

**PROFILE- RETIREES**

*(A banquet celebrating the 2024 Retirees was held at Crestview United Church, Winnipeg on May 15, 2024)*



**Elizabeth Brown**

From the first moment I stepped into Wilmot United Church in Fredericton, NB, back in 1985ish I have always felt warmly welcomed and included; that the United Church was a place to call home and that God's amazing spirit was here. As I explored my call to ordained ministry from Maritime Conference, and chose to go to McGill University and United Theological College in Montreal, I discovered the wider church community. Internships at First United in Ottawa and Stanley Pastoral Charge in NB (along with a CPE unit at Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital in Fredericton), taught me more about multipoint (5 points!) rural church folk, hospital chaplaincy, and downtown city ministries. Settled in Massey – a three-point rural pastoral charge – in northern Ontario, Manitou Conference, and given a manse to live in was a blessing for me as a single parent and my family. We thought the settlement committee had given us the very best gift ever! After a call to overseas ministry didn't work out, I found a new call to First United in Lethbridge, AB and discovered opportunities to learn new skills and develop gifts and talents. Answering a call from Trinity United in Winnipeg was another learning opportunity and a discovery that this ministry was indeed another blessing and gift for my ministry and life. Making the decision to retire back to northern Ontario to the "home" of my partner Tom is the right and good next step on my journey. Each step has taught me so much; each step reminded me of that amazing spirit of God; each step a new and exciting time with wonderful people along the way. Although all the things I mentioned from my faith and life journey seem all good, there were always learning and growing challenges along the way. These make up our faith stories!

*Respectfully submitted*  
*Elizabeth Brown*

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**Kathleen (Kathy) Platt**

Kathy with 3-month-old grandchild, Mia.

I studied at the Centre for Christian Studies from 1995 to 2000. In 1999 we traveled to Nicaragua for our Global Perspectives experience. It was my first major trip out of the country, and it was profoundly moving. While there, I tried to call home to touch base with Art and our three sons, but much to my frustration I couldn't get through to them. In those years we had a clunky desktop computer and the only way to connect to the internet was through dial-up, which tied up the only phone line we had; cell phones were not yet a reality for most of us. Clearly the boys were enjoying a LOT of computer time while I was away since I could rarely get through on the phone! Fast forward to 2020, when the only way to gather for worship was through Zoom. Many of our elders used their iPads or laptops to connect, and I found myself teaching them how to mute their mics and change their view...I became the technical expert for our on-line worship – ye Gods!! As one person described it so aptly: many of us who were once small-town, country preachers found ourselves becoming tele-evangelists!

Yes, there have indeed been many changes both in the world, and in our church. I feel very privileged that amid all those twists & turns, I've had a job that fed my soul and liberated my imagination. I'm deeply grateful for the education I received from CCS – I was given the inspiration and the insight needed to carry pastoral care, education and social justice into every facet of my ministry and to better enable me to navigate our ever-changing world. I was invited into people's hearts & homes at some of the most vulnerable times in their lives. I will carry their stories with me, holding them with the love and the honor they deserve.

Many thanks to the communities of faith that have made me laugh, made me cry and taught me much about life and about love. I began in Minnedosa and will retire from Minnedosa. In between I was at Kelwood, McCreary, Alonsa; then to Regina (Sunset United); then to Portage La Prairie (McKenzie United). Now, I have new adventures ahead. Hopefully, our grandchildren will get to know a Nanna who is not quite so tired out!

Carrie Newcomer's Song is a good message to end with:

*I will sing a new song – the old one carried me this far and for so long*

*But it's time to walk on, lifting up heart and voice with a new song.*

*I don't know how – no I don't know how – I've never done this before – at least until now. But I will sing – I will sing a new song.*

*Blessed be...*

*Kathy Platt*



**Lori Stewart**

Recently, I was asked to talk about the difference between Diaconal and Ordained ministry. When I described diaconal ministry, I found these words of Ted Dodd particularly apt, “The diaconal way of working is very community oriented, seeking to draw out the gifts of everyone, working in groups, and fostering partnerships. Diaconal ministers move with flexibility into areas where they are needed, where service is required.”

Ministry for me seems to have been characterized by working with groups and moving with flexibility. When I was commissioned, I started in a fairly typical position for diaconal ministers at that time: I was settled to Central United in St. Thomas where I was in a team ministry with an ordained minister. I participated in worship each week but I also was deeply involved in organizing the Christian Education program for children, youth, and adults, something I loved doing.

When a position for Stewardship Minister came up in the London Conference Office, a few people tapped me on the shoulder about applying. I hesitated because I didn’t know much about stewardship at the time, but was urged to try. What they really needed was someone with educational skills; the stewardship part could be learned. I ended up being offered the job and stayed for almost nine years. I particularly remember from those years the people who shared their own profoundly moving stewardship stories, my work with volunteers to create funny plays to entice churches to engage in stewardship, and how people’s giving was motivated by a deep love of God and the church.

It was during those years that I was part of the Committee on Diaconal Ministry at the General Council Office. It was a time when the church honoured diaconal ministry in an intentional way within its structures, not as a special interest group but as part of the church’s ministry that needed to be lifted up. I was privileged to meet with diaconal ministers from across the country twice a year to find ways to promote and advocate for this form of ministry.

In 2001, I went to Jamaica as a United Church Overseas Personnel. There was culture shock in those first years and a need for flexibility. I started out as the Office Administrator for the Regional Council while also working with the Institute for Training and Leadership Development, where I was the staff tutor for a group of theological students in ministry placements in the Region. I travelled around to hear their sermons and provide support with their studies. The greatest reward was in providing training for elders in the Region, some of whom then went on to do Lay Pastor’s training, and ended up in the ordained stream. With each success, they became more confident to take the next step. In Jamaica, I was called on to do all kinds of things that I didn’t feel I had skill in, but my “service was required”.

After six years in Jamaica, I ended up back in team ministry at Sturgeon Creek and then Fort Garry United. But now congregational ministry wasn't where I felt called to be, so when I was urged to apply for the position of Development Coordinator at the Centre for Christian Studies, I decided to give it a go. I didn't really know much about development when I started, but I was now experienced at moving with flexibility into areas where I was needed.

It seems that that's what I have been doing ever since I was commissioned in 1988.

*Respectfully submitted,*  
*Lori Stewart*



**Deborah Vitt**

You can't imagine how many times over the past 7 years, I have mentally composed this bio sketch. Some of my imaginings were witty and darn right hilarious and others were contemplative and full of sage wisdom and insight. And so you would think, when it was time to put ink to paper (or keyboard to computer), this task would be a no-brainer. I am thinking now, that I should have actually written down some of my thoughts and not stored them in my ever-shrinking cloud memory.

"Retiring? I thought you had retired years ago." Nope – on June 30, 2017, I just felt called to take a giant leap back from the daily rigors of ministry a little earlier than the prescribed age of 65. And I am forever grateful for the circumstances in my life that enabled me to actively listen to that early call of the retiring spirit.

I guess finding one's path or direction in life is very much about "call". Of course, that word has significant understanding in the world of ministry. I never felt however, that I could respond with both feet fully committed to the not so gentle nudgings or call, until I learned of the gift of diaconal ministry.

Many thanks to friends from the Western Field Based Program, who first listened to my wonderings and strongly suggested I enter the discernment process through Selkirk Presbytery. I had been an active lay person for many years in the church - serving on committees at the local, Presbytery, Conference, and National levels which introduced me to some amazing life/spirit-changing faith experiences. Those early formative years laid the groundwork of my faith.

- The Committee of Women's Ministries
- Free to be Friends

- O Creator
- The Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women in Church and Society
- Re-Imagining, Minneapolis
- Roots and Wings and all the women's gatherings too many to mention
- Affirm United

I believe it is so very important to name these early life events that helped shape my faith, my understanding of what it means to be an ally, a feminist, and my ongoing awareness of the need to make space for all to be welcome at the table. I am forever grateful.

After 5 years of ministry studies at the Centre for Christian Studies, which included field placements at Immanuel United (Sharon, Ian) and North End Stella Community Ministry, I was commissioned in May of 2000 in Portage la Prairie and settled into ministry with the fine folks at Stony Mountain and Lilyfield. What a wonderful experience that was to spend time in rural ministry with such dedicated people. Then it was back to work as volunteer support coordinator at North End Stella Community Ministry, where Karen, Verna, and Edna shared their wisdom and teachings.

In 2004, I was diagnosed with Ovarian Cancer. Yeah – that pretty much sucked. Many thanks to the steady support from Linda Murray during that time and of course all my friends and colleagues who found creative ways to walk with me on that journey. To Melody McKellar, your love in action provided spiritual grounding to our family during those early days.

In 2005, I accepted a call to Cloverdale and Selkirk United Churches (my home congregation) where I shared in team ministry with Ken Delisle (2005-2008) and Chris Yuzdepski. Over time, Cloverdale and Selkirk dissolved their pastoral relationship and I stayed on in fulltime ministry with Selkirk folks til 2017. Together we were able to re-imagine and literally build a welcoming worship space and accessible community/fellowship hall that continues to serve the needs of our community.

Never would I have imagined my life to include so many years of service and ministry in the church. I am grateful for all the connections I have made in this United Church of ours - to the congregations I served and the people I have privileged to know - this lapsed Menno kid from Austin, Manitoba has much to be thankful for.

To Randy, Adam, Camalee, Clare, Kathleen, and some pretty amazing grandkids Isaac, Felix, Benjamin, and Jude.....your support, love, laughter, and fun times are such a gift.

To my friends and colleagues.....your love in action has left an indelible imprint on my heart and I am forever grateful. Life has a way of moving on and I believe in my heart of hearts, God's love is constant.

*"Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land: for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."*

Genesis 28:15

*Respectfully submitted,  
Deborah Vitt*

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