



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

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Office Hours: M-F, 9am–1pm

## **PASTORAL LETTER**

Feb. 6, 2026

After the funeral last Saturday, I was pouring myself a cup of coffee at the reception when I heard someone say, “Aaron, it’s Jeff Mitchell.” I said, “Jeff!” We hugged. I hadn’t seen Jeff since his mother’s funeral back in 2010, when he and his brother, Peter, and I sat with their mother when she was dying. I remember visiting Ruth in the hospital. One morning, I was sitting with her as she slept. When she woke up, she asked, “Aaron, am I dead?” I said, “I hope not because it means that I am too!” I loved Ruth Mitchell. She always welcomed me into her home.

Jeff, Peter, and I spent a lot of time together back in 2010 as they cared for their mother, both when she was at home and in the hospital. Ruth was sweet. When I first arrived here in Moncton back in 2004, her husband Don had passed away before I could get to know him very well. By all accounts, an amazing family. It was nice to be reminded of the Mitchells.

“You’re a Presbyterian now, aren’t you?” I asked Jeff. He laughed and said that he was. He had moved from Riverview to Boston, to Washington, DC, where he told me that his wife leads a pastor’s retreat in New Mexico. He said, “I could never find a church that reminded me of home. We looked really hard.” I hear this sentiment from time to time from families who left Moncton who couldn’t find a church that reminded them of St. John’s, which makes sense given the diversity of the church. I remembered Jeff telling me the story that he met his wife while working in Boston. He would call his mother every day from his cubicle near hers. She was impressed that he was a good son. Jeff was part of the two rows of friends, “the boys”, who had shared a eulogy that I read in honour of their friend which ended with the words, “We love you, brother.”

The room was multicultural with work friends and family. There were East Indians, Jamaicans, and even people from Albert County! Curt’s wife’s uncle from Jamaica stood up and testified to Curt’s kindness and patience, especially when it came to teaching golf and fishing. Curt’s love for food and cooking could be felt at meals, as he cooked for friends and chose specific wines for them based on their dietary needs.

As I sat there, I thought, “The Kingdom of heaven is like...” So often in our world, we are taught that the immigrant is someone to fear, and all I heard yesterday were people who were so grateful to be here who wondered what their life would be like outside of work, and then Curt appeared with his four wheeler and fishing rod and off they all went into the woods. God Bless New Brunswick. God Bless Curt Comeau.

It was the blending of cultures, of language, of colour and creed, and we were all drawn together by Curt’s love. Stephanie’s brother sang a song that reminded me of Prince, and her mother from Jamaica stood up to read three scripture passages. With her daughter sitting in front of her, Erma quoted Psalm 34, and with her beautiful voice, she read in lovely accented words, “The LORD is near to the broken-hearted, and saves the crushed in spirit.” I never believed in anything so much as I did in that moment.

After she was finished, I held her hand as she went back to her seat, and I said, "Some people read scripture, but I can tell when people know scripture." In that moment, it felt like the scripture passage was reading me as Erma read it.

At the reception, four people from Jamaica walked over to me, and one of them asked, "Are you a priest?" They were waiting for me! I smiled because the first time someone asked me that question in Cape Breton years ago, they punched me in the face and gave me a black eye, so I automatically say no to that question. I told them, "I'm a United Church minister", to which one of them said, "Ah, I know that church. We're Pentecostals, and this funeral was very different. Our funerals usually last a few hours!" I said, "To be honest, we could use some of that Holy Ghost fire sometimes", which made them laugh. I loved our conversation and hearing about their faith. There was so much joy in these young people, well-dressed people.

The speeches were moving, the music was three Guns N' Roses songs (I commented on the hymns!), and as I stood next to his urn, I offered the words of blessing. Because Curt loved salmon fishing, I shared the words from Norman Mclean's "A River Runs Through It" which speaks of finding the rhythm of the divine through the casting of a fishing rod:

"Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world's great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs. I am haunted by waters."

But it was the strangest thing. At the reception, I spoke with a lot of people whose parents I have buried over the years and who I haven't seen since. They wanted to tell me about their lives since then. I did lots of listening and asked lots of questions. There were hugs. We've all aged. There were a number of people there who'd never been to a funeral like that who were impressed. I said, 'Good subject matter, right?' since we kept it all about Curt.

Before I left, I stood in front of Curt's picture in the reception room. I read a meme recently that said, 'You'll never know when someone takes your photo if it will be the one that they use for your obituary.'

I hoped no one approached me while I was having an existential crisis.

After I poured myself a cup of coffee at the reception, Jeff Mitchell asked me a question. "How are you doing?" and I couldn't answer it because he asked it in such a way that I could tell he meant it. I said, "I'm ok, Jeff." He didn't believe me. He said, "I hope you'll be ok, Aaron."

At the grave, I did the service with a small talk where I shared the quote that I try to live by from Buddhist Ram Dass, 'We're all just walking each other home.' I believe that. You know, perhaps I believe that more than anything. Awareness of mortality is a gift. I want to be fully alive with people who care about me and who I care about. It changes how we speak to one another and treat each other. Maybe I have a closer understanding of what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are those who mourn", because I really felt blessed to be there that day.

*The Rev. Aaron Billard*  
Minister

	<p><i>The bulletin and pastoral letter are dedicated in Loving Memory of <b>my father, Hazen Hogg</b> by Susan and Tom Parker</i></p>
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February is Black History Month in Canada, a time to honour the historical and present contributions of peoples of African descent. This is a time for congregations to make a commitment to becoming more culturally sensitive, racially inclusive, and justice-conscious. Please join us in our work as a church to combat racism, embrace diversity, and to support the work being done by people of colour here in our church, in Moncton, and beyond.

## NOTICES, UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS

Check our website at [www.stjohnsmoncton.ca](http://www.stjohnsmoncton.ca)  
for Sunday online Worship links, calendar, and more.

Feb. 8	Sun.	11:00 a.m.	<b>WORSHIP and Sunday School</b>
Feb. 9	Mon	7:00 p.m.	Al-Anon (weekly-Owen Fraser Hall)
Feb. 10	Tues.	2:00 p.m.	<b>Friendship Group –</b> We will be having a games day. So bring your games and your hearts for an afternoon of laughs and love. (board games, card games, etc.). (monthly-Fellowship Room) 
Feb. 11	Wed.	6:15 p.m.	Sparks, Girl Guides of Canada (weekly-Owen Fraser Hall)
Feb. 12	Thur.	7:00 p.m.	<b>Choir</b> (weekly-Choir Loft/Fellowship Room)
Feb. 12	Thur.	7:15 p.m.	Pathfinders, Girl Guides of Canada (weekly-Social Hall)
Feb. 13	Fri.	10:30 a.m.	<b>Worship with the Rev. Aaron Billard at Royal Court Chapel,</b> 6 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Coverdale Rd., Riverview If you are a resident there, we ask you to help us spread the word to members of the congregation who live there.
Feb. 14	Sat.		
Feb. 15	Sun.	11:00 a.m.	<b>WORSHIP and Sunday School</b> - Transfiguration Sunday
Feb. 15	Sun.	12:45p.m.	<b>Worship &amp; Music Committee</b> (monthly-Norman Sinclair Room)
Feb. 16	Mon.		<b>Church closed – Family Day</b>
Feb. 17	Tues.		Shrove Tuesday 
Feb. 17	Tues.		<b>Deadline to submit reports</b> to the church office to be included in the 2025 Annual Report.
Feb. 17	Tues.	7:00 p.m.	<b>Wings.</b> Divine Vuguziga will share "My experiences from Rwanda to Canada". As February is "Black History Month" in Canada, this is also an opportunity to learn about one person's history. We expect to have childcare that evening if you require it (let us know).
Feb. 18	Wed.		Ash Wednesday 
Feb. 18	Wed.	7:00 p.m.	<b>Finance &amp; Property Management Committee</b> (monthly-Norman Sinclair Room)
Feb. 20	Fri.	6-9pm	Rehearsal – UdeM (Sanctuary)
Feb. 21	Sat.	9-12:30pm	Rehearsal – UdeM (Sanctuary)
Feb. 22	Sun.	11:00 a.m.	<b>WORSHIP and Sunday School</b> - First Sunday in Lent - Grocery Sunday  
Feb. 22	Sun.	1:30 p.m.	Concert, 3pm – UdeM (Sanctuary)

Feb. 23	Mon.	2:00 p.m.	<b>UCW</b> (monthly-Fellowship Room)
Feb. 24	Tues.	700 p.m.	<b>Church Council</b> (monthly-Owen Fraser Hall)
Feb. 25	Wed.		<b>PINK SHIRT DAY</b>
Mar. 14	Sat.	 6:30 p.m.	<b>St. Paddy's Day at St. Johns: Kitchen Party!</b> A fun-filled evening of singing and music. Bring your instruments and join in the fun! 

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.*



**2025 TAX RECEIPTS are ready for pick up** at the front of the Sanctuary at Sunday morning Worship and on weekdays Monday-Friday, 9am-1pm at the church office. If you do not receive your receipt, please send us an email or give the office a call. Thank you to all who supported the work of St. John's United Church.

**Please take our CONGREGATIONAL ENGAGEMENT SURVEY 1, Jan. 25 – Feb 11**

Your Worship and Music Committee is working to “Strengthening our Invitation” at St. John's United Church. Please take our anonymous congregational survey – your input will help us improve our worship experience. We will be sharing a summary of the results. You can respond from your phone or from a computer. We look forward to hearing from you!

Click on this link [Congregational Survey 1](#) or go to <https://forms.gle/6nuornC88RvHWtta9>

**Note:** your email address will be visible to you as you take the survey, however, it is **not** collected as part of the survey.

To use the QR code shown in the Sunday bulletins (and below), simply:

1. open your camera app
2. point the phone at the QR code, as if you were taking a picture of it
3. a link will appear, simply touch this on your screen
4. the survey will appear.



The **PASTORAL CARE & MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE** needs volunteers for the various roles and activities the committee undertakes. If you would like to help or for more information, speak to Valerie Roy or contact the church office.

**DEDICATE THE BULLETIN/PASTORAL LETTER** in memory of a loved one(s). The cost is \$50.00. Upcoming dates available: June 7 and Sept. 9, 2026 and Jan. 10, 2027. If you dedicated last year, you will be contacted to see if you want to dedicate again.

**STEWARDSHIP SECOND** – Incredible things—God-inspired things—will happen when we learn to live the way of generosity and grace.

**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](mailto:sjucrev@gmail.com)