

The Harcourt Herald January 2023

The Harcourt United Church Community





Harcourt Memorial United Church

An Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Canada

We are a people of God called together and sent forth by Christ to... **Seek. Connect. Act.**

Our Mission: Inspired by the Spirit, we participate in Christian practices that strengthen us in the building of just, compassionate and non-violent relationships.

Our Vision Statement: To be an authentic community of spiritual growth and service.

Our Core Values: Risk... Respect... Responsibility... Vulnerability... Trust

Our Purpose: To welcome and strengthen in community all who wish to serve God and follow the way of Jesus

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and Technical Support:
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The People with

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The Harcourt
Herald is
published 10
times per year (in
paper and digital
formats).

Submission
Deadline: 20th of
each month.
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From the Desk of the Editor

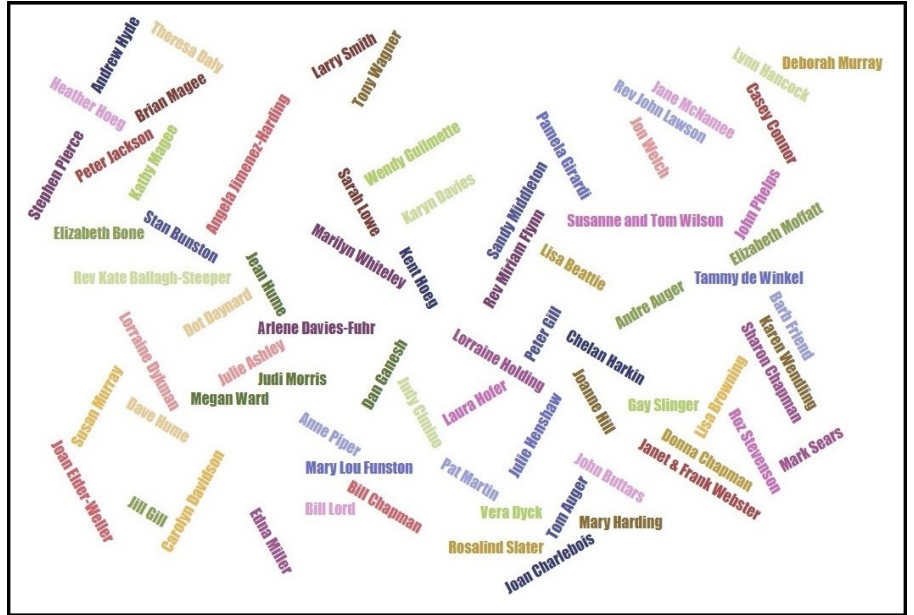
We wish you a very good New Year, and we want to take this opportunity to say “thanks” to the many people who gave us their gift of participation and making the Herald successful as our internal communication tool. In the Year 2022 74 different people sent us articles; many of these did it more than once. How wonderful!!

For this issue we suggested that you tell us about the gifts you offer Harcourt and the wider community.



For many this is a very difficult task. Not because there are no gifts – no, the contrary there is plenty that is given, often on a regular, committed basis – but because our old training tells us not to boast.

So, what we do - always remains hidden. We weren't inviting you to boast, but simply to share with others what you consider your ministry, your contribution to the betterment of the community. It's a way of encouraging each other, of reminding ourselves that, even at advanced age, many of us still have energy to build up the Body of Christ.



The Herald is Harcourt's tool to get to know one another better, to encourage and to tell what is and can be done. So, if you have any ideas of what you would like to read and/or write about, let us know.

Someone suggested that we provide a space for “Letters to the Editor”. We think this might be a way to start two-way conversations within the Herald. Here it is. Please let us know what's on your mind.

Letters to the Editor





Letters to the Editor.

Thanks Marion for all of your wonderful efforts with the Harcourt Herald. I do believe that it is gaining a broader audience and seems to have a larger group of people offering articles. I know this has a lot to do with your efforts as well as Judi Morris's.

Sharon Chapman

Kudos to hardworking editor Marion Auger, the outstanding newsletter team, and all the contributors to the Harcourt Herald. Together, they have created a "newsletter" that is probably unique among church publications. It is as good as a magazine and provides an outlet for all kinds of congregational creativity. I particularly liked the December issue with its thoughtful and inspiring submissions, and lovely interviews. The Herald is a monthly treasure we should all be proud of.

With appreciation,
Long-time Harcourt reader

Rev Kate Ballagh-Steeper

I saw a funny facebook post this week – suggesting that we all quietly and on our tip toes go into the New Year, slipping in without much fuss, so that 2023 might be a calmer year than 2020-22! Certainly when we look back over the year that is ending we recognize that it has been a continuation of the roller coaster that 2021 and 2020 were! Thankfully, we can at least gather for our Christmas celebrations at church and with family and friends.

The pages that follow share reflections on gifts. If we are thinking about gifts, we also think about gratitude. When life is difficult, unearthing some gratitude can help make it a little easier. I know it does for me, especially when I am tired and grumpy. If I can turn my attention

away from what is annoying or irritating and focus instead on one thing for which I am grateful – it is often enough to shift my mood.

Gratitude also helps strengthen us on our journeys in faith. Recognizing moments of Holy Encounter, elicits deep gratitude. Being aware of moments of grace and love, elicits deep gratitude. Being witness to another's generosity of spirit, elicits deep gratitude. And when gratitude takes hold and grows within us, we cannot help but be drawn into deeper relationship with God whose generous love is beyond our imagination.



Gratitude leads us toward humility and the ability to offer generous love and grace to others. Gratitude leads us to act and work for justice – because we need to share the love we have received. I am grateful for the gift of my citizenship for example; which means I want others to share in that gift and so I work for just refugee policies and to support newcomers to that Canada so they can feel at home here.

As we stand at the beginning of this new year, I am deeply grateful for the warm welcome I have received since beginning my ministry at Harcourt. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with fine and talented staff members. I am grateful to be a part of the many, many, many committees (😊) with so many talented people who are so generously sharing their gifts and time to do the faithful work of discerning where God is calling this church. It is exciting and terrifying all at once, and we will all need to be brave as we face the challenges ahead. But if our decisions are rooted first in our gratitude for all that God has done, we can trust God will continue to be with us for the time ahead.

May 2023 be a year of gratitude for you. May we offer prayers of thanksgiving always!
Peace, Kate



Council News

Lorraine Holding, Council Chair

(councilchair@harcourtuc.ca)



Our invitation to approach this New Year by sharing our gifts is an important one. Each person who is part of our Harcourt Community of Faith has something to share – with each other, in a small group, on a focused committee or team, with our neighbours, or the wider Guelph community.

As Council Chair, I appreciate all who contribute in so many unique and connected ways. Volunteer lay leadership and “doing” = many hands and hearts to carry out our ministries.

Council’s December 18th meeting focused on planning for early 2023.

- Brian Magee provided an update on the generosity of financial gifts received during the past few weeks. We are grateful that our 2022 deficit is shrinking. Appreciation of, and active participation in, our ministries will help determine Harcourt’s future.
- We acknowledged several activities that are signs of hope: the work of the visioning priority groups, guided by the Champions (see Kathy Magee’s update in this newsletter); the imminent arrival of the first shipment of chairs for the Sanctuary; ways to bring people together; fundraising ideas (including a proposal for an antiques/collectibles sale).
- We decided to plan two opportunities in February as “town hall” gatherings – information sessions on our visioning priorities and the 2023 budget. Stay tuned for details. We hope that we can combine in-person and virtual connection.
- This led us to planning for the Congregational Annual Meeting on Sunday, March 5. Mark it on your calendars! Again, watch for further details about timing and format.
- Carolyn Davidson provided a brief overview of her participation in the November Zoom meeting of Western Ontario Waterways (WOW) Regional Council.

Speaking of gifts, it’s the time of year to recruit “friends who care” – people for various committees and teams, including Council. Giving your time, energy and skills are ways to learn more about Harcourt and make new friends while contributing to our future. Watch and listen for opportunities! Council vacancies for the coming year include: Vice Chair; Umbrella Councillor for Stewardship; and Council Liaison to WOW Regional Council. Kent Hoeg or I are willing to answer your questions if you have interest in any of these. Chairs of committees/teams also welcome extra hands and hearts. As a friend who cares, what gifts might you share with Harcourt when opportunity knocks?

May we welcome 2023 with good health, energy, faith and hope.

Moving Forward on Our Journey



Kathy Magee, on behalf of the Champions' Group.

Chapter Two

On December 12th, Dan Ganesh, Andre Auger, Merrill Pierce, Steve Pierce, Pamela Girardi, Lorraine Holding, Kate Ballagh-Steeper, Kathy Magee met in the chapel as The Champions of the four themes (Building Partnerships, Spiritual Life, Worship, and Supporting Manna) that the Harcourt community identified as our priorities. We are still thinking about a better name for our group, but the dedication and energy in the group really makes Champion an appropriate term. We want to share with you the important progress and exciting momentum that is bubbling up in Harcourt.



Worship – Dan Ganesh

Tom Auger, Stan Bunston, Sandy Phair, Karyn Davies and Kate Ballagh-Steeper have agreed to participate in a Worship task group. They will have an in-person meeting in early January. The focus will be on developing worship strategies that centre on spiritual fulfillment, stewardship, and sustainability and growth. Working with the other three themes to dissipate silos is an immediate goal. The move to flexible seating and integration of the various forms of Harcourt worship experiences will be a key factor. Mid range goals include a more interactive live streaming model. The team is aware that the language we use and concepts of worship are important, as worship is often how we are formed and called as God's people.



Community Hub – Steve Pierce

Many meetings and much research are moving the project forward. Fluid groups of four to twelve people have developed as the project evolves. Steve is present with each group and is the communication link with Kendra Fry from Trinity Centres Foundation. Five task groups are currently active.

External Welcome task group - Focus is on our eternal environment – building and grounds. They are generating ideas and will meet again with Kendra

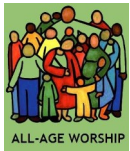
Models of Governance task group – Building on Kendra's experience and expertise and with original ideas they are exploring various models of governance in community partnerships.

Stakeholders task group – This group is working with an extensive list of groups we see as having an investment in Harcourt, current and potential contacts. A 'short list' is being developed. Kendra will contact these groups in January to assess their knowledge of Harcourt,

their needs etc. It will include city administrators and groups in music and the arts, health and wellness, and recreation.

Internal Welcome task group - This group is meeting in December with Dave Harder (from Trinity Centre Foundations) to focus on inside the building re appearance, how we welcome people etc.

Website task group – This group is meeting with Kendra to look at essential and important changes to the Harcourt website.



Manna – Merrill Peirce and Pamela Girardi

The focus remains on shared leadership and new leadership models.

The challenge is to engage more people in long term goals rather than solely one-off projects – an issue not unique to Manna. The leadership team has been connecting with others (Andrew, Colleen and Wendelin from GUM communities) working with this age group (30-45 years) in effort to connect passion to action. They are looking at messaging about Manna, especially on the website. Tapping into memberships' talent and skills is an on-going strategy.

Programming specific to age groups is also area of focus. This requires extra leaders (5 leaders for 3 groups – children, youth and adults). Adults have expressed a longing for occasional deep conversation without children.

They are looking for opportunities for GUM youth to be involved in joint activities. Pamela is considering an occasional separate meeting with youth after the regular Manna gathering.

Enhancing the worship area as a welcome space for children is key to ensure that what they need is present, safe and enriching. Flexible seating will also facilitate this.



Spiritual Life – Andre Auger

There are five areas of attention for this group.

Developing the virtual ministry dimension. Peter Jackson, Marion Auger and Bill Chapman will be meeting in January to focus on this project.

Working with committees to facilitate awareness of Spirit in their work. Sharon Chapman has agreed to lead this initiative and will be contacting committees in the new year.

Creating a series for people to share their experiences of Thin Spaces/Time/Places in their lives. Andre, Marion and Sharon are providing leadership.

Kathy Magee and Andre will work on developing material for moments in worship to explore liminal times, times of awe and wonder.

Explorations in Progressive Christianity. Lisa Beattie has expressed interest in providing some opportunities to continue and adapt this journey, that Andre began a decade ago, with an environmental/ecological focus.

Our next near steps are happening! There is an organic, evolving process that is capturing peoples' imaginations, passion, and hope for Harcourt's future. The adaptive change we know is essential is present and blossoming. The willingness to work with uncertain outcomes opens us to opportunities, energy and involvement. We look forward to sharing more information with you in the new year. Please contact any member of our team if you feel moved to join one of these transformative initiatives. Together with God we can accomplish more that we can ever imagine. One step at a time.

Partnership/Community Hub Project

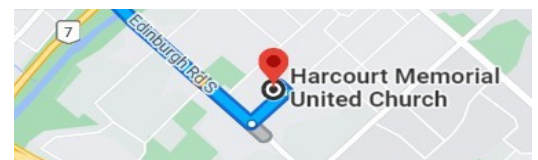
Stephen Pierce



The project continues as a number of small task groups have been meeting to consider different topics.

On November 2, Kendra Fry gave a zoom presentation on “**discoverability**”. How do people discover Harcourt? On a humorous note (or maybe not), Kendra recounted how she and Dave Harder tried to find Harcourt using Google Maps. They ended up on Forest or Maple St. and were told to follow the path to the church. Needless to say, Casey has rectified that problem with Google.

Harcourt is discovered in many ways including our Website and through Google search for churches in Guelph (Harcourt is currently listed eighth). Harcourt is also discovered through concerts and events, neighbourhood meetings, people walking their dogs and the “sign” at the front of the church. However, there are levels of welcome. What do people see and experience and what information are we providing to the community about what happens here and when? What groups meet here? As a result, task groups were formed to look at different aspects of “discoverability”.



One task group is addressing the topic of “**external welcome**”. What do people see and experience when either looking at, or approaching the property or building? Is the appearance

appealing, attractive, warm and welcoming? The group conducted a “walk around”. Observations and impressions were identified and ideas about possible changes discussed. The findings will be discussed with Kendra Fry to consider possible next steps.



The Communications Committee held a zoom meeting with Dave Harder around the topic of “**internal welcome**”. A broad discussion took place around the issue of belonging which touches us all but also impacts those who are new to Harcourt. The Committee will meet to discuss further how we might communicate our “internal welcome”.

The **Website** Task Group met with Kendra Fry to talk about changes to the website. The Task Group will make changes to make the website easier to navigate and for people to find what they may be looking for.

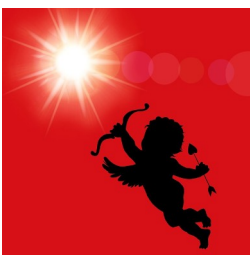
There is also a **Stakeholders** Task Group. A large stakeholders list has been prepared. The list consists of community leaders, community organizations of various types, neighbours etc. The list has been reviewed and priority stakeholders will be identified. Kendra Fry will hold conversations with these stakeholders to learn about the community’s perception of Harcourt, its building, its work and future possibilities.



Finally, a **Governance** Task Group has been formed. Kendra presented four different governance models that are currently in use at different churches with whom she is working. The Task Group will review these models and consider if any of them could serve Harcourt better. There is always the option to keep the current governance model in place.

Financial Update

Brian Magee, Chair of Finance



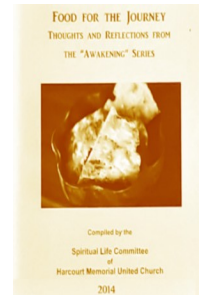
The spirit of giving was very much evident at Harcourt in the month of December. A tremendous thank you to those who were able to respond to appeals for financial funding to further Harcourt’s ministry and mission. Generous donations from within the congregation and from outside donors are an indication of the value of Harcourt’s role in the community. We are starting a new year and we are moving forward.

Thank you for your continued support.

Food for the Journey - “It is in giving that we receive”

Peter Jackson, for the Spiritual Life Committee

(attributed to Francis of Assisi)



Desmond Tutu was driving in Florida one day. “All of a sudden a car cut across the lanes in front of us and the Archbishop had to swerve out of the way.” His companion, writer Doug Abrams, was interested to see how this deeply spiritual and moral leader would react. “‘There are some truly amazing drivers on the road!’ the Archbishop said with exasperation and a head-shaking chuckle.”

It is interesting that Tutu did not give way to anger. In the course of a week-long conversation between him and the Dalai Lama, the two agreed on many things but disagreed about emotions such as this flash of exasperation. The Archbishop maintained that initial emotional reactions are natural and unavoidable, but the ability to choose a response can be learned. The Dalai Lama maintained that through self-knowledge and meditation we can develop ‘mental immunity’ to emotions.

Where they agreed, however, is that the essential step toward having the ability to choose a response or to have mental immunity is to live from a place of compassion. Compassion as these leaders understand it is much more active than empathy. “As the Dalai Lama has described it, if we see a person who is being crushed by a rock, the goal is not to get under the rock and feel what they are feeling; it is to help to remove the rock.”

And they agree that joy is the reward of seeking to give joy to others, a result of helping others. For them, joy is not a fleeting emotion; it is a way of being in the world. The goal, in a beautiful phrase from the Archbishop, is “becoming an oasis of peace, a pool of serenity that ripples out to all around us.”

The route toward becoming such an oasis is through practice. Both of these spiritual leaders spend hours in meditation each morning. The Archbishop’s practices seem to tend towards the more active or ‘kataphatic’ end of the spectrum - engagement with thoughts and images such as in the Ignatian practices of Lectio Divina and Gospel Contemplation. The Dalai Lama’s practices seem to tend toward the less active or ‘apophatic’ end of the spectrum - raising awareness and quietening the monkey mind through self-emptying practices such as chanting a mantra or focusing on the breath, while dismissing passing thoughts with a thank you.

Some meditative practices combine aspects of these two polarities. One example is what the Book calls 'Rejoicing In Your Day'. It is known in Ignatian practice as the Daily Examen and Buddhist monks call it 'Making A Dedication'.

Doug Abrams' Book of Joy describes the conversations between the two spiritual leaders. The book concludes with several 'Joy Practices' which may be useful supplements to practices you already follow. Here is a summary of a practice of meditating on the 'pillars of joy' which form the intellectual centrepiece of the book.

The first four pillars are named as qualities of the **mind**.



Perspective: See yourself and your problems from a wider perspective ... your problem will pass ... your problem shrinks as you see it in the wider context of your life.

Humility: See yourself as one of seven billion people ... your problem as part of the unfolding and interdependent drama of life on our planet ... feel love and appreciation for all of those who have contributed to who you are.

Humour: Smile and see if you can chuckle ... Try to find the humour in the situation ... The human drama is often a comedy and laughter is the saving grace.

Acceptance: Accept that you are struggling and that you have human limitations ... remind yourself that in order to make the most positive contribution to this situation, you must accept its reality.



The next four pillars are named as qualities of the **heart**.

Forgiveness: Forgive yourself for any part you have played in creating this situation ... forgive any others involved for their part and their human limitations.

Gratitude: Think of three people or things you are grateful for right now ... and people or things that are supporting you.

Compassion: Have compassion for yourself and how you are struggling ... send that compassion to your loved ones.

Generosity: Feel the deep generosity in your heart ... imagine radiating this generosity to all around you ... how can you give your gifts?

How fitting that the final question in this practice has to do with giving, the focus of this edition of the Herald!

If you are interested in reading more about the exchanges between the Dalai Llama and Archbishop Tutu, look for *The Book of Joy*, published by Penguin Canada, ISBN 978-0-670-07016-9. The quotations in this article come from there.

A set of introductory spiritual exercises can be found along with many other resources on the website www.spiritualpractice.ca. Included are outlines of the practices named in this article (Lectio Divina, Gospel Contemplation and the Daily Examen). Well worth a visit!



Advent moments at Manna



The Gift of Connection

Arlene Davies-Fuhr



We are connected, even when we don't see each other very often or we live far away. We are connected, even when we share very different opinions or we are from completely different cultures. Like trees, humans also have constructed an underground communication system through our roots, our thoughts and prayers, as well as our mindful meditations. What is forged becomes a strong tie that remains even when our relationship is not overtly visible. An enduring bond is present even when interactions are rather confusing, strained, or frayed. We retain memories of the good times and tough days. Like an orchestra, choir, or band, it is important to discover ways to work together in spite of our different voices, our unique approaches, and complex story lines. In fact, the blend of textures and timbres is what adds spice and diversity to the overall, unified, whole. Like individual instruments, players or singers, each one of our personal connections, whether lengthy or brief, whether insightful or frustrating, has the capability to provide insight and opportunities. Contact with a wide variety of individuals, with their preferences and desire, has the potential to expand our horizons and deepen our awareness.

At weddings and funerals, vacations at the beach, observations over e-mail and face book, and numerous ordinary get-togethers, have gifted us with a lifetime of very diverse and stimulating interconnections. Some conversations lead to hospitality that is momentous and meaningful, while others provide casual and fleeting connections. Yet, they are all extraordinary. Memorable movies, books, concerts and plays also impact us. Media has the potential to expand and touch our hearts. Over our lifetime, the accumulation of exchanges with people in communities we have been part of, as well as the various roles we have played, constantly weaves in and out of our consciousness.

Our connections with a multiplicity of people, affect our daily communications and actions. A chord of compassion and mutual respect miraculously emerges as our energy and theirs interact and unite in a stunning array of light. We find, to our surprise, that we have conversed with individuals and have participated in events we never dreamed possible.. The accumulation of time spent with strangers, friends, and family, even when the situations are awkward or challenging, leads us in a creative dance of love, and joy, and appreciation.



In this season of gift-giving, I encourage us all to celebrate the diverse individuals who bring such delight and laughter, wisdom and awareness into the midst of our days and our decades.

“They Shall Know us by our Love”

Andre Auger

I remember thinking: if Christianity were a criminal offence, could I ever be convicted? What evidence could the prosecutor produce to prove my “guilt”? What behaviours could my accusers point to, to convince the jury? What is Christianity anyway? Is it merely a set of beliefs? Or is it a lifestyle? A way of being with others?

I like the new United Church motto: “Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice.” No word there about believing a bunch of stuff... After all, we live in a time when many traditional Christian beliefs are being reconsidered: the birth stories; substitutionary atonement (“Jesus died for our sins”); existence of hell; original sin, etc. As John Spong has shown over and over, our theology is a fragile accretion of beliefs from different epochs in Christian history, which, when studied carefully within our context or when lined up with contemporary understandings of our evolving universe, are just not defensible anymore.

But if Christianity is a way of living and not assent to a set of beliefs, then a “**bold discipleship**” really asks us to consider the life of our model, Jesus, and invites us to do likewise. Protestant Christianity probably got it wrong when it latched on to Luther’s claim that we are “justified by faith” rather than by “good works.” Jesus doesn’t suggest that through “good works” we “get to heaven.” Jesus does say that by paying attention to the Sermon on the Mount, we help bring about the “realm of God.” Just a “little shift” in emphasis.

I think it requires “**deep spirituality**” to get there. Spending time meditating on the life and works of Jesus (the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises is a great way to engage in that process in a systematic way... Just sayin’) is our most faithful spiritual practice. Only the Gospel of John has its Jesus say how important it is to believe in him; the other Gospels show us how Jesus lived and acted and then invite us to do likewise. It’s not very complicated, really: “they shall know us by our love.”

Now, this is not merely about being “nice” or polite or thoughtful. Love of the marginalized – and that’s really the model of love to which the Judeo-Christian tradition always refers to (think of the prophets) – requires that we engage in “**daring justice**.” That we stand up to systemic evil wherever we see it, that we push for equity, for inclusiveness, for peaceful solutions to conflicts, for fair distribution of wealth, for health care for all, etc. Yes, I suppose that could get us in trouble with the dominant culture. It didn’t seem to stop Jesus...

But then just read this issue of the Herald... A lot of us are doing an awful lot to bring about the realm of God, each in our own way.

And the world around us shall know us by our love!

Showered with gifts

Megan Ward

One recent Sunday, I had the pleasure of looking more closely at the banner hanging from the lectern in the front of the Sanctuary. It shows a dove carrying an olive branch and the quilter tells me the blue and yellow are inspired by support for Ukraine. If you get a chance to see it up close, you'll notice that it has very complicated piecing. It joins a line of beautiful quilted banners and altar cloths made by such talented folks in our church family.



The banner was drawn to my attention by a member of the Chancel Guild, following a conversation about the planning that went into creating that wonderful festive feeling we get as we enter the Sanctuary. It was a snippet of conversation which helped me appreciate the time and care taken by that group, much of it in the background, but all of it creating a feeling of the Sacred in that space.

Creating an experience of the Sacred is what bubbles up for me as I reflect on all the activity which binds us together. In my work as a Trustee, I've learned much more about our financial arrangements. I never paid much attention before, largely because I have faith that other people have the necessary expertise. But now that I'm paying more attention, I witness the year in, year out, support all of us get from Council, the Finance Committee, the Treasurer, the Payroll Administrator, the Envelope Secretary and the Trustees. Again, the work moves along mostly in the background, but the faithfulness embodied by the effort is tangible and real.



Likewise, my work with the Re-entry Planning Group drew my attention to the day in, day out commitment of the members of the Property Committee. I had no idea just how many volunteer hours go into creating a welcoming place for our renters, our staff, our church groups and each of us. Can the Sacred be found in the maintenance of a temperamental boiler? It is for me.

I could add dozens of stories to these because one of my great pleasures from volunteering at Harcourt is the variety of people I rub up against in the course of my activities. I bet you can too. St Paul wrote that we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us. Your work, your gifts, are a blessing to us all.

The Magi and Me

Don Johns

According to legend, it was Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh that the wise persons brought to the Christ Child. I say wise persons, for I suspect each them consulted with their female companions to arrive at the appropriate gift.

Gold, to acknowledge the preciousness of new life, Frankincense to perfume the whole journey, and Myrrh to dress the body for the entrance into eternity.

The Magi delivered insight and blessing. They received wisdom in a dream in return.

So, at this season I too make my way to the manger and offer my gift. After consultation and acceptance with those I love – the gift of a Grateful Heart. My heart is grateful because of the original blessing of the Christ in my life and as in yours. This blessing constantly encourages, provokes and comforts me.

It has enabled me to reach out to those who seek information and companionship in end of life circumstances. It provokes me to bring an inclusive spirit to politics, and little things like taking in the garbage pails for neighbours and monitoring a phone list of those who appreciate regular contact – usually a call a day.

I try to be a good listener and speak positively to anyone I meet, sometimes causing me to be late for meals.

I am persuaded that the Christ in the cosmos; in companionship on the journey; and in the heart that the original blessing has given me the same gifts the Magi brought to the Child.

Now it is a pleasure to use and be used by these gifts.



“Angels are Making their Rounds”

Joan Charlebois

As I grew up I had a “Leave it to Beaver,” lifestyle. However, I was a sickly child and my parents didn’t expect that I would make it. - Here I am 75 years later.

I have occasionally thought “why have I survived?” I told my clients the dear Lord has something that I am meant to do; it was only recently with the question for the Harcourt Herald “What gift do you give to God and your community?” that I really pondered the question.

Throughout my whole life I have never had another career other than nursing, and I am still working in my 57th year of entering the Victoria Hospital in Halifax.

My singing has also been a gift given to me and so many times I have done solos and performed in shows. My greatest gift was to sing at my client's funeral at the request of my client before they passed on. Through music, the singing has brought so much enjoyment and happiness to those I have sung to.

I really do believe that God's purpose for me in life was my gift of nursing. Though my career I was able to help, nurture and care for those of us who are less fortunate through illness whether they are rich or poor. Some say it is a Calling. Even as a little girl I often wondered why God had some people who were rich and others who were poor and sick and hungry. I just wanted to help them and share the gifts that I had and that is why I chose nursing.

I can't explain why I was in certain situations at the time where if I hadn't been... there the person would have had an unfavourable outcome. I used to call it my "Jiminy Cricket" on my shoulder telling me to go. In one case I had a lady who had ALS. She was at home with her husband. After she ate her breakfast, she started to choke; her husband was in the kitchen and couldn't hear her. For some unknown reason I turned my car around and went to their home at that exact time even though I was not to see her until the afternoon. I was able to save her.

I often wondered what made me do that?



I spoke at length with Jim Ball about it and he called it "The Finger of God." I call it my guiding hand. Throughout my life I experienced these situations numerous times and each time I could not explain why I had acted in a certain manner.

I now know in my heart that God led me to these situations. I was and still am his instrument in helping people.

The anthem that was sung "Angels are making their rounds" sums up for me what my purpose in life is and I don't say this in a braggart way. I say it humbly and in some small way I do believe that God needed me as an instrument to care for those who are sick or dying especially during my 22 years as a Palliative care Nurse.

Some have thanked me and called me their guardian angel.

I have heard that numerous times in my life. Perhaps I am.



God and Community

Tony Wagner

In last month's Herald, I was fascinated by the various views and perspectives of God and the images different people had of Him/Her. It took me back to my early childhood. I grew up in the normal Sunday school atmosphere as well as the standard DVBS summers and so forth. But the atmosphere was more on negativity rather than of God's love and togetherness. Don't do "this", don't do "that". If it was pleasurable, it must be wrong. My two older brothers were drummed out of the congregation for doing "that". Hence, my view of God was someone who was to be feared and vengeful but at the same time was a just and fair God, often referring to the book of Job. My views of God have evolved significantly since then to a loving God that is a friend on stand-by to whom you can take your problems at any time, day or night. I have no idea what he/she might look like but have a lot of "why" questions when we meet face to face.

My most recent encounter with community involvement began approximately 22 years ago while I was providing commentary to a proposed renewal of the Canada/US Agreement on Great Lakes Water Quality when I experienced three strokes in a relatively short period of time. Being part of the 33% that survived and not institutionalized, I began a rehab program at St. Joseph's Health and Wellness Centre while it was still in their old facility on Montrose Ave., prior to their move to their present location. Apparently, I was making fairly good progress in the rehab program when I was asked to consider becoming a patient visitor. Up to that point St. Joe's was particularly good to me and this was an opportunity in some small way to repay them for both their kindness and their faith in me in dealing with their patients. What began as a short commitment has become endless. Their post Covid-19 activities are slowly evolving to that of pre-Covid-19 program. I may be one of their oldest (if not oldest) volunteer, but it has its rewards.

Over the last 20 plus years, I have had the opportunity to work and visit with many interesting and inspiring elderly people. To give but a few examples. The lady was finding it very difficult to walk but insisted she do it without help. Her eyesight began to deteriorate as did her overall health. She rapidly regressed to a cane, walker, finally a wheelchair, as well as losing her complete eyesight, but still insisted we continue with our walks. We did our usual walks with her in her wheelchair, but she would suggest we turn back usually at the same place. I finally asked her how she knew how far we had gone. She said by the number of trees we passed. How did she know the number of trees we passed? The temperature is always cooler by the trees. She finally lost her ability to speak but would always know when I was nearby and burst into a big smile.

Another lady was paralyzed from the neck down but had a very sharp mind. Her favourite game was Scrabble. She had a magnetic Scrabble Board in her night table and her favourite topic of conversation was the evils of sugar and what it could do to your health. I'm not the world's worst Scrabble player and I never did beat her in a game of Scrabble, but she was unsuccessful in her bid to get me off my stroke medication despite her infectious smile.



There are many non-monetary rewards to working for and with persons in the neighbourhood and often one of those rewards is nothing but a big sincere smile.

Learning to Share my Gifts

Mary Harding

Growing up, my mother had lots of phrases that we were to live by. One of them was "do unto others as you would have them do unto you".

I was pondering this in terms of "my" gifts (what strengths have manifested in me) and with January and Epiphany fast approaching, I also pondered those wealthy travellers so propelled by a portent, that they embarked on a long journey to gift a young, poor family, and to receive divine blessing.

What propels me to give/share gifts?

It serves, given my Mom's wisdom, that the gifts I appreciate receiving would indicate what I might share with others. When someone shares of themselves with me, or recognizes a need in me and reaches out, or when someone, out of their sense of abundance, shares with me, I am enlivened and filled with gratitude. Really, it all comes to relationships. When gifting, both parties are blessed. I experience this when I offer a Therapeutic Touch treatment. In giving a treatment, I too receive peace & healing.



Recently, I was reminded of when I was a young girl and my Dad would put me to bed and we would sing together. We'd sing songs like 'Jesus Bids us Shine' or 'Jesus Loves Me'. My Dad was rather "tone deaf" and yet he happily sang with me. I cherished this intimate time together and hold these memories as precious gifts. What I only recently realized, was that he wasn't just ritualizing my

bedtime, he was honouring my singing and showing me support and encouragement. He saw me and affirmed a gift he recognized in me. My Dad died of cancer when I was just eleven. He was gentle, caring, sensitive and compassionate. Life is not fair. Chaos swirls in and disrupts order. Death sweeps through and the immensity of how much love one can feel is exposed with painful lamentation. Even so, the mirror he held up for me still shines brightly.

I find it in my nature to hide in my sorrow, retreat into my cave, seeking safety in isolation. This long-practised pattern attracts me in its orderliness and familiarity. I recognize that it too can disconnect me from others and from my passion. So, I consider inviting the gift of chaos to disrupt this pattern, this disconnection. What if I look into the mirror my father held up for me, and free myself to share my gifts as intended, for my own well being and for others? Gifting is really only possible within a relationship. So, may I, in this New Year, be propelled like those Wise Ones from afar, to follow the Light and share my gifts.

The gift & the Giving.

Judi Morris

Rupi Kaur, Canadian Poet, and author of “Milk and Honey” and “Healing Through Words,” says it makes her sad when someone tells her they’re not creative. She continues with, “Our ability to come together, think, and solve problems is our collective creativity in motion.”



Once you begin to think about it, the gift of creativity, abides in every corner of everyone’s daily life. Every fabricated excuse made for something we cannot or do not want to do is creativity. What jacket or sweater matches a pair of slacks and all the way down to gardening is creativity. Creativity is a constant companion throughout our daily living.

When directly asked about the gifts we bring to God, some draw a complete blank...even turn their heads down. At first, we may feel we don’t have much or even anything to offer. We may feel it must be something glorious and bold and are convinced we don’t have any of that at all.



A line of the Carol, “In The Bleak Mid-Winter,” gives us a hint. “But what I can I give him - Give him my heart,” is telling. The heart is the place to look. Really.

Medically it's a pump - beyond that... it's a black hole that contains all our gifts. The list is endless and renews itself persistently.

A guest speaker at an event I attended, said, "An inferiority complex is the biggest cancer of any personality." I felt his eyes zing right through me. I never felt more inferior as I did in that moment. He looked straight at me...he had to have known all about me.... In a similar vein it feels most certain if I listed the gifts that I bring to God, I would be viewed as arrogant, liking myself and most frightening of all, misjudging myself which would make me terribly wrong. Still, I have lived long enough to realize I **have** been well blessed with gifts which in turn have empowered me to bless those around me with these blessings.

Rather than list gifts, I prefer to feel gratitude for them such as my task-oriented nature. Similar to many of my blessings, this one can produce a curse along the way. When one is task-oriented, their focus is on the end result. It's a tunnel of energy that takes one forward toward the purpose often not pausing for niceties along the way until the job is done. It's not about people.... it's the job... until it's finished. There are always casualties along the way. Some value



the job much less than niceties. There is no pleasing everyone. Still, the 9:00 a.m. coffee and tea was served and everything cleaned up after. That act gave comfort and refreshment to those who needed it and offered opportunity for others to gather, share, and feel connected. The willingness to do it came from my heart

and I was always happy to oblige.

Lessons learned through growing up in the United Church with its liberal, inclusive, compassionate attitudes equipped me to wade through my life with genuine attempts to see the face of God in all whom I meet and make mid-course corrections along the way.

The Wise men brought gifts, tangible ones, gold, frankincense and myrrh. They did that because they had them to give. They also gave grace, love and blessings. The later gifts long outlived the tangible ones.

Every gift I bring to God comes from gifts God has blessed me with. From my heart, in earnest I return.

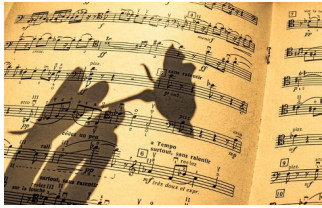
I believe God is the energy of the earth and do all I can to give care to it along with the gift of Gratitude.

THANK
GOD

Q: What gifts do I bring to my community and church?

Lynn Hancock

This question has taken me on an unexpected journey of reflection. I'm going to attempt to share three gifts; all I which I believe I owe to God.

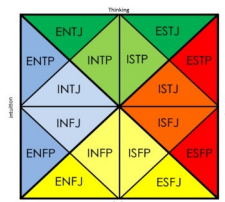


The first gift I'd like to share is one that I remember first as a child, singing in harmony in the car on family trips. I loved harmonizing. It seemed to come so naturally to me. So naturally, I guess, that I assumed everybody could do it if I could do it. I now thank God for this gift. I have loved singing choral anthems in church which included second soprano parts because I could harmonize. As an elementary school teacher, I had opportunities to play the piano for music classes. When I taught vocal music to Grade 6 and 7 students, I decided to take advantage of the opportunity to discover how to "play by ear". The students were very forgiving and I gradually overcame my fears of playing in public. The worst was not making a mistake. The worst was allowing my fears to prevent me from sharing my God-given gift. **A gift to offer.**

The second gift was an answer to a prayer. I was emotionally stuck and needed something to shift. As some of you know, I was introduced to "bubbling" on Easter weekend of 2013. A gift from God? Absolutely. Was I meant to keep this to myself? Apparently not. This has evolved over the years. It has been such a wonderful fit for me at this stage in my life. Imagine a retired teacher being referred to as "The Bubble Lady"?! I get to meet new people in a safe environment. I find the activity therapeutic as I set an intention to let go and let God. I have found a cheap recipe to share and can offer rope to those interested in sharing it with family and friends. This activity has also been a gift in order for me to be more fully present and in the moment. The wind will have its way. I just need to adapt and adjust so that the wind is at my back. **A gift to offer.**



The third gift..... offered by a teaching colleague/friend. She recommended that I fill out a questionnaire and attend a workshop based on the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. This was in the spring of 1988. Almost 35 years ago! It changed my life! As a result of what I learned from this self-awareness tool, I was able to be pro-active and apply for an assignment better suited to my personality. A gift from God? Absolutely. Was I meant to share it? Apparently. In 1993, I travelled to Montreal, registered for the training and became a certified M.B.T.I. consultant with Psychometrics Canada. Another gift that keeps on giving, I'd love to continue to share this..... with you....if you're interested. **A gift to offer.**



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Sharing Gifts

Rosalind Slater

As a child I was always encouraged to share my God given talents. I was not always sure which of my talents were God given but got over that conundrum by deciding that everything I did came from the God-source.

It was around the time that our church, Hudson Street Methodist Sunday School and Chapel, decided to join in the Spring celebrations and enter the local Eistedfod. We had borrowed this name and idea from our Welsh neighbours, though in Wales these events were made up mainly of singing competitions. We held competitions of all sorts, baking, sewing, embroidery, soft toy making being only a few of them. I won first prize for my soft toy, a duck. but when I was rightly proud of my achievement I was told not to brag because the talent for sewing felt was God given. I was also in the choir that won a first and my father won for his beautiful tenor solo. He was quietly proud of himself but not pushy. I should try to learn from my Dad, I realized. Although I tried to copy my Dad in all things I was never to win a prize for singing however.

My Mother wondered aloud how one of her family, me, could only sing like a cornflake. When my family sang quartets at home they asked me to join in with the bass part. This didn't help me get over my shyness and nerves because I didn't read music. My singing voice was obviously not God given. My mother encouraged me to use my speaking voice instead and I was given a part in the pantomime that she was directing the next Christmas. And so started my love of acting and theatre which has been a source of joy my whole life. Hudson Street didn't have a scout and guide company and I dearly wanted to be a part of the organization that my friends had joined so my Mother let me go to the Brownie pack at another Methodist church. Guiding became part of my life and I decided in my late teens to train as a Guider so that I could start a company at Hudson street. This gave a lot of joy to the girls at Hudson street in which I was happy to join.



This was a good decision because it was one of the things that helped me settle when we emigrated to Guelph and before that it was also how I met my husband. When we emigrated I didn't drive a car so was unable to drive my girls to the Brownie meeting, which they wanted to join. so I volunteered to become Tawny Owl for Barb Truscott at Harcourt. and she was happy to drive The Slaters to Brownies. This was the beginning of a wonderful friendship and Barb helped me settle down in my new home..



In addition to Harcourt I joined Guelph Little Theatre that year and began to share my love of theatre with many people in Guelph both on stage and off. That was the start of thirty five years of joy for Keith and me because he joined G.L.T. also and our children soon became involved.. Just as my mother had, I began to direct children's pantomimes for Christmas. What my children missed from me not being around the house they gained in being on stage with their many friends.

Most of the things I did in the early years in Canada I did to try to find society for my three daughters. In addition to Brownies, we all sang in the choirs and joined in other social events at the church. In 1994 we spent a year on Sabbatical in Cambridge England and on our return to Canada we found everything seemed to have changed. We had worshipped in a Methodist church whilst we were away and had joined a theatre company at the university but culture shock hit hard on our return. Our daughters were grown up and I couldn't find a place where I felt that I fit.

Harcourt had changed too as had the theatre. We discussed whether we should find another church but we both felt that we couldn't take any more change. We went to Harcourt the next Sunday and in the announcements I heard God's voice: when a plea was made for someone to volunteer as the Sunday School Superintendent. I volunteered. I don't know if this was a God given talent but I did my best to fill a need for a few years and once more found a place for myself in the church, It's funny how throughout my life when I've taken on responsibilities to help others I've received great personal joy as well. Take Keith's illness for example, as a child who'd failed the 11plus exam I couldn't go to grammar school to receive an education I needed to become a nurse or a teacher, but now because of necessity I was nursing Keith and teaching others how to see to his needs and receiving accolades for my abilities all the time. I personally see these as God given talents for when the need was there I suddenly found my abilities. Since his death I have found great joy in once again volunteering where the need is. I serve on council as outreach councillor and I have great joy in the fact that along with the GUM churches we are sponsoring a family of refugees from Afghanistan and I pray that they will be able to join us soon.

Throughout the years I have shared in bringing music to others and have made up for my lack of voice by playing instrumentals. From triangle in Kindergarten I progressed through piano in my youth, bells at Harcourt, and now flute with New Horizons Band. I try to share my talents with others, flute was definitely a Godsend after Keith's death and I'm glad a friend shared his knowledge of New Horizons with me at Keith's funeral. Once I'm proficient at flute I plan to share that talent with my friends at Harcourt also. Sharing anything ,I find doubles the joy and this makes them God given.

An Interview with “Many People” & One Question

Judi Morris

*“Three Wise Men brought Gold, Frankincense & Myrrh – What gifts can and do **we** offer God?”*

People appear wary to speak or write about gifts they offer God. In place of an interview with one person this month, I have taken on “Many People” on the topic, asking this one question and received responses anonymously.

It is my hope these responses will give us cause to reflect on **our** gifts and those we offer God. For those who seem to feel they have nothing to offer... I believe they will realize they are mistaken, and in fact are rich in gifts they offer to God.

Some gifts you will see are offered more than once. One has opened me to a “Wow,” and something to pay heed to. I hope you will find one that speaks to you. I share the contributions exactly as I have received them, in their own words, their own voice. I have given each one a title.

This is for you.... Enjoy

The Littlest Angel



Back in 1962, Bing Crosby sang a song entitled, "The Littlest Angel" (*one can still listen to it on YouTube*). It has always been my favourite Christmas carol. The lyrics are about a four-year-old who has died and is an angel with low self esteem. In heaven, he plays all day with a little box that to others had no worth. In the box was a butterfly with golden wings, a little piece of a hollow log, two shiny stones from a riverbank, and the worn-out strap of his faithful dog. The angels hear that the holy child is to be born in Bethlehem and they all bring gifts for him. The littlest angel puts his little box with all the presents that are fine and rare, and he sits alone and cries because he thinks his gift is so meagre and bare. It is said that God chooses the gift of the little box that the child had blessed with love. It starts glowing that very night and becomes the star up above.

When I think of what gifts I bring to God I can relate to the littlest angel and my head drops low. Some days it is just a smile to a stranger on my morning walk or a listening ear to a friend on a phone call. I guess when I give anything to anyone, I am giving it to the universal Christ. May the sky be full of stars tonight.

Gifts I offer to God:

- Trying to take care of the earth by keeping my footprint small
- Doing everything I can to show people that they are loved
- Singing my heart out at every opportunity
- Sending laughter into the world
- Giving what I can to help the marginalized people in our community
- Reaching out to people who may be lonely
- Raising my children to live honestly and ethically
- Working hard for my union to ensure fairness for workers

Listening to God and Others

Sometimes a gift we give to God is simply to listen to another human being. And sometimes the occasion for this is itself a gift. I was able to receive and to give in this way recently in a conversation with someone I know casually and like but do not know well. I was in the right place at the right time, and she told me... about the disappointment of her recent two-week holiday ... that she'd had to have her cat put down... that the twenty-year-old son of her brother had just died by suicide. All I could do was listen, but that listening was a gift to her and to God - and the opportunity to do it was a gift to me.



Learning & Listening as I Go

I participate in spiritual groups whenever available, attend church as much as I can. This helps direct me on the path where I feel God needs me to go and reaches out a helping hand when I wander. Listening to others helps me to discern where I need to go and who I need to be.

Giving your Skills to those who Most Need It

My gift that I offer up is my willingness to share my knowledge and skill in sewing, to do mending repairs for folks at Chalmers, without charge to them.

What gift do I have to give to God?

I am not even sure who God is. But I do know that there is an Almighty Power, and that I am very fortunate in all that I have been given and the life that I lead. So, I have always tried

to give to the less fortunate. All my career I worked in mental health and in the prison and parole system. I tried to make a difference in how the patients and offenders were looked after. Above all I tried to listen and give them hope. Not hope of something unrealistic, but hope that things would get better, and that they would find some peace in their lives.

Of Music and Listening



I learned early that I had a special gift of listening to people and also of harmony. I have observed the power of listening helps people to heal. God gave me this gift to be used and I offer it to people whenever I see the need. I believe people need to be heard more rather than told what to do to fix their problems. In hearing their own voice, they become aware of what they need to solve their problems in a way that works for them. Since the invent of social media, listening seems to have become a dying art.

Music motivates people. It motivates them in battle, in ceremony, in times of celebration and in worship. I offer my gift of harmony to God.

Willingness

I'm not really sure what to say. What can I give Him? What is my gift? Maybe a willingness to give God the benefit of the doubt, (because I certainly haven't been able to make sense of life). Trust & patience. Perseverance of the saints.

Devotion

As a "gift I give to God", I would say: a devotion to self-knowing and healing.

My Gift to God

I offer to God the gift of trust.

The Community of Harcourt's endless Gifts to God

- Chalmers support – volunteers & donations
- Saturday Night Suppers – volunteers & donations
- Gardeners – volunteer planters, weeders to grow food for Chalmers
- The Quilter Group – quilts are donated to those who need

- Prayer Shawl group – gives shawls to those needing to be held in care
- Singing in the choir
- Singing Hymns in the congregation
- Reading Scripture on Sunday Service
- Leading portions of the Manna service
- Leadership in groups and service and other groups in Harcourt
- Leading the service every Sunday and taking care of the congregation
- supporting refugees in every way that we can with respect including listening

* * * * *

When we reflect on these and the million not listed, we can't help but realize all have gifts to give and give throughout each day. The responses we have been offered here are **Gifts to God.**

Art at Harcourt

Nancy Ryan

If you attend Sunday services or come to midweek activities at Harcourt, you may have noticed that our walls now look a little less interesting. Hilary Slater's paintings which enhanced the sanctuary, greeting area and upper hall have been removed, and what a difference that makes! I loved looking at her art wherever I found it, and I was sorry to see it go.



"Art at Harcourt" was, I suppose, a bit of an experiment where we beautified the church all the while supporting an artist and generating some revenue for both. I would say that we certainly succeeded in the first instance, though in the second perhaps not so much. But as with most experiments, lessons have been learned. The beginning of summer (with Covid still an issue) was probably not the best time to launch the exhibit. And though we promoted Hilary's work in the e-letter so that Harcourt folk were in the know, other artists or gallery-goers in Guelph or even neighbours who might have dropped in to admire (and perhaps buy) her paintings, were not informed. In hindsight, we can see how to improve a really great concept.

I notice that the hooks carefully installed for Hilary by Mark Sears are still in place and I take this as a good omen. We need to do it again: invite more artists to show their work at Harcourt for their benefit and ours, and for our entire art-loving community.

More art at Harcourt seems like an initiative worthy of an aspiring community hub.

My Greatest Gift

Lisa Browning



As I tend to do a lot, I've put a bit of a spin on the suggested topic this month. The question/prompt was "What gifts do you bring to Harcourt and to the wider Guelph community?" But when I first read it, the question jumped out at me as "What are the greatest gifts you've been given?"

And my answer to that question may be surprising. The greatest gifts I have been given are the abuse and trauma I have experienced, and the long, "dark night of the soul" journey I had to go through as a means of dealing with that abuse and trauma.

For those who don't know the details of that story, here's a summary ...

On Easter weekend, 2012, I was admitted to Guelph General Hospital, under Form 1 (suicide watch) and suffering from PTSD. I was severely dehydrated and malnourished, and I had been living a life of hyper-vigilance, not eating, and rarely sleeping. It was the end of a very emotionally/verbally abusive relationship with a man who had chipped away at my self-esteem for the preceding three years, little by little, until only a shell of my former self remained. The doctors wanted to admit me to Homewood, but I refused. My perfectionistic self would not allow myself the 'luxury' of time off work, and complete attention to self. I did, however, agree to out-patient status, and spent a lot of time on my healing. First I had to deal with abuse itself, and the feeling and emotions I had as a result. Anger, fear, bitterness, and an underlying sense of shame. I did a lot of work and, with the help of some incredible people and programs at Homewood, I found my way out of the darkness.

*"You have to let your darkness shape your journey to the place of healing.
You have to go deeper than your mood, far beneath your emotion,
and down into the underworld of the very meaning of your life."*

Thomas Moore, *Dark Night of the Soul*

Had I been told, even a year or so ago, how I would answer the "What are the greatest gifts ..." question, I would have found it very difficult to believe. But things were a lot different, a year or so ago. At that time, I was just starting to understand what Judith Orloff meant when she said, "The things we're ashamed of turn out to be the greatest gifts we have to give." I was just starting to grasp the concept of our soul purpose being connected to our most difficult experiences in this life. And I hadn't yet even considered the possibility that this would serve as

my direct connection to so many, in our community and beyond, who have also experienced abuse and trauma in one form or another.

Had I not gone through trauma and abuse, I would not have been presented with that dark night of the soul journey. And had I not persevered through that journey, I would not have been able to look at my past experiences from a completely new perspective, thereby gaining the insight and clarity—and, yes, the confidence—required to help others do the same.

I can't begin to articulate how life-giving it is to me, and how grateful I feel, when people I have worked with reach out to me to tell me about the experience of sharing their story. Here are a few examples:

"Through the process of writing my story I experienced a vulnerability I hadn't known existed. By having the courage to push through my barriers and dissolve the fear that held me in a state of never being enough. I found myself in a space where healing occurs, spiritual growth emerges and empowerment begins."

"There was something really powerful and freeing about owning my story and letting it go. Through the process of writing I also accepted myself as good enough, and that in itself is a gift all its own."

"This journey of digging deep and sinking in has been utterly transformative—allowing old wounds to see the light of day and finally heal."

Gloria Steinem once said, "The final stage of healing is using what happens to you to help other people." One of the most powerful and poignant examples of that came from a writer in one of my most recent anthologies, who wrote to tell me about what he has been doing since the book was published:

"I have been handing them out to customers, and recently sat down with the son of one of my customers, who is dealing with crystal meth at the moment. He wants to get together again as I think he sees hope at the end of the tunnel, and is ready to tackle his demons head on! Only because of you, and gathering these stories of hope, are people realizing they can do it too! What an amazing gift you are allowing to be shared with those who need it so badly! You have set a spark in me that I'm ready to work on full steam ahead. Feet to the ground, and out there just to be an ear, to share my struggle with addiction, and to offer hope."

I totally agree with Gabor Maté, who said, "Our most painful emotions point us to our greatest possibilities." I am grateful to have experienced the pain that I did. It truly has become

my greatest gift, and I am beyond grateful to be able to pass that gift on to as many others as I can.

Harcourt's Heritage: The Generosity of Caroline Harcourt

Marilyn Whiteley



In the spring of 1888, teen-aged Caroline Forbes came to assist in the Sunday school that Nellie Goodeve and two or three other women from Guelph's Congregational church had begun in the Brooklyn district of the town. This area of the flats south of the Speed River did not have a good reputation, while Caroline's family lived in the gracious, large stone house named Summerville on what is now Harcourt Drive. Caroline's father, Robert Forbes, owned woolen mills in Hespeler. He wouldn't let Caroline go alone down the hill into the neighbourhood of the Sunday school but sent her brother with her. Accompanied by her brother she went, and there she began a commitment to the Brooklyn Sunday school that stayed with her for the rest of her life.

In 1904, the Congregational church asked Chalmers Presbyterian church for assistance with the Sunday school mission, and the following year one of Chalmers members, Robert Harcourt, became superintendent of the Brooklyn Sunday school. He was a chemistry professor at the Ontario Agricultural College. In October of 1910, Robert's wife, Mary, gave birth to a son, John, but Mary died less than two months later. Robert Harcourt and Caroline Forbes married in August of 1917. Caroline's father had died in 1895 and her mother in 1911; now Caroline, Robert, and John lived in Summerhill.

Robert served as superintendent of the Sunday school from 1905 until ill health forced him to resign in 1940. (He died three years later, in 1943.) Caroline did not hold that kind of formal responsibility, but she laboured extensively in the mission and in the neighbourhood. The Sunday school had acquired a building on Albert Street, but by 1923, it was too small. A Board of Management was organized to plan for the construction of a new school, and Caroline Harcourt was named Honorary President, with Robert Harcourt one of the members.

While the construction of the building on Martin Avenue was largely financed by Caroline Harcourt, it was deemed important that everyone, however modest their means, had a chance to participate. They could buy cardboard "bricks," with the money going toward the construction. It is not recorded whether this was Caroline Harcourt's idea, but it clearly fits with her ideals. The Sunday school held rummage sales for many years. The clothes were sold

for very low prices, but they were *sold*, not given away, for Caroline Harcourt believed that for the sake of people's self-esteem, they should pay something, however small, for each garment. She also taught people how to bank, and she often sent a load of coal, a voucher for groceries to someone in need or connected someone in the neighbourhood with possible employment.

When I was preparing to write the history of Harcourt church in 2006, children's author Jean Little gave me a remarkable example of Caroline Harcourt's timely generosity. She reported,

When our father, Dr. Llew Little, was a young man, Mrs. Harcourt encouraged him to seek higher education. He often preached at the Brooklyn Mission. Although his family was poor they struggled and saved to send him to university. One year, however, the money for his tuition could not be raised. Finally Dad prayed, "Dear God, I have done all I can, if you want me to go on you must help me." The following morning a letter was delivered. It read, "Dear Llew, I think you might be needing this." The money for his tuition was enclosed. God had answered his prayer with the help of Mrs. Harcourt. Her generosity was always practised without fanfare. Our father thought the world of her.



Caroline Harcourt had been one of the three trustees when the Martin Avenue building was constructed, and she held the deed for the property. Early in 1952, she deeded the property to the Home Mission Board of the United Church of Canada. When she died in February of 1953, her will included a \$35,000 endowment fund for the Sunday school mission, and a further provision if the mission became a congregation—which it did, when Harcourt Memorial United Church was formed three years later, on March 4, 1956.

Most of us do not have the means to give to a faith community and the community at large as Caroline Harcourt did. But this is our heritage; this is what helped Harcourt Memorial United Church come into being. May we be faithful heirs and stewards of this remarkable legacy and, as we are able, may we follow Caroline Harcourt's remarkable example.

