

Westminster United Church – More than a place of Faith?

When you are walking down the main street of The Pas, one building that towers upwards and stands out as historical and majestic is the Westminster United Church. The WUC holds a downtown presence in the community. It has been sitting watching over our community for 68 years, being constructed in 1952. It has remained a constant in our downtown core, with many locals entering through the doors regularly, others attending in times of joy or sorrow. The Church is a place of worship, a place to be married, a place for baptisms, funerals, and community gatherings. It is also a place for spiritual guidance when people are at their lowest, tending to the burden of life through God's word. The Church is there grounding us in times of need, in times of great joy and deepest sorrow.

Linda Buchanan is one of two alternating worship leaders. Linda started ten years ago to fill a void when Val Cottrill, the WUC minister of the time left The Pas. Linda and Joan Prokopow are lay women of Westminster United Church. Both ladies trained in 2009, to ensure that the many layers of church services and practices could seamlessly continue. Linda's involvement with working as a Manager of Rosaire House allowed her to build the skills and confidence required to fill the position. "A large number of people have deep faith, but do not have the ability to stand up and speak in front of people. I felt comfortable with that role and enjoy working with people". When Linda worked in Scotland, she remembers that the church was the primary place where many events were held. With the help of the many church members she is trying to resurrect community spirit. The WUC is looking for ways that groups can work with the Church as a

meeting place or to bring community together. Linda reflects daily on how the Church can be involved with community. "Daily we are examining what role we can play in the community and how we can stay connected, reconnect and build faith within the tri communities.

The Church is involved in many traditional practices. They deliver spiritual messages through marrying couples, baptism, funerals, being present in end of life compassion, and spiritual support for those who are experiencing illness and disease. Linda will express to the family the special wishes for those who are dying in the hospital. Many of us understand the importance of closure after someone close to us dies. Linda has been providing online bible study and funeral services to fill a spiritual need. She taught herself how to use the technology of Zoom to bring these needed services to our community. Linda has supported many families by preparing and delivering funeral services over this medium. This type of service gives families a time to come together and be a part of life's final parting, Death. She has brought families together from across the Country and senses the gratitude from her doing a part at the end of life. It allows families to have closure and start the process of healing when family members are mourning and grieving. The other benefit of using technology is that Linda can provide Bible study to those wishing to continue their practice of prayer, and faith teachings from the safety of their homes during these Covid times. Covid-19 has really made us think about how we are going to do things.

In the summer, many of the church congregants work together to beautify the church grounds. They plant flowers, pull weeds, sweep sidewalks, and mow grass. This past summer they came up with a unique planting idea

to grow produce, such as carrots in the gardens. Daily we witness many passing by hungry and with extraordinarily little other than the clothes on their back. One parishioner, Teena Ross, planted carrots with the kind intent of those needing something to eat, finding just that in the garden on the Church grounds. The idea of helping others by allowing them to help themselves to a garden vegetable such as a carrot for life nourishment is a special form of Outreach ministry. This is just one of the little things that the Church is doing to help our community. Daily we witness many who appear to need help with the basics of life. Linda spoke from the heart saying that “We (WUC) are there for those who are looking for direction and spiritual guidance”.

Although Outreach has always been the ministry of the United Church Women (UCW), this year the congregation as a whole has had to pick up the mantle as much as possible with fewer (aging) numbers operating from public health restrictions. They want to meet community needs through service. They felt the need to help feed the homeless by working with the soup kitchen to prepare a simple meal once a month. When we look around our community, it is evident that there are people desperately in need of spiritual help. In the past, church fundraisers hosted potluck suppers and all kinds of fundraisers for the church coffers. Although the church knows that they need to support their own operational costs, they also recognize the need to help the community. There is a shift towards fundraising to help others in the community.

The WUC is a beautiful building that could be used for many community events in the downtown hub. The building is home to the Le Pas de Danse Dance Studio which provides the thrill of dancing in several styles to

dancers of all ages. Last year, the Uptown Daycare, which called the church basement home for 35 years, gave notice they were moving to a new location. A local family looked at this space as an excellent opportunity to start up a dance studio. Within a month, Patti-Jean St. Hilaire and her husband took over the space, completed many renovations and opened the Dance Studio. Many enjoy the creativity and freedom that dance provides and they enjoy the great energy and atmosphere of the WUC. The Church feels blessed to support this type of community activity. In partnership with the St. Hilaire's, Westminster can continue to celebrate its history and faith in this community.

Linda defines God as something bigger than us and a way for people to find love for themselves and for others. The theme of our conversation was "We just care about you; we accept all people who are struggling with direction, enlightenment and spiritual guidance". The Westminster United Church believes in the power of prayer, action, and community. As times have changed, so have the way that many people look at the church. The WUC senses that we need to bring the Creator into our daily lives, not just with words but with loving kind action. "If we think that we can fix things ourselves without the guidance of a spiritual perspective, then we have lost our way". The simple message that the church wants to send to the community is that we just care about you... the people in our community. It does not matter who you are. Everyone is welcome. We are all people who need to be loved and cared for. There is light from the darkness that many experience daily.

If you want to reconnect with the Westminster United Church or have ideas to share for building a stronger spiritual community, you can contact Westminster United Church at 204-623-2821, or send an email to tpwuc25@mts.net.

