



St. John's United Church of The United Church of Canada

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Office Hours: M-F, 9am-1pm

PASTORAL LETTER

Dec. 12, 2025

This past week, I asked if anyone knew how to replace kitchen taps. A few members of the congregation heroically stepped forward, only to walk away in defeat. The thing is, I really appreciated them showing up. It reminded me of the days when I lived in a manse where, if something went wrong, someone from the village would come by and try to help. I remember my first year in a manse, I had a meeting at my house, and one of the women said, "These curtains are awful!" Next thing I knew, there was a battalion of UCW members showing up, taking measurements, choosing material, and sewing curtains. Another time, I called a local electrician who came to church to tell him that I couldn't get the dryer working. Dougie Kennedy, a quiet gentleman, put his toolbox in his truck and drove for half an hour to where I lived. He went into the laundry room, put his toolbox down and said, "Oh, yes, yes, yes," and put the plug into the socket on the wall. I said to him, "Dougie, you and I will never speak of this again." We had a good laugh about it when I visited him this summer, when I was in Cape Breton. He's 91 years old now. That was 25 years ago.

Last Saturday afternoon, I had the service for a young father named Pat who went missing while out on his four-wheeler. His brother spoke, his daughter spoke, and two of his young sons spoke through their tears. They had written their speeches. I was deeply moved. I said to his daughter after the service, "You're a very good writer. I hope you keep writing." Pat was the kind of guy who could take apart anything and taught his daughter how to drive; a proud moment for both of them. I stayed as long as I could afterwards, receiving a lot of hugs myself. I think that in these times, the church steps up. The kids go to Harrison Trimble, and it's hard to think that people so young have to endure a loss so great.

On Sunday morning, we had an incredible church service. I say incredible because we had a lot of people in church and a great choir of twenty-five people. After the service, I noticed they were all standing in the choir loft getting their photo taken, and it occurred to me that I was witnessing a historic moment as they stood for a group photo, just like all the other ones proudly displayed of the choir over the decades out in the Great Hall. Then, they asked me to join them! Gosh!



That afternoon, Lori-Ann had to drive Allie back to school. Halo wouldn't let her go, and it was so cute. After they left, a church member gave me a drive to Cobb's Funeral Home to preside at the service for a man named Sonny who died far too young, far too soon after a mental health crisis. The family and I had planned the service the week before. An aunt was going to sing two songs. When I arrived, I met the aunt who said that she couldn't do the songs now because the guitar player couldn't make it. I felt bad because music helps us grieve, so I asked to look at her music, and she showed me. I said, "All is not lost. I can play those pieces on the keyboard





up front.” She beamed, “You can??” So, we took a few minutes before the service to go over them. Next thing I know, I’m helping to lead a group sing-along of “Sonny’s Dream” by Ron Hynes with a room filled with grieving people. Turns out, the aunt and the mother of the young man were from West Mabou, Cape Breton. I thought, “That explains it.” We all got along so well. Such a devastating loss for them all.

On Monday, I was asked to attend a private wake for a 16-year-old boy at Fergusons Funeral Home. His parents, sister, and aunt and uncle were there. So was his dog, Titan. Titan is 110 pounds of love. I once read and believe that animals grieve, too. There’s a thought that it’s ok to bring them along when people are dying or have died because their senses are so strong, and we wouldn’t want them to think that someone just suddenly left them. Titan jumped up to the side of the open casket a few times and put his paws on the edge to see his boy, who was a little kid when they brought Titan home as a puppy. As I watched Titan standing there, I thought, “My heart wasn’t ready for that.”



The next morning, I found myself in a three-hour Zoom meeting for the regional church. It’s good and important work, and I drank enough tea to keep my eyes open. At one point in the meeting, they talked about a church that had been demolished and the congregation disbanded. My ears perked up, and I said, “I’d like to apply there!”



That afternoon and through the week, I was out visiting and ate more sweets than I should have. I love seeing people’s Christmas decorations! A family came to see me, and the Friendship Group gathered for their potluck. I had errands to do with my wife, but there was a big part of me that wanted to stay and sing Christmas Carols with them, accompanied by Susan Estabrooks on her ukulele! What an incredible group they have built. It’s the one group in the church that seems to have as its mission to welcome new people.

The last day has been spent putting together Christmas services, including the Children’s Pageant and the Quiet Communion service next week. The pageant is always a lot of fun, filled with music and sweet performances, and lots of laughs. Quiet Communion is more about gathering in a darkened sanctuary lit by candles and hearing words of hope and singing carols and letting ourselves experience the story of Christmas in a quieter, more thought-provoking way through poetry, sacred texts, light, darkness, and music. It’s a team effort at St. John’s over the Christmas season to make it special with music, storytelling, a Christmas Eve service at a nursing home, and even a “Come to the Stable” event where we will display manger scenes from the homes of members of the congregation after church on December 14th. We’ve also had a lovely Advent gathering each Sunday after church. The main service will be on December 24th at 7pm.

It’s been such a busy week that it came and went faster than I realized. Tonight, we had the service for Cameron, the young man who died at 16. I’ve been talking with his parents all week, helping them figure out a way to have a service that would honour a kid who loved Pokémon, pizza, Fortnite, and his friends. It hits close to home. They had recently moved from Ontario to give Cameron a better life. He was a student at Harrison Trimble. I asked what music Cameron liked, to see if there was something we could play during a gathering. They said he liked heavier music and couldn’t think of an appropriate song. I said, “I’ve been stalking you all on Facebook, and I saw that Cameron attended a concert by The Trews (a Maritime band, they sing “Highway of Heroes”) with his best friend,” (whom he loved like a brother). They said that it would be a great idea to use their music, as there was a strong family connection, since Cameron’s best friend’s dad played in the band, and they got to go to the concerts for free. I remember the band from when I was in university in my twenties, and we all loved that they were a cool band from here.

So when the time came, we gathered together in the chapel. I opened with the tenderest words I could write. There was a lot of crying. How can one not feel powerless and heartbroken in that room? There was so much despair. Cameron's mum and dad spoke. They thanked everyone for coming. They were so proud of their son. His aunt spoke. His new friend from Harrison Trimble spoke. He was a brave and thoughtful young man. His best friend's dad spoke. His sister shared her heart, as did a few other friends. One man noted that Cameron's dad could fix anything, and how sad it was that he couldn't fix this. (Cameron died from a health-related issue.)

I read the words from John's Gospel where Jesus talked about laying down your life for your friends, since Cameron's buddies meant the world to him. When it came time for the service to come to a close, I walked down and stood in front of the family and placed my hand on Cameron's casket and said these words:

Cameron Denis Tyler
Your life we honour
your departure is hard to accept
your memory we will cherish
In grief at your death
but in gratitude for your life
and for the privilege of sharing it with you
we commit your heart to our hearts.
Be at rest now
rest in the hearts and the minds of those who love you so much.

When I finished reading those words from the paper I was holding, I handed the paper to Cameron's best friend and said, "Keep this." I stayed for a while talking to people. I think we all trauma-bonded because there were lots of hugs and tears from people I hadn't known a week ago. Cameron's grandmother was sitting by herself, and I could tell that she was having a hard time. I sat beside her and put my hand on her shoulder, and I leaned in and asked, "Can I make you a cup of tea?" She nodded and smiled through her tears. As of this morning, the service has been viewed 1100 times.

As I was leaving Fergusons, one of the funeral home directors gave me a large orange envelope. He said, "Read that when you get home." When I got home, I opened it, and it was a letter from Cameron's best friend's father, who had travelled from Ontario to be here. I had spoken to his son before the service to let him know so many people were surrounding him with love now, and how friends are friends for life, no matter what. In the letter, he thanked me for everything. I loved The Trews in my 20s, and now I like The Trews even more in my 50s. It was very gracious of him.



Yesterday, I called my wife after her work day was over and asked, "Can I take you out for a coffee?" She said she would love that. So, I drove home to get her, and we sat and talked and tried to figure out what the rest of December would be like and I thought to myself, "How do I get to be the guy who sits across the table from her?" I've wondered that for over 20 years. I guess when I see how short life can be, those moments become more meaningful.

This morning, a lawyer called the church just after I arrived about a bequest. I spoke to her for a few minutes. I told her I was the minister. She said, "Oh! I hear that your congregation is on fire!" which isn't the best way to describe a church that's burned down a few times; however, I appreciated the sentiment. I said to her, "We've got a lot of Spirit here, that's for sure." I feel it, and I know you all feel it too. It's just nice to hear someone else say it.



This will be the last pastoral letter for the year 2025. I sincerely thank each and every one of you for taking these moments with me as I talk about church, faith, and ministry as I see it day to day. Thank you for the encouragement to continue this part of our church's ministry and for sharing these letters with friends and family. If anything, these letters show that the church truly is on the move and needed just as much as ever. I don't think the church should ever try to be relevant because what's current today is quickly traded for what's next and newer. We should be who we are as the followers of Jesus to remind the culture around us of what it means to serve the city, for when we serve the people whom Jesus came to save, we will find our own salvation.

Thank you for all the ways you continue to support St. John's United Church. May we continue to grow and reflect the light of the Christ child around us.




A Merry, Holy, and Happy Christmas to you all.



The Rev. Aaron Billard
Minister

*The bulletin and pastoral letter are dedicated in Loving Memory of
David Keays, Don & Norma O'Hanley, Allen Hill,
Gussy and Whiskey; missing you all
Love, Marilyn*

NOTICES, UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS

Check our website at www.stjohnsmoncton.ca
for **Sunday online Worship links**, calendar, and more.

Dec. 14	Sun.	 11:00 a.m.	WORSHIP and Sunday School - 3 rd Sunday of Advent – Joy - Nativity Scenes display “Come..to the Stable” in the Fellowship Room	
Dec. 14	Sun.		Deadline to donate to Crossroads for Women (see note)	
Dec. 14	Sun.	12:30 p.m.	Advent Gathering (see note) (Sunday School room)	
Dec. 15	Mon.	9-12pm	Pick up your Nativity Scenes from “Come..to the Stable”	
Dec. 15	Mon	7:00 p.m.	AI-Anon (weekly-Owen Fraser Hall)	
Dec. 16	Tues.	7:00 p.m. 	A Quiet Christmas Communion Service - in person only and NOT online - Come take a holy pause in the December darkness as we look for the light of Christmas in the busyness of the season. You are invited to this service of Holy Communion in which we will sing carols and share sacred stories from scripture. We are offering this worship opportunity as a way to find ourselves in the story of Christmas as we remember the reason for the season. (Sanctuary)	

Dec. 18	Thur.	7:00 p.m.	Choir (weekly-Choir Loft/Fellowship Room)
Dec. 18	Thur.	7:15 p.m.	Pathfinders, Girl Guides of Canada (weekly-Social Hall)
Dec. 19	Fri.	6:00pm	Pageant Rehearsal
Dec. 20	Sat.	3-6pm	Concert, 4:30pm – Do-Re-Mi Music School (Sanctuary)
Dec. 21	Sun.	 11:00 a.m.	Christmas Pageant – in-person only and NOT online - 4 th Sunday of Advent – Love - This family service is tailored towards children and young families. - Poinsettia deliveries organized by the Pastoral Care Committee
Dec. 24	Wed.	2:00 p.m.	Worship with the Rev. Aaron Billard at Shannex - Gordon Hall , 67 Souvenirs St., Moncton. If you are a resident there, we ask you to help us spread the word to members of the congregation who live there.
Dec. 24	Wed.	 7:00 p.m.	Christmas Eve Worship - Traditional Christmas Eve service with lessons & carols and candle lighting. 
Dec. 28	Sun.	11:00 a.m.	WORSHIP - 1 st Sunday after Christmas - no Sunday School 
Dec. 31	Wed.		Deadline for 2025 donations (see note)
Jan. 4	Sun.	11:00 a.m.	WORSHIP - Epiphany Sunday - no Sunday School 

Announcements from other United Churches, Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Region 14 and the community are shown on the TV in the Owen Fraser Hall and also located on the bulletin boards located at the Alma St. entrance and outside the Church Office.

SOBEYS & SUPERSTORE GIFT CARDS are sold each Sunday in the Sanctuary before and after Worship and at the Church Office M-F, 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

We make 4% on every card sold. Your support is needed and appreciated.



WELCOME!

We would like to warmly welcome any new faces to our church family today! Please feel free to introduce yourself to a fellow member or reach out to our minister if you have any questions. We invite you to stay after the service for fellowship. Fill in the “welcome” envelope located on the table at our two main entrances and place in the offering box (no money required) or email the church office at stjohnsmoncton@gmail.com to let us know you are worshipping with us.



2026 CHURCH OFFERING ENVELOPES & PAR PACKETS WITH SPECIAL OFFERING ENVELOPES

are now available for pick up (on stage in Sanctuary & church office).

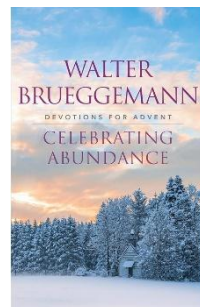
Please do not use your 2026 envelopes until the New Year.

As a cost-saving measure, offering envelopes and PAR packets not used in 2025 were not renewed.

CHRISTMAS SPECIAL OFFERING ENVELOPES are located at the Church main entrances. If you use SJUC box offering envelopes, a Christmas envelope is in your box. If you use PAR, your Christmas envelope is in your PAR packet. The Church thanks you for your support.

ADVENT GATHERING: CELEBRATING ABUNDANCE

On **December 14**, you are invited to meet upstairs after church for Advent with Aaron as we explore the thoughts and writings of the late Walter Brueggemann, who was a well-loved speaker, Biblical researcher, and scholar. Each session will be based on scripture, with a story time and opportunity to reflect together as the people of Jesus in this time and place. We will be reading from Walter Brueggemann's devotions for Advent. All are welcome, even if you can't make it to all of the sessions. Bring a lunch!



Are you thinking of **donating** money to the **KARING KITCHEN**? Why not purchase a \$25, \$50 or \$100 Grocery Card either from the Church Office or after Worship during coffee hour. Your purchase will provide a 4% profit to our Grocery Card sales will provide the Karing Kitchen with much needed options for either Sobeys or Superstore groceries and will provide you with a year-end tax receipt for your donation. A win-win-win all around!!!



We will be supporting **CROSSROADS FOR WOMEN** here in Moncton again this year. Each Sunday **until Dec. 14** you are invited to bring a personal care item to place in a white basket as you come into the church. We will be dropping off these items in support of the work of Crossroads, which is also supported by the St. John's UCW. Items suggested: toilet paper, toothpaste, shampoo, conditioner, deodorant, lotions (for dry months), canned goods like soups and pasta. Thank you in advance for your support of this important program.

DONATION – Cut-off Dates

As we approach the end of the year, we would like to remind you of the cut-off dates for making 2025 tax receiptable donations to the Church:

- cash and cheque donations – received at the church by 1pm on December 31
- cheque donations made via Canada Post - must be received by or envelope post-marked Dec. 31
- e-transfers – to stjohnsmoncton@gmail.com – by MIDNIGHT December 31
- Canada Helps donations – by MIDNIGHT December 31

If you are uncertain as to how much you have donated already to the Church, please email or telephone the Church office. Karen will provide your donation information to date. Keep in mind, records may be a week or so behind, and UCW donations are only posted as of December 31.

Official tax receipts will follow in late January or early February.

Once again, thank you for your generous givings this past year!

STEWARDSHIP SECOND – Rejoice in being able to use your gifts to do God's work.

ST. JOHN'S UNITED CHURCH CARES... To notify the Minister of personal concerns, anxieties, illnesses, hospitalizations or deaths, or to pass along a prayer request, contact Rev. Aaron Billard at 506-858-8289 or sjucrev@gmail.com

CHURCH MINISTRY PERSONNEL AND STAFF



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