

PROFILES – RETIREES



Brenda Gibson

I graduated St Andrew's College, Saskatoon in 1985 after completing my B.A at the University of Winnipeg. At the time St. Andrew's had an all male teaching staff, and I appreciated that these men were excellent professors and passionate teachers of the prairie culture. During my education at St Andrew's I did a one year internship at The Pas, MB. This internship was a gift for many reasons, including the February Presbytery meeting that was held at Lynn Lake MB.

In June 1985 I was ordained at the Annual Meeting of Conference, in my hometown of Winnipeg. My first pastoral charge was Theodore-Springside, two small towns near Yorkton, Saskatchewan. As a city-girl, the rural learning curve was steep. I embraced the country life and enjoyed this experience immensely.

Four years later I entered a year-long CPE training (as it was called then) at Foothills Hospital, Calgary. This was a wonderful learning opportunity and once again, my supervisor and colleagues were thoughtful, caring individuals.

In 1990 I joined the Rev. Dennis Butcher in team ministry at Sherwood Park U.C, near Edmonton, AB. I appreciated working with Dennis, as we were a collaborative, respectful team, in a congregation of gifted people.

After 10 years I accepted a call at McClure United Church in Edmonton. This congregation deeply embraced its staff, and cared about its well-being. This congregation deeply embodied Christian values.

Having married into the military, I served a year and a half as a civilian chaplain at Base Borden, near Barrie Ontario. I enjoyed working with bilingual personnel, nine inter-denominational clergy, and the first military Imam. After 2 years the military moved us to Winnipeg, back to my roots. In Winnipeg I served at Kirkfield Park United Church where I was honoured to share ministry and communion with the Rev. Tony Maunder on a few occasions.

I then returned to the rural area, to Manitou-La Riviere Pastoral Charge. This was a great experience, in such a beautiful part of Manitoba, among welcoming, passionate people.

I finished the formal part of my career in North Kildonan U.C. for a 5 month appointment. This was a fun time as the congregation not only welcomed me, but we discerned together what the “new normal” would look like in this new era.

My ministry has taken me to many places, and I am grateful for all the people I have met, and all the experiences I have had. May God bless us all as we continue to serve within this great country and welcoming, wonderful church.

Charles (Chuck) Ross



I remember that back in the late 1970s, Carolyn Payton was the director of the Peace Corps. She coined the slogan “The toughest job you’ll ever love.”

I have often felt that way about ministry and working within the church. I spent 35 years in the RCAF and 21 years as a student and ordained minister. The Air Force was far easier.

The call to ministry was challenging- some of the hardest, most difficult and at the same time, most uplifting work and experiences in my life were with our United Church. Some of the most faith-filled and inspirational people and some of the most challenging relationships I had were in our United Church. Some of my angriest moments and happiest times were being a part of our United Church. Even when it appeared easy, ministry was really the “toughest job you’ll ever love.”

It was no easier for that itinerant preacher in first century Palestine. He never gave up, even under circumstances we can only presume to understand. Two thousand years later, in the shifting sands of our time, his message is still important and relevant- and we can’t stop our service to God and the world just because, from time to time, it gets a little tough.

I was very fortunate to be part of the communities of faith in the In-Community Program for Ordination (remember that?), Roland, Oakville, Pilot Mound, Treherne–Rathwell and Graysville over these past several seasons. Each of them has challenged and rewarded me in my ministry, taught me ways to live my faith and teach others and provided a communion of saints and friends in this world. For this I am grateful and indebted.

The page turns as I retire from yet another career, but at the same time, not. One might say ministry is kinda like farming- you don’t really retire, you just say you did.

Peace

Chuck Ross

Gordon Taylor



45 years of training for and serving in ministry cannot fit on 1 page. But more than that, who would read it?

I did not grow up wanting to be a minister. I wanted to be a lawyer. I wanted nothing to do with Church. But then Romans 5:5 happened, and plans changed. Looking back, I see how I was being helped along The Way.

As I entered Queen's Theological College, I started going to Chalmer's United. Deaconess Marg Quigley shaped my faith practice. Dr. Stan Lucyk revealed the beating heart of scripture and a dedication to inter-faith dialogue that is with me still. Fishburn-Marr (near Pincher Creek, AB) and Meaford United Church (ON) took me on as a summer student. After ordination (Bay of Quinte; 1978), I drove to Red Lake, ON, to grow into the responsibilities of ministry, find the love of my life (now Dr.) Eveline Milliken, and help rebuild a church destroyed by fire. From that distant post, I yearned for the fellowship of Presbytery. I chaired Cambrian's Christian Education and Social Action Committees engaging the *Telling My Story/Sharing My Faith* program, and opposing a proposal to bury nuclear waste in the area's mines.

At Gaetz Memorial UC (Red Deer, AB; 1981-87) I learned about team ministry. I conducted hundreds of weddings, 5 every other Saturday, thanks to the "cathedral" setting. I did not count the funerals. Each of those was too significant to become a statistic. I learned from those who grieved an infant, a 6 year old lost to leukemia, a brother murdered, a newlywed burned to death just weeks after the wedding, a family waiting in dread as the police drove up the lane. I remember the faces of the frightened and those at peace. I saw such faces during a term of CPE in the trauma and cardiac units of Foothills Hospital, Calgary. Hospital life, and especially a live birth and an autopsy, helped me appreciate anew the miracle that life is, and the need to seize each day with gratitude. Perhaps that is partly why I became involved in the anti-capital punishment movement.

In 1983, I began Doctor of Ministry studies at St. Stephen's College, studying abroad with Matthew Fox and Brian Swimme, Gordon Turner and Carl Schneider. My research found that redress of shame rather than resolution of guilt or fear was far more likely to account for strong faith. Our first child, Katherine was born and thanks to Eveline, I was able complete my D.Min. in 1989. Likewise I was privileged to sit on the Inter-Church/Interfaith Committee which prepared the *Bearing Faithful Witness* document. As a late addition to this team, I was grateful just to sit with so fine a gathering of scholars.

With the Victoria Statement freshly minted in 1988, we found ourselves in Winnipeg at the start of 25 years with Fort Garry UC. FGUC was full of great people too numerous to name. I had the opportunity to team with a variety of colleagues, two of whom went on to their own ordination. Our second child, Hilary, was born, and the congregation, like Gaetz, was wonderful in supporting us and our children as I sought to focus and energize our congregational mission to share the abundant life of Jesus.

Two important things came to FGUC from chairing the MNWO Committee on Evangelism and Congregational Development at that time. First, I was exposed to the 32 week *Disciple* Bible Study, which I subsequently led many times. Then, with three other under-40 ministers, I was invited to study evangelism at Columbia Theological Seminary with Faculty like Ben Johnson, Walter Bruggemann, Barbara Brown Taylor and Roger Noshioka. John Hogman also attended and presented a fine paper entitled *The United Church as Broken Myth*. For my part, I clarified my realization that the unique "possession" of the church is not love, but Jesus, and the best gift we can bring to faith, inter-faith, and non-faith discussions is insight into how his life enhances love.

Winnipeg Presbytery was the "congregation I attended;" so I tried to say "yes" to invitations to serve – whether on the Board of St. Matthew's Maryland Community Ministry which I co-chaired for a number of years, or as a Director of Church Development, Inc., or as Chair of Presbytery for a term. In 2000, I was elected as a Commissioner to General Council 37. I have wonderful memories of the vibrant Youth worship and Dr. Peter Wyatt's profound acknowledgement of our "solidarity in sin" with respect to Residential Schools. Nationally, I worked on organizing committees for one *Faith in the City* conference (with Rosemary Reuther, who had previously shaped my feminist consciousness), and two of the *More Franchises than Tim Horton's* conferences. There, Marina Nemat, known for *A Prisoner in Tehran*, taught lessons in courage and Leonard Sweet and the creative team of Midnight Oil helped me see worship must be EPIC if it was to speak to this age: Experiential, Participatory, Image Rich, & Communal.

Being a Conference appointee to the U. of W. Faculty of Theology Advisory Council led to 9 years on the Lt. Governor's Advisory Committee for the *Advancement of Inter-religious Understanding Award*. What a joy it was to meet bright spiritual souls from every tradition. During my first sabbatical, I added to my tool kit Rev. Karen Hilfman-Millson's translation of the 5 Greek elements of church DNA into the more accessible and memorable *PALS+* (prayer, action, learning, sharing, growth). Hospitality and the dance of the Trinity (*perichoresis*) made its way into my chapter in *Three Ways of Grace*. Her decoder-ring model for organizing small groups remains relevant to the decentralizing church of our age of Covid-19.

After 25 years at FGUC and Intentional Interim training, I accepted Paul Campbell's suggestion to do "gap" ministry at the United Church in Meadowood (UCIM). The congregation, staff and I had so much fun together that 9 months quickly became six years. We burned the mortgage; became the 100th Affirming Congregation in the UCC; welcomed Moderator Gary Paterson with Easter jazz; developed community grief groups, partnered with College Jean Sauvé, and responded to climate change by selling hundreds of trees at cost into our neighborhood. I took a trip to Israel with mentor Stan Lucyk and several congregants. Three years later, on my second sabbatical, I co-led another trip there.

Three more leaders have helped my ministry practice over these last six years. Carey Nieuwhof has asked questions we'd rather avoid, such as "why are we not growing," and "how can we break out of stale patterns?" Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in entertaining and erudite style, has helped reveal the Jewishness of Jesus, decoding oddities of the Gospels, the paradoxes of sibling rivalry, our need for law as well as love, and balancing individual and communal responsibilities. Finally, John Pentland, in *Fishing Tips*, has given rich insights into casting nets in a new direction – it is worth reading at least three times! As the UCIM leadership Board studied these texts with me, we made choices that led to significant improvement in attendance, financial stability, and joyful spirit. When we confirmed 22 adults into membership in the spring of 2019, it seemed a good time pass the torch.

I had not wanted to be a minister. But thanks to God's grace, and family, wonderful followers of Jesus and friends who worship God by another name, I found in ministry my true calling. To paraphrase John O'Donohue: may a slow wind likewise work God's ways of love around you and within, an invisible cloak, to mind YOUR life.

(The Rev. Dr.) Gordon Taylor, B.A., M.Div., D.Min.



Ken Thomas

I grew up in the United Church in Brandon. My paternal grandmother was the daughter of a Methodist Circuit Rider in Michigan. My first sense of call came as a teenager. I met Dr. McLure, who was touring Canada talking about his experiences in China. I spent several years with the Ecumenical Institute based out of Chicago, where I encountered some serious theology. I was also good at math, so I became a professional accountant. But something kept nagging at me, a growing restlessness. One day in church I was reminded of the Gospel of Thomas, logion 70, "When you bring forth that in yourselves, this which is yours will save you." It was time.

At this point, I want to thank Rev. Paul Campbell, whose example and whose encouragement was instrumental in my accepting the call to ministry and attending seminary.

Long ago, I discovered a book about John Wesley. Maybe I have Methodism in my DNA, but the more theology I have learned, the more staunchly Wesleyan I become. The model of Methodist circuits may be our best hope for the rural church, if we can let it work.

My period of pastoral ministry was short, but truly rewarding. It was a privilege and a blessing to serve at Roland United Church, a wonderful congregation in a remarkable community. Both Jackie and I cherish the memories of the seven years we spent there, the gracious support we received, and the many friends we made.

It has been a journey - CPA, M Div., not a common combination of letters, but one of many cherished memories and wonderful people.

I am not sure there is such a thing as retirement, not from the call of God to serve. I continue to be blessed serving on the property commission and as treasurer at Sandy Saulteaux, opportunities to work with great people, and to serve God using different gifts. The new normal, whatever it is, will still have a place for retired ministers.

And in all of this is, I have had the love and support of my wife Jackie; to her I owe the greatest thank you.

Blessings and Shalom

Ken Thomas

Cathie Waldie



As I reflect on my spiritual journey and call to ministry, I am aware of the different strands that were part of my Christian formation. I was born into a family with deep roots in the United Church: both my grandfather and uncle were ministers. Baptized at St. John's United in Winnipeg and confirmed at John Black Memorial United, I was active in many aspects of church life while growing up. During my teens I attended St. Mary's Academy for five years, which introduced me to the spirituality of the Roman Catholic faith tradition. It was the era of guitar music and folk masses, which I often participated in, finding myself drawn to the contemplative aspect of worship. After high school I studied at Mennonite Brethren Bible College (a forerunner of Canadian Mennonite University) for a year, where I learned about the Mennonite faith tradition with its emphasis on Biblical teaching, issues of peace and justice, and beautiful choral singing.

Around the time all of this was happening, John Black Memorial welcomed its first female minister, Lynette Miller. She and her teammate Ross Williams saw something in me that I didn't and encouraged my church involvement. The summer before I was to begin studying nursing at the University of Manitoba I had a spiritual experience in which I sensed God calling me to ministry. My initial reaction to this was "No, I'll do anything but that!" However, the Spirit continued to move and work in my life, and several years later I found myself entering Emmanuel College in Toronto as an "intended candidate" for ministry. Those years of theological education were rich in learning, community and personal growth, which further broadened my understanding of faith, spirituality and the Church. In 1984 I was ordained and settled on a two-point pastoral charge, Big Valley-Erskine, in east-central Alberta.

And now, some 36 years later, I am reflecting on the gift of this vocation that I initially resisted so strongly. I am grateful for the journey that pastoral ministry has taken me on, both geographically and spiritually. After four years of serving in Alberta I spent one year travelling and learning in Europe and Israel on a worship fellowship I received at Emmanuel. That was followed by six years serving the Teulon Balmoral pastoral charge, another six years at First United Church in Dryden, ten years with Crossroads pastoral charge, and finally ministry with Pembina Parish pastoral charge for the last nine years. Along the way I was married, blessed with three children: Nate, Rachel and Jay, and divorced.

Each of the communities of faith I have served has been unique, helping me to learn, grow and deepen my awareness of the Spirit's presence in all of life. Ministry has been a deeply fulfilling vocation for me, and it has been a privilege to walk with others through some of their most profound life moments. I am thankful to have had the opportunity to serve God and Christ's church in this way and look forward to continuing to serve in other ways, including the ministry of spiritual direction. Retiring in a time of pandemic has made me want to explore the spiritual resources of our faith tradition and others more fully, sharing them with those seeking meaning, peace and hope. God's grace has been abundant, and I trust that it will continue to hold all of us through what is, and is to come!



Janet Walker

At this time in my life, I'm living in a place of gratitude. I have been fortunate in my life to encountered many on my journey that helped shaped me to be the person I am today.

My family of birth – raised me in the church.

My experiences in my studies at Queen's, and the various ministries in which I worked, congregation, Conference, Cuba, and then I came to Winnipeg Presbytery, St Andrew's River Heights and Churchill Park, all of these helped shape the minister I am.

When we arrived in Winnipeg, my daughter Kathryn adopted a grandma for life, with our good friend Eleanor Geib became part of our family.

Kathryn grew-up in the church. A village of church people helped to raise her. I hope though now as an adult she can forgive me for the times I chose the church instead of her, leaving her to host Christmas at 10 years old while I responded to a pastoral emergency, not allowing her to take dance classes with her friends on Sunday mornings because we went to church and running out to meetings when the fire alarm was set off because of the microwave. Kathryn, please forgive me, Also though I need to thank Kathryn for being my daughter – for bringing light and laughter into my life.

I have to thank everyone for their patience when I exasperated them, and also to thank everyone for inspiring me.

Especially I thank those who have supported me through these last months of my illness.

Everyone asks – what's next for you Janet? For the moment I'm the proud mother of a bride to be. Kathryn and her fiancé Brandon will be married Sept. 18. And I will be a grandmother in January.

What else is next? I like the words from Leonard Cohen in "Anthem"

"There is a crack, a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in"

We look for the light that comes through the cracks. I'm open to that light.

A. A. Milne said in Winnie the Pooh "How lucky I am to have something that makes saying good-bye so hard."

Thank you all.