being church. I’m going to call Joan’s daughter this week to see how she is doing and invite her to worship. I wonder if she will come.

—Rev. Elizabeth Frazer
Who began her 14th year of serving Omond Memorial United Church in July 2010.

Every 500 years the church holds a rummage sale, Phyllis Tickle writes in her recent book, The Great Emergence. Not like the rummage sales we have every year. Tickle is describing a time of major cleanout, a time of ‘re-formation’, when we let go of old ways and start fresh. The Manitou Conference goal, ‘to allow ourselves to let go of old ways of being the church,’ seems to be anticipating such a time, and the time is now.

Our church has done this before, within the memory of most of us. In the 1950’s my father travelled to India to make a film about the role of the Canadian Bible Society in that missionary effort. It was the old-style of missionary he portrayed, where foreign clergy brought the good news to people who did not know a God of love. In only a few short years, the United Church changed its theology of mission to an understanding where God is already present—not waiting for the arrival of the missionary (‘Mission on Six Continents’). Then the United Church began to invite missionaries from other continents to Canada. In Manitou, we received Elijah and Elizabeth Lumbama from Zambia as missionaries to us through the “Face to Face” program. By the 1980’s we had moved to thinking of mission as partnership. We continue to send ‘over-seas personnel’ only at the invitation of the churches abroad. In the span of thirty years we accomplished an enormous change, involving both theology and relationships.

When I was serving as a Manitou Conference staff person, I heard the question, “Where are the youth?” raised in anxious, even anguished, tones. The implication being, if we don’t get our youth

back the church is going to die.

Presently I am a member of Outreach Committee and St. Andrew’s in North Bay. One of our priorities is climate justice, with an emphasis on local action. As part of the growing network of people working for change, our Outreach committee sponsored an organizational meeting of Transition Town [see The Observer, “Transition Towns”, January, 2010]. Within the Transition Town movement are a number of young, committed, passionate and knowledgeable people who bring a vision and a willingness to offer leadership! Here, I said to myself, is another form of church. I began to get a glimpse of our United Church forming partnerships in a new way. Instead of wishing for young people to attend worship in order to be part of us, we become part of the movements which have captured their hearts and spirits—movements that are also inspired by the Spirit of Life.

Various studies are predicting the end of the United Church denomination. Perhaps our church as we have known it, our old ways of being the church, will cease. Where will new life be born? The Transition Town network, and other current ‘earth movements’, provide an illustration of where new life might be found. We need to be willing to leave behind our old structures, our old worship, our old buildings, so that we free ourselves to reinvest our energies. Now is a Sarah-and-Abraham moment for the church, where we leave everything behind and take only our faith, and the community which nurtures that faith, and move out into the world trusting that Spirit is at loose beyond the church.

—Kay Heuer

At St. Andrew’s United in Sudbury, where I serve in congregational ministry, there was a lot of noise going on directly below my office. Some days it was pretty distracting, but, because I knew the reason for it, it was easy to be tolerant. All that clanging and banging was Renovation Noise. The church kitchen was undergoing a complete overhaul. Everything was removed. It actually looked awful—all the stains and old wall paint exposed, the floor peeling in places and nail holes in the walls.

A week later, I stopped by for another look and lo! and behold—the new floor had been laid. Suddenly the room looked brighter and cleaner and fresher. I felt a surge of hope: maybe the renovations *would* be completed in time for the next Out-of-the-Cold dinner being served here. I walked up to my third-floor office feeling a whole lot more positive. Soon the kitchen would be viable again!

That’s important. A kitchen is a kitchen, after all. And goodness knows that more good ministry happens out of church kitchens than we could ever calculate! There are a thousand memories hovering around that kitchen—stories about special meals and dishwasher catastrophes and hungry mouths fed and people “slaving together over a hot stove” (the *best* fellowship!). Now there will be stories added about the renovation days. Many people consulted together to plan and design the changes, and many hands collaborated to help bring it all about.

Very soon, we will be celebrating the final result (for now)—we’ll cook together and we’ll eat together and we’ll serve together. Almost sounds like church, doesn’t it?

As we dream and imagine how we might let go of old ways of being church, may we never lose sight of why the church exists: to offer food to those whose spirits are hungry for good news. Whatever oldness we let go of and whatever newness we take on, what matters most is that we continue to do “good ministry.” A church is a church, after all!

—Judith Visser

Sunday Conversation with Chief Shining Turtle

In 2010, The United Church of Canada celebrated its 85th anniversary. One project connected churches from different parts of the country with each other. People at Little Current United Church also connected more locally—with a joint worship service and potluck with people from Sheguindah church (the other point in the pastoral charge). It turned into more than a getting to know the immediate neighbours, however!

Relations with First Nations communities on Manitoulin Island were difficult with tensions around HST and threats of closing off highway access to the island when Rev. Faye Stevens met with Chief Shining Turtle (Franklin Paibomsai) to express her deep sorrow about the situation. She invited him to come and talk at the joint service and potluck. He readily agreed!

Although a few people expressed dismay at the Chief's visit, the church was full. In place of the sermon, Rev. Faye Stevens had a conversation with Chief Shining Turtle. She relates: "We sat in front of the pulpit in two big chairs and I asked him questions mostly about himself and his family since his wedding which I had conducted five years ago: about his wife and kids, where he grew up, his education, his father being in WWII, an award he had recently received, etc. so people could see him as a family person much like themselves. He was very articulate, respectful, to the point, and made analogies throughout about his interactions with our church governance."

"A smudge was done very sensitively using just a small amount of sweet grass. After I described how we prepared ourselves for worship, I invited

the Chief to tell us a bit about his people's preparation for approaching the sacred. He spoke of the smoke wafting amongst and between us like a spirit of relationship."

The service continued and Faye talked about HST and its impact on First Nations, who by treaty are exempt from paying provincial tax, and the action Sudbury Presbytery had taken in sending a letter of support to various levels of government with a copy to the Union of Ontario Indians. Local people became aware of the issue through the threats of road closures on the 24th of May weekend, which had sparked a few very nasty letters to the paper.

Faye said the letters, "broke her heart" and she asked Chief Shining Turtle to tell the HST story from his perspective. He told about the hundreds of letters and e-mails that had gone to gov-

ernment from First Nations communities, how they had largely gone unanswered, or been answered by "underlings", and how he had personally been hung up on. He talked about how the decision to resort to roadblocks had not been made lightly; how it had involved three very long late night meetings, and how it was the women of the community who had encouraged it. He talked about going out by himself and praying about it. He felt that the eleventh hour recapitulation by the government was a result of the movement of the spirit in the minister's (Flaherty's) heart. He used language that his audience could hear well!

After he finished, it seemed appropriate to point out that in contrast to the violent G20 protests by some in Toronto, the Whitefish First Nation protest was more in the tradition of that of Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi.

Rev. Faye Stevens offered the Chief a gift of maple syrup, which he said he'd give to someone in his community less fortunate than himself. Chief Shining Turtle gifted Faye with an eagle feather and called her a healer.

Faye said many found the service very emotional. It was a beautiful, powerful service, and the spirit was surely moving! The hymns spoke in their own powerful way. Some people said that their attitudes had been changed as a result of being there and hearing what the Chief said and how he said it.

Chief Shining Turtle invited folks to worship with the Roman Catholic community at Birch Island, and to bring their choir!

—Faye Stevens



Rev. Faye Stevens with Chief Shining Turtle.

Photo by Rick McCutcheon.

Happy New Year! 2011 is going to be a very exciting year, especially for youth!

The Youth Connecting with Youth Project in North Bay Presbytery is building a community of United Church youth who are a part of congregations where there may not be the opportunity to form a youth group of their own.

Our blog is at: northbaypresbyteryouth.blogspot.com

We're also on Facebook: North Bay Presbytery Youth. To contact Stephanie: e-mail nbpyouth@yahoo.ca or by phone at (705) 476-6494.

—Stephanie Sheeler Armstrong, Youth Worker, North Bay Presbytery

Getting to know Kathryn Dahmer, settled to Trinity, Lively

I would like to thank Manitou Conference for the warm welcome I received as my family and I arrived this July to Lively.

1) *What are your favourite movies?*

I love movies, especially dramas based on true stories. *Invictus* and *Defiance* are two movies that have inspired me recently. I like movies that dare to comment on real life—sickness, isolation, dignity, mental health, grief and loss—all the heavy stuff.

2) *What is your favourite Bible verse?*

My favourite is always changing but the one for this season is, “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10). The past year has been one of the most stressful, chaotic, scary and out-of-control seasons for my family as we moved and the children (Jordan,

Caleb and Kate) all said goodbye to childhood friends. The simple words, “Be still and know” grounded me again and again.

3) *What do you like to do when you’re not working?*

When I am not working I like to be outside as much as possible. I love walking my dogs along Junction Creek (the scenery is inspiring and sacred). I both love and hate running; it is the outward expression of all that wars within me most days. It’s about balancing striving and discipline and the sense of well-being and worship that I always find when I’ve finished a run.

4) *What “old way of being church” would you like released?*

I would like us to release the per-



spective and mindset that is rooted in the good ole’ days of Christendom. I fear the church still expects people to come to them, on their terms and turf, so to speak. I wonder if the desire to grow is to embrace a new generation or if it is fear-based and coming from a survival instinct mentality. To really welcome those outside the church will mean change and letting go of what has been comfortable, safe and familiar. It’s not the failure of new programs that threatens the church; it’s the success of them that the church finds deeply threatening. There will be tension and it will be a true test for all involved.

5) *What “old way of being church” would you like retained?*

I think we should retain our remembering and retelling our history. A church that is rooted in who they are and where they’ve come from can forge ahead into the unknown because their identity is secure. A church that holds its unique identity and traditions can be unapologetically present and relevant in our world. A church that has something authentic to say is very inviting and attractive. We must not be afraid to be Christian in post-Christian culture.

ward—to Jesus. I’m off and running and I’m not turning back.”

5) *What is your favourite song / hymn?*

There are so many that I would consider favourites and the answer to that question probably changes hour to hour, but one speaking to me particularly at present is *Give Me Jesus*.

Getting to know Ted Grady, intern at Trinity and Carmichael, North Bay

1) *What “old way of being church” would you like released?*

There are so many wonderful and exciting ways of living out our faith and worshipping God. I would like to let go of “how it was done before.” We learn much from experience, and that should be considered, but fear of change shouldn’t be the reason for making a decision. We are called to boldly live our faith and walk confidently with our God!

2) *What “old way of being church” would you like retained?*

I hope that we always keep Christ as the centre and God as the leader of the ministry we share. We have been blessed with the strong faith of those

who went before us and I hope that we will continue that witness to those who follow us in faith.

3) *What is your favourite way of living with respect in Creation?*

I think it is about keeping in mind how my choices and actions impact the world around me and how they will affect those who follow me. We are only here for a time and we have been gifted with the responsibility to care for God’s Creation so that those who receive it next can live out God’s purpose for their lives. I try to live this out by considering my life choices and how I witness my faith to others.

4) *What is your favourite Bible verse?*

The verse that speaks to me in my present situation is from the Message version of the Bible. Philipians 3:13-14:

“Friends, don’t get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I’ve got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us on-





This summer Powassan United Church hosted a Vacation Church Camp for one week in August. We had two amazing counsellors from Camp Lorrain, Jordan and Shannen, join our community for the week and organize a program for the kids. This was our best attended day camp so far. On our busiest day we had 20 campers ranging in age from 5 to a few 13 year old helpers.

Photo by Taylor Marchant.

Letting Go

As a teenager in the eighties, I was the caretaker at my family's little suburban United Church. I came across a couple boxes full of sad-looking old church books in the choir room: some dilapidated Bibles, several of the blue hymn books, and a handful of green service books. Their day was done.

The more serviceable Bibles and hymnbooks had already been sent to foreign missions. I spoke to a couple church elders, who were reticent about throwing out these holy books. They weren't ready. As it turns out, I was.

I placed the chunk of frayed scripture on the ground and said two other words: "Thank you." And I picked up the next book, and with the tearing and the placing, I uttered the same words, "Sorry... Thank You... Sorry... Thank You..."

Blue boxes weren't introduced until several years later. So I brought the two boxes to a roadside recycling centre, where a kindly man in coveralls explained to me that they couldn't recycle the books. Why not? "Well," he explained with a strained face, "there are Bibles in there!" I showed him the sorry state of the topmost Bible. He interrupted with apparent concern, "—but, son, you have to *tear off the covers to recycle the paper!*"

On the third or fourth book, the man in the coveralls asked me: "Are you going to say that with every book?" And I said, "Yes. Yes, I guess I am." He replied, "Well, I better get a chair." He came back with a lawn chair. He sat down. And to my surprise, he picked up a book. Before he pulled off the cover, he said "Sorry." And as he placed the cover and the chunk of pages, he said, "Thank you." There were no other words. The two of us took turns at that task until all the books were done.

I stood tall, determined, and held that Bible in front of me, ready to tear. Really, the cover was half-off to begin with. Nonetheless, I felt like I was about to perform cardiac surgery without the benefit of anaesthesia. Before I tore, I said one word. I said, "Sorry." I pulled the cover off, and dropped it to the ground. Then

Those words—words of honouring, words of unspoken grief, and of loving respect—they come back to me as we consider for ourselves *how to let go of old ways of being church.*

—Ted Harrison



Zion United Church in Spanish closed officially on October 31st. Members of Massey Pastoral Charge gathered for the final service and potluck and the keys were handed over to members of the Spanish Fellowship House of Prayer. Above, Shirley Smith and Lise Smith, Rev. Lyn Heeley and Rev. Brian Bigelow participate in the service.

Submitted by Margaret Clipperton