

# Council Report June 2020

It was the best of times; it was the strangest of times! As we draw closer to the end of another program year at St Albert United Church (SAUC) and reflect upon the year that has been, you can't help but note the stark contrast between the start of the year and the year's end.

Last year, our church embraced the suggestion from our Transition Team, to re-imagine how we organize as a church and how we can become more efficient as we carry out the programs and the vision of SAUC. With the road map that the Transition Team provided, each of our Ministry Circles began the work of taking the vision and making it a reality. Following an energizing and successful sabbatical, Rev. Mervin and the leaders within our church continued the work of re-organizing and several people played important roles helping to coordinate between the various groups within each ministry circle. This work has been ongoing, and I get the sense that the new structure is working quite effectively now. There are always going to be ways to improve and evolve and I hope that we continue to re-evaluate how our church functions with an eye for continuous improvement.

While our re-organizing was getting under way last fall, we were also extremely excited and fortunate to welcome Rev. Deborah Hoekstra to the Ministry team at SAUC. Rev. Deborah joined us from Beverly United to fill the  $\frac{3}{4}$  time position we were seeking after last year's AGM. Before her official start date in November, she and Mervin were able to take part in a team building workshop which helped them to define which specific roles they would fill and where they would focus their time and energy. This was a wonderfully cooperative process and served to lay the foundation for an effective and supportive working relationship.

On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, in addition to holding our covenanting service with Rev. Hoekstra, we also entered into covenant with the newly formed Northern Spirit Regional Council of the United Church of Canada. While this was more of a formality, it also gave us an opportunity to affirm that the spiritual journey of our community of faith is aligned with the core values and beliefs of our National Church.

In November, we were also pleased to enter into a renewed partnership with the Community Refugee Committee of St Albert (CRCSA), as they seek to sponsor two refugee families from Syria. Following the success of our partnership sponsoring a family back in 2017, we were excited to join, once again, in an effort to bring over two families who are both related to the family we assisted in our first collaboration. This is a long and sometimes tedious process, but the applications have been submitted and are awaiting approval. The CRCSA has done a tremendous job supporting the families that they have sponsored and have raised the majority of the funds required for this sponsorship effort. SAUC Council also pledged to help raise \$3000 to assist the cause.

Our church enjoyed a joyous and exciting Christmas season, and the start of a new decade filled with promise and hope. While we were appreciating another thoughtful and contemplative Lenten journey, suddenly, our world changed. News reports of the outbreak of a virus in China began to dominate headlines in January, and by late February, the virus was spreading globally. With the help and guidance of our National Church, the Council of SAUC held special meetings to come up with a proactive plan to help prevent an outbreak of Covid-19 within our vulnerable community of faith. On March 15<sup>th</sup>, Council elected to close the building in response to the pandemic and they started the process of planning how to continue to support our community and staff while the entire province, country and world, sought to slow the spread of the virus and to stay safe.

I'm a firm believer in the saying that necessity is the mother of invention, because over the past three months since we had to close the building: worship services have been shared on YouTube, ministry groups have "mastered" the use of platforms like Zoom to continue to meet, and members have stepped up to assist other members with grocery deliveries and other services, while continuing to stay safe. Members and our ministers continued to try to reach out to everyone in the SAUC family to make sure that everyone was receiving the support that they needed.

The closure of the building created a sudden drop in revenue and each of the Ministry circles within the church has been working hard to come up with ways to cut costs and to maintain revenues. The Finance team has been diligent and has been able to access grants from the Federal Government to assist us during the months that we have been closed, and we are grateful for their efforts.

As our province begins to lift restrictions on businesses and churches, we now have started the work of planning for a safe and successful re-opening of our church and of our return to worshipping together in person. Caution will be of utmost importance and we must all remain patient with the process.

The work of the church continues as we prepare for the start of a new program year in the fall, and we are always looking to provide ways for people to get involved with the programming and work of our congregation. This year, we have at least one member of council who has reached the end of their two-year term, so we will be seeking volunteers who are interested in being a part of this group. On behalf of Council, I would like to extend a heartfelt 'Thank You' to Betty Welsby for the leadership and wisdom she has brought to the Council at SAUC for the past seven years. Her dedication and hard work have been a blessing and will be missed.

As I write this report, our world is facing a great deal of uncertainty. The Covid-19 pandemic is still a major threat both globally and locally and protests in the name of social justice are continuing all over the world. It is exactly times like these when we rely on the support and the love, we find in our SAUC community. We all long for the day when we will be able to join together in fellowship and worship again, but until then, let us all stay connected and stay safe.

Your church Council is always open to your suggestions and ideas, and we are always willing to listen.

Troy Sartison (Chair)

Susan Waldie (Secretary)

Cheryl Watson

Mike Anhorn

Nelda Arnst

Stephen Fitzpatrick

Betty Welsby

Donna Wyatt

Ken Hutchinson