



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

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Office Hours: M-F, 9am–1pm

## PASTORAL LETTER

Sept. 26, 2025

Last Friday morning, it was pouring rain and I was wearing a suit so my wife dropped me off in front of St. George's for a meeting I had there with Fr. Chris VanBuskirk. I was buzzed into the basement where the church office is and I said thanks to the church admin. Chris was standing there with a member of another Anglican church and we went through a back room to the church parlour. "Every church has



one of these rooms," I commented and they laughed. We were there to plan the Singing With the Saints event on Saturday, November 1st. Our First Baptist friends couldn't be at the meeting so we assigned the guitar parts to them! Someone had found a tent to use and a speaker for the keyboard. We decided to keep things simple since this was the first time we tried an event like this. My assignment was to find Catholics.

When the meeting was over, we walked over to the chapel through the sanctuary. I told Chris that no one has prettier churches than Anglicans. I'd never been in the chapel before so I was curious about it. "How often do you use this?" I asked. "Twice a day," he replied. They hold a service that's broadcast online. He showed me their digital setup. He said, "We needed something that a monkey could use." I was impressed. I said, "Not bad for a church that uses a prayer book from the 1500s!" We also agreed that early church architects



made these buildings too complicated.



Fr. Chris's final service in Moncton will be held on November 2nd. He has been a good friend to many, including street people. He's advocated for those who have nothing and opened the doors of St. George's to them. He's the most pastoral parson I've ever known. I don't know how you can replace him, so we will keep St. George's and the Six Saints parish in our prayers.

I walked back to St. John's in the misty rain and did a few things at the office. Two wedding families arrived with paperwork. I'd had a call the day before from the Funeral Home Director at Frenette's with a special request. I'd done a funeral years ago for a stained glass artist. His sister asked for me because her daughter had died. They didn't want a service. They just wanted me to come over and say a prayer over the body before it was cremated. When I walked through the doors, the halls were empty. I went to the chapel where two women were standing in front of a casket covered in quilts, talking. I introduced myself, and a woman said, "We remember you, Aaron. I'm so glad you can be here." I asked them to fill me in on the last few days.

She said, "When I was 24, I was working in a group home. I saw a young girl who had no family and had been placed into care for her whole life. She was blind, and she had mental deficits. I said that she couldn't see, but they said it was just how she was. I fought to get an eye test for her, and then they gave her really thick glasses. I decided to adopt her and to be her mother."

I said, "Most 24-year-olds are thinking about other things in life. What made you decide that?" She told me that when she was 8 years old, she was placed into care when her family broke up. She grew up in different homes, often having to care for the younger children. "No one ever hugged me." So when she saw this girl, who belonged to no one, she thought, "No one will ever take her home or call her theirs so I decided that I would. I adopted her, and she lived with me for the rest of her life." She died at the age of 60. The friend who was there with her had been a Personal Care Worker, so I said, "Oh, you know her as a client?" She said no, that she had retired. She knew them for years, and when she bumped into them one day, she became part of their lives and helped care for the daughter.

I am sometimes humbled by the unselfish acts of love of others. So I stood there before the casket and prayed, even though they had already invoked heaven here on earth with their love of and care for this woman. The brother whom I buried years ago had been placed in institutional care at a youth facility in Nova Scotia when he was a boy and suffered terrible abuse, which led to him becoming an artist so that he could calm his mind. We talked about that for a while, and how he endured while he had lived. He never forgave his abusers and wondered how God could allow such a thing, and disavowed himself of religion altogether. I do not blame him. They hugged me, and I left to go back to the church.

Later in the afternoon, I walked over to the event room at St. James Gate to take part in a celebration of life for a member of the Canadian Forces named Melanie, who died too soon. As I walked down the street, I could hear a bagpiper playing, which always stirs up the blood. I nodded as I walked by, and since I wasn't sure what door to go in, I opened the first one and found an elevator where I was told to meet the family in a room on the second floor. As I walked down the hall, they waved at me and brought me to a room so that I could meet everyone. Melanie's father, Leo, was there, and I shook his hand and offered my condolences for his daughter and said that the main thing now was that everyone was together. His other daughter stood beside him with her arm around him. She introduced me to her uncle, Eli, and I said, "That's my son's name!" which made him proud to say what a good name it was. As we were talking, I learned that Melanie's mother (who'd died years before) was from Cape Breton. "What part?" I asked. Her daughter said, "Glance Bay." I smiled and said, "I was born there." Turns out there were a few people from Glance Bay in the room, and it felt like I finally had my in. I looked out the window and saw the poor piper in the pouring rain.

I was introduced to several people who were taking part in the ceremony, including the MC, Kim Rayworth. I asked, "Kim, have we met before?" She said that she didn't think so, but told me that she was the Managing Director of the Capital Theatre. I said, "Ah! Ok. I know who you are now. I listen to CBC!" She's often on in the mornings talking about upcoming events. I sat next to a retired music teacher from Moncton High and learned that we had Doris Sabeau and Owen Fraser in common. The room was packed. I didn't know anyone, which surprised me. There were a lot of military people present. My role was to say a prayer over the urn, which the father felt was important. I felt like a fish out of water, but either we adapt or die as the church. I was grateful to be invited. It was really well done with greeters, waiters, and the family organizing everything down to the last detail. Everyone there seemed so successful, which is exactly when my Imposter's Syndrome kicks in. I felt like an out-of-place wizard from Harry Potter or some kind of exotic plant standing there in the corner, as people never quite know what to do with someone wearing a clerical collar these days.



A young woman came out of the crowd and hugged me and said, "You did my dad's funeral." She was in her twenties and said it was a long time ago. I didn't have the heart to ask his name, so I said I hoped she was ok, and she said that she was, with tears in her eyes.

Kim Rayworth welcomed everyone and introduced the speakers. There were a few eulogies, and the Colonel from Melanie's unit spoke. They presented a Canadian flag to Leo. I was to go up front after a Jill Barber song played. As I stood there, I was pretty nervous and feeling claustrophobic because the room was so full. I had written good words for Melanie to commend her spirit. I opened by saying my name and that I was the minister of St. John's United Church around the corner. I said that we were an inclusive church, and I wanted everyone to know that I realize not everyone is a Christian or believes in God; that what I was about to say was just a way to find words to welcome Melanie home. There's a part in the United Church service book, sadly, for the burial of children that I often use instead of the traditional burial rites that I use for traditional services. I used more formal words over the urn, "Rest eternal..." I had said to the family when we were planning my part of the ceremony that people often refer to death as a reunion, and maybe there's some comfort in knowing that Melanie and her mother were together again, since they were so close. Someone said, "We totally believe that. In fact, we think her mother came to get her. Time to come home." That brought tears to my eyes.

Afterwards, a song played and people stood around tables and talked. There was a line up to see the family and a number of people came up to thank me. One woman, who is well known, said, "I've never heard someone like you say those words before. What church are you? Are you new here?" I smiled and said thank you, and that I often think that my personal motto is that of philosopher Ram Dass: "We're all just walking each other home." The Colonel came up to me and shook my hand. I told him he spoke well. He said, "We always speak the truth to our troops."



I made a loop around the room in case I knew a few people, which I did, and made my way back to the church. That night, we took Eli to the Y for a swim. He's been wanting a membership; Lori-Ann took him to get one. Since we are wanting to be healthier, we decided to join too.

Sunday morning, we welcomed the children back to church. I must say we had a great crowd, and the kids were really excited to be back. It was great hearing about their summers and reconnecting with parents. That afternoon, I visited our friends

Doug and Alberta. When I arrived at Alberta's, a few people from the church were already there, which is something I always love, that when I go somewhere, the church is already there. Alberta and I had a lovely conversation. A woman walking by her room recognized me and said that she and Alberta were new friends. Alberta and I prayed together. We talked about life and death. I said to her, "One thing I try to remember is the awareness of my mortality. You and I both know that anyone could go at any time." Alberta, who was a nurse, agreed with me. She's so peaceful and forthcoming. I said, "Let's make a deal: whoever gets to heaven first has to say hello to everyone!" She burst out laughing. I gave her a kiss on the cheek and made my way, though I could not open the door with the combination and had to be rescued by a resident who knew how to use the code.

On Monday, I had a burial for a funeral I had done before the summer. As we all stood there, I looked down and saw a bench that was dedicated to Ann Smith with her husband Ralph's name etched beside it. You've heard me say before that I never feel alone in those moments when that happens. Carol's family had all gathered there to place her urn in the bench beside Ann's, and I couldn't get over how beautiful it was there. We stood around talking after the service was over. I met a man from the Wesleyan Church, and we talked about Baptism and beliefs. It was the difference between theatre seating and rock bands and wooden pews and pipe organs. You know where I stand on that! He told me that his grandfather had been a devout Baptist who led him to Christ based on how he lived. He said that even their home had a unique feeling to it. His grandfather had taken him to the cemetery to show him where family members were buried and who they were, and then, sadly, a week later, he was standing there at his





grandfather's service. We had a really nice talk. I noticed another family member had crossed themselves, and I said, "And you must be the resident Catholic!" It was Carol's son-in-law. His wife said to me, "He wants me to get buried with him in the Catholic cemetery, but I like it here." He smiled and said, "Depends on who goes first!"



The next night, we went back to the YMCA. I feel like a person who hasn't gone to church for years walking through the doors, I'm that nervous. But the Y has really figured out the judgment-free zone philosophy. Everyone is trying to get healthier. I tried some of the exercise equipment, and Eli told me I was doing a great job. I was trying to count how many cultures there were in the room, and it pleased me how positive it was to be here with so many. Eli's swimming lesson started at 8pm, so we wrapped it up and went to watch him swim. A friend sat with



us since her son was in the same class as Eli. I looked down and I noticed a member of the church was swimming too. Afterwards, I saw her and said hello, and she introduced me to her friend, who goes to First Baptist. I said, "It was great seeing you swim, but next week I want to see you walking on water!"

On Wednesday morning, I had another burial from a spring funeral. They had specially ordered the stone, but due to supply chains, it took a while to come in. It was a beautiful stone, and there was a monk buried close by. As we stood there, Carol Ann's mother and her two aunts sat in chairs. They are called the Golden Girls, and they look so similar. I just love them. I gave each of them a hug, said the prayers and read the scriptures, and Carol Ann's granddaughters each placed flowers, followed by her daughters. Her husband, Neil, then placed a rose from her garden. So much love. While we were there, a plane flew overhead, quite loudly, at just the moment we had paused for silence. I said to Carol Ann's husband, Neil, afterwards, 'You really are a details guy. Stone, flowers, honorary flyover...' He laughed. I went back to their house, where they were having a reception. I love how much they love being together.

It was a difficult week for us. We ended up in the emergency room with Lori-Ann twice this week. The doctors, nurses, and staff have been exceptional. Her blood pressure is out of control and far too high, and it's been a rough ride. It's so bad that they take her in right away and that's saying something in today's ER situation. So, if you could keep my wife in your prayers, I would greatly appreciate it.

We also had to empty out our camper after our water heater leaked, and by the time we realized it, it was too late, so it is a write-off. Because of how our insurance works, despite having enough coverage, they will only give us cash value, which isn't enough to replace our camper, so it looks like our time at the beach has come to an end unless something changes. It's been a stressful process and unnecessarily so. We've been grieving this loss of something that has brought our family so much joy. It's a big letdown from our provider, who will not budge.

This weekend, after a week of sadness and stress, I will preside at a wedding for a beautiful couple. I'm also going to drive to Sackville to bring our daughter home for a few days. We miss our girl, and she misses us. We could all use some family time after a long week. And I could use some time at the gym so I can be a better version of myself so that I can be a better minister for this congregation and a healthier husband and father.

I wish you all well. Thank you for supporting me in the work that I do, and for caring for my family.

*The Rev. Aaron Billard*  
Minister

Note: I received word that our dear friend Alberta MacLellan passed away yesterday. We give thanks to God for her. May she rest in peace.





*The bulletin and pastoral letter are dedicated in Loving Memory of  
our loved ones. Forever missed.  
by Nina & Norm Bourque*

*The Church extends its deepest sympathies and condolences to the  
family and friends of **Alberta MacLellan**  
(wife of the late Dr. Donald MacLellan)  
who died on September 25, 2025*

### **MEMORIAL**

*Donations have been made to St. John's United Church in loving memory of  
**Dale Cale** (wife of Garth Cale)  
by Robert & Lucille Charman*

### **IN HONOUR**

*A donation has been made to the Mission & Service Fund in honour of  
**Art & Sonja Buck** on their recent anniversary  
by the Rev. Dr. Doug & June MacEachern*



### **National Day of Truth and Reconciliation Day September 30**






People all across Canada will wear orange shirts to remember and honour Indigenous children who were taken from their communities and families to residential institutions. On Orange Shirt Day we also observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. For non-Indigenous Christians in particular, this is a time to reflect on their role in colonialism and the ongoing responsibility to make reparations.



### **NOTICES, UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS**

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

Sept. 28	Sun.	11:00 a.m.	<b>WORSHIP and Sunday School</b> - Truth & Reconciliation Sunday; wear an orange shirt - Grocery Sunday (see note)	 
Sept. 28	Sun.	4:00 p.m.	<b>A United Hymn Sing</b> at Mount Royal United Church (see bulletin board)	
Sept. 29	Mon.	2:00 p.m.	<b>UCW</b> (monthly-Fellowship Room)	
Sept. 29	Mon	7:00 p.m.	<b>AI-Anon</b> (weekly-Owen Fraser Hall)	
Sept. 30	Tues.		<b>SENB Youth Group:</b> Expression of Interest at St. Paul's UC survey deadline. (see bulletin board)	

Sept. 30	Tues.		<b>National Day of Truth and Reconciliation &amp; Orange Shirt Day</b>	
Sept. 30	Tues.		<b>Church / Office closed</b> – National Day of Truth and Reconciliation	
Sept. 30	Tues.	7:00 p.m.	<b>Church Council</b> (monthly-Owen Fraser Hall)	
Oct. 1	Wed.	6:15 p.m.	Sparks, Girl Guides of Canada (weekly-Owen Fraser Hall)	
Oct. 2	Thur.	7:00 p.m.	<b>Choir</b> (weekly-Choir Loft/Fellowship Room)	
Oct. 2	Thur.	7:15 p.m.	Pathfinders, Girl Guides of Canada (weekly-Social Hall)	
Oct. 5	Sun.	11:00 a.m.	<b>WORSHIP</b> and <b>Sunday School</b> - World Communion Sunday	
Oct. 8	Wed.	7:00 p.m.	<b>UCW Fashion Show</b> (see note) (Owen Fraser Hall)	
Oct. 10	Fri.	10:30 a.m.	<b>Worship</b> with the Rev. Aaron Billard at <b>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.	
Oct. 10	Fri.	9am-1pm	If you have harvest items (pumpkins, gourds) you would like to add to the <b>Thanksgiving display</b> at the front of the Sanctuary, please bring items in <b>NO LATER THAN</b> Friday.	
Oct. 12	Sun.	11:00 a.m.	<b>WORSHIP</b> and <b>Sunday School</b> - Thanksgiving Sunday - Blessing of the Backpacks We are sending our students and teachers back to school with our prayers and blessings. All kids, preschool through college, are invited to bring their backpacks to Worship and join us for this special time of blessing as they begin an exciting new school year.	
Oct. 12	Sun.	2:30 p.m.	<b>Worship</b> with the Rev. Aaron Billard at <b>Peoples Park Tower Chapel</b> , 960 St. George Blvd., Moncton. If you are a resident there, we ask you to help us spread the word to members of the congregation who live there.	
Oct. 13	Mon.		<b>church / office closed</b> – Thanksgiving Day	
Oct. 14	Tues.	2:00 p.m.	<b>Friendship Group</b> (monthly-Fellowship Room)	

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.*



## SUNDAY SCHOOL

Sunday School resumed on **Sept. 14<sup>th</sup>**. Please fill out the Sunday School Registration Form located on our church website and at our two main entrances. Return the form to the church office either in person, by mail, drop off in our church mail slot (on Victoria St. door) or email [stjohnsmoncton@gmail.com](mailto:stjohnsmoncton@gmail.com). Thank you.



## NEW CHURCH EMAIL ADDRESS

Please note, the church now has a new email address. The old address was [sjuc@nb.aibn.com](mailto:sjuc@nb.aibn.com), while the new address is [stjohnsmoncton@gmail.com](mailto:stjohnsmoncton@gmail.com). Please adjust your correspondence as well as your Interac email transfer contacts accordingly.



## ST. JOHN'S HAS A NEW PRESENCE ON INSTAGRAM!

If you use Instagram, please give us a follow! <https://www.instagram.com/stjohnsmoncton/>

## 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 or email the church office at [stjohnsmoncton@gmail.com](mailto:stjohnsmoncton@gmail.com) to let us know you are worshipping with us.



## GROCERY SUNDAY FOR KARING KITCHEN

(Sept. 28 – last Sunday of the month)

The Outreach Committee would like to bring your attention to the Karing Kitchen's need for these groceries: cornstarch, can milk, soda crackers, alfredo sauce and honey-garlic sauce. *White baskets will be at the main entrance for your donations.* Thank you.



**DEDICATE THE BULLETIN/PASTORAL LETTER** in memory of a loved one(s). The cost is \$50.00. Upcoming date available: Oct. 12, 2025. If you dedicated last year, you will be contacted before your date to see if you want to dedicate again.



**UCW FALL FASHION SHOW** will take place of **Wednesday, Oct. 8<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm.** Tickets are \$12.00 and available from members of the UCW and church office. Dessert and tea/coffee will be served. Door prizes. Fashions provided by Cazza.

## THANKSGIVING SPECIAL OFFERING ENVELOPES

Thanksgiving envelopes are located at both church entrances. If you use SJUC box offering envelopes, a Thanksgiving envelope is in your box. If you use PAR, your Thanksgiving envelope is in your packet of envelopes. You can place your envelope in the offering box on Sunday, mail or drop your envelope in the mail slot on the Victoria St. entrance; e-transfer also an option. The Church thanks you for your support.



## DIME BLITZ



This UCW fundraiser has now drawn to a close, and it's time to bring in the bottles of dimes you have saved over the summer. Please do this before the end of September Deposit in the offering box on a Sunday morning or drop off in the mail slot located on the Victoria St. entrance door.



Thank you for your continued support of UCW projects.  
Please ensure each container is labelled with your name.



**STEWARDSHIP SECOND** – We have all been blessed, so we all have a great opportunity to bless others through generosity.

**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)

<b>CHURCH MINISTRY PERSONNEL AND STAFF</b>			
	Rev. Aaron Billard, <i>Minister</i> <a href="mailto:sjucrev@gmail.com">sjucrev@gmail.com</a>		Shelley Arsenault, B.Mus.B.Ed. <i>Music Director</i>
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