

St. Matthew's and Hardwood Lands Presbyterian Churches

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**February 6, 2022 ~ The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany
and PWS&D Sunday**

Welcome

- † Welcome! To the fifth Sunday after Epiphany! The first Sunday in February and PWS&D Sunday! It is so nice to have you join in this time of worship!
- † PWS&D stands for Presbyterian World Service and Development.
- † Each year, those involved with PWS&D provide resources for worship. This year is extra special, since it is the 75th Anniversary!
- † “Inspired by God’s promise of abundant life, Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D) envisions a sustainable, compassionate and just world. This year marks 75 years of those values guiding us as we respond to hunger, poverty, injustice and disaster. Together, we are working to support and empower people all over the world. Through PWS&D, our church works with communities in our global village to restore human dignity, ease the pain of want and promote community cooperation that benefits all. Together, we are promoting human rights and supporting refugees. Faithful to our calling, we respond together.”
- † Come join, as we celebrate the wonderful ministry we do through our donations to PWS&D!

Announcements:

- † **Thank you** for being patient with our canceling in-person services once again! It was not an easy (or unanimous) decision, but it was made out of an “abundance of caution” since covid-19 cases continue to surge in our province over

the past weeks. We are praying that we will be worshipping again in-person soon!

- † **Wednesdays** ~ St. Matthew’s hosting of the Knitting and Crochet group will begin again on February 9th. It runs from 10am-12noon in room 102 at 224 Highway 214. Come learn how to knit or crochet, help others, and share what you are working on. Come join in the fun! Proof of vaccination is required, along with the wearing of masks, hand sanitizing, and physical distancing.
- † **ANNUAL REPORTS** are NOW due!
 - † Reports for the St. Matthew’s Church can be given to or emailed to Cindy Shea at cindyishea@hotmail.com
 - † Reports for the Hardwood Lands Church can be given to or emailed to Rev. Beth at elmsdale.hardwoodlands@gmail.com
- † **February 15** ~ the Presbytery of Halifax and Lunenburg will meet at 10:00am on zoom.
- † **February 16** ~ The congregation of St. James’ will hold its annual meeting at 7:00pm.
- † **February 20th** ~ the Hardwood Lands Church is planning to begin in-person Sunday worship services again!! Unless the pandemic restrictions worsen. St. Matthew’s will reassess before this date as well – so stay tuned!
- † **February 24** ~ the Session of the St. Matthew’s Church will meet in the church at 10:00am.
- † **February 24** ~ the Hardwood Lands Session will meet at 7:30pm in the church.
- † **Annual Meetings** ~ will be planned for mid to late March!
- † **Prayer list** – if you or someone you know would like to be included for extra prayers, please let Rev. Beth know!
- † Even though our in-person worship services have been canceled, our expenses continue. If you would like to make a donation to support the ministry done in and through our churches you can do so by the offering at worship services (when held), mailing a cheque, or sending an e-transfer:
 - † For the Hardwood Lands Church send to hwltreasury@gmail.com
 - † For the St. Matthew’s Church send to stmatthews.elmsdale@gmail.com

† Please include your name and mailing address in the e-transfer for receipt purposes!

† Thank you again for your support!

Thank you for joining in this time of worship!

Let's take a moment to quiet our minds and focus on God!
(you're invited to light a candle to remind you Christ is with you)

WE GATHER IN GOD'S PRESENCE

Call to Worship:

In the bulb, there is a flower.

In the seed, there is a tree.

In the midst of this community, there is a Spirit

That awakens us to God's vision of abundant life

Revealed most fully in and through Jesus Christ.

Let us worship God who creates, redeems and sustains us!

Hymn: "The love of God comes close"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdNp80yi71Q>

The love of God comes close

where stands an open door,

to let the stranger in,

to mingle rich and poor.

The love of God is here to stay,

embracing those who walk the Way;

the love of God is here to stay.

The peace of God comes close

to those caught in the storm,

forgoing lives of ease

to ease the lives forlorn.

The peace of God is here to stay,

embracing those who walk the Way;

the peace of God is here to stay.

The joy of God comes close
where faith encounters fears,
where heights and depths of life
are found through smiles and tears.
The joy of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk the Way;
the joy of God is here to stay.

The grace of God comes close
to those whose grace is spent,
when hearts are tired or sore
and hope is bruised and bent.
The grace of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk the Way;
the grace of God is here to stay.

The Son of God comes close
where people praise his name,
where bread and wine are blest
and shared as when he came.
The Son of God is here to stay,
embracing those who walk the Way;
the Son of God is here to stay.

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

God of life,

we gather as your people, ready to do your will,

we gather as your children, who have learned to love because

you loved us first,

we gather as disciples, prepared to imitate Christ's loving
actions.

In Jesus Christ, you have shown us compassion and boundless
grace.

You have shown us a new way to love one another.

You are the Creator of heaven and earth,

and we are creatures,

yet you have called each one of us by name.

You are the Holy One,

yet you sent your Son to serve us.

In awe and wonder, we listen for your word,
we wait for your call,
we prepare our hands and hearts to serve you and all the world.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

GOD SPEAKS TO US

Time for the Young and the Young at Heart

- † Items: a kitchen cupboard where you store can goods and/or a closet where you hang clothes
- † I would like you to go look in one or both of these places – pay attention to what is in there; how much or how little is in there; how long have some of those items been there; and are there any items there that you haven't used for a long time? ... go ahead... I'll wait for you to come back...
- † Or maybe if you don't go, then sit and think about them
- † I'm pretty sure we all have stuff in our cupboards and closets – more than we actually need; some that has been there for and/or have not actually used for a long time!
- † Now imagine what it would be like if you opened that cupboard or closet and it was empty, completely empty – not a pretty sight!
- † So today I would like you to think about what in those places or other places in your house, could you share with others?
- † It's not easy to share items we've had for a long time, I know that. We might give something away, just before we need it!
- † But that is not what we teach our children is it? We teach them that if you are not using it, or if you have more than you need then you share with others.
- † Do you remember trying to teach children how to share with others? How did you explain it or show it?
- † When do/did we change from sharing to keeping, and even to hoarding (which we've heard more of during this pandemic)?
- † This is not what God wants us to do! In fact, in Jesus teaches in Luke 6:38, "Give, and it will be given to you. a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running

over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

- † Do we really truly believe this? That if we give to others, God will give us more! It is true – I have seen it; I have experienced.
- † I challenge you to give it a try... ask God what and to whom He would like you to give? And see how He works in your life.
- † I would love to hear about this or any other story you have about God working through your giving... send me an email or call me for a chat and share your story!
- † Let us pray... Dear God, we thank you for all that you give to us. Help us to look at all we have and see how we can share with those you place around us, who need help. And help us to step out and share! We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn: "Jesus' hands were kind hands"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJC4nEC-XLg>

Jesus' hands were kind hands,
doing good to all.
healing pain and sickness,
blessing children small,
washing tired feet,
and saving those who fall;
Jesus' hands were kind hands,
doing good to all.

Take my hands, Lord Jesus,
let them work for you;
make them strong and gentle,
kind in all I do.
Let me watch you, Jesus,
till I'm gentle too,
till my hands are kind hands,
quick to work for you.

Prayer for Understanding:

God of light and life, we turn to your Word for guidance and inspiration week after week. Send your Holy Spirit to move in and among us this day as we listen to the Scriptures read and interpreted. Help us to hear your challenge and your promise, and to respond with our commitment to follow Jesus, your Living Word. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Mark 12: 28-34

Sermon: 75 years of Loving our Neighbour through PWS&D, by Guy Smagghe

You are welcome to read the sermon below by the Director of PWS&D, Guy Smagghe, however, it does refer to slides with photos, so I invite you to watch him present the sermon – by clicking on the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHZutbs8E2Q>

SLIDE 1

'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Jesus told us that this, along with loving God, is the greatest commandment. It is also a hard one, as our society continuously encourages us to look primarily after ourselves.

We hear our politicians say "we will only do something if it is in Canada's interest," "we will agree only in our province's interest" ...honestly, it irks me when I hear those phrases as they encourage us to close our minds to the needs of others, of our neighbours nearby or far away who may actually need a little more compassion and solidarity from places like Canada.

SLIDE 2 - We live on a relatively small planet in a vast universe. How is our human family doing on this small planet?

SLIDE 3 - It is a pretty uncomfortable question to answer given the divisions we have created for ourselves, all these little kingdoms that prevent us from collaborating for the greater good of all.

The recent pandemic has brought to light the injustices and inequalities in access to health services, and to vaccines in so many countries. Did you know that only 4% of the population of Malawi has been vaccinated so far?

How are we caring for our neighbours?

Can we begin to think differently and to put the well-being of all ahead of our own self-interest? Jesus called us to care for our neighbour as ourselves. How can we do that?

Isn't my neighbour not only the one who lives next door but also the one who is living in a slum in India,

SLIDE 4 - the one affected by drought in a remote rural area of Malawi,

SLIDE 5 - the one who had to leave her home in Syria to seek refuge in Lebanon,

SLIDE 6 - the one who can't find enough food to feed her family in Afghanistan?

Jesus was indeed also referring to all of them when he asked us to love our neighbour.

Can I love my neighbour but be indifferent to his sickness,to her hunger?

SLIDE 7 - For the last 75 years, The Presbyterian Church in Canada has acted on this call from Jesus by setting up mechanisms for relief and development internationally so that we can reach our neighbours in need, wherever they might be.

Eventually, this became known as Presbyterian World Service & Development, an effective way that allows each one of us to respond to Jesus' call to action to love our neighbour.

How did this all begin?

SLIDE 8 - In 1947, Europe had been devastated by World War II and desperately needed assistance. The church asked every congregation to collect gifts to provide relief to Europe.

This endeavour became known as Canadian Church Relief Abroad of the Board of Evangelism and Social Action.

SLIDE 9 - In 1968 the General Assembly responded to the emerging needs of the Nigeria-Biafra crisis. The sum of \$7,500 was given to provide relief supplies for Biafra in early 1968, particularly to support the work of Canairelief.

SLIDE 10 - In 1970, the church recognized that it was not sufficient to respond only to emergencies. That year, the General Assembly report stated: "Although emergency feeding and housing are important, more and more we see the need and the benefit of development aid – seed, fertilizer, plants, pesticides, farm machinery and experts to teach their uses, digging new wells for drinking water and irrigation purposes, the prevention of soil erosion and increasing fertility for crops."

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We are a small denomination and on our own, our outreach would be very limited. But the PCC has always been known for punching above our weight. We do that, first because Presbyterians are extraordinarily generous and see relief and development as fundamental to living out our call from Christ. And secondly because we have learned how to work in partnerships that exponentially improve our ability to respond. **By 1980 the General Assembly had accepted a recommendation to change the name to the Committee on Presbyterian World Service and Development.** – not quite the catchiest name or acronym (PWS&D!) but one that captures well who we are. By the way, our website does have a catchier name – if you search WeRespond.ca you will find us.

It is at that time that we started receiving funding from the government of Canada through the Canadian International Development Agency (known then as CIDA). This allowed us to start engaging with partners on multi-year projects which meant that we began making a more sustainable difference in the lives of those to whom we reached out.

PWS&D joined the Canadian Foodgrains Bank in 1993. The Canadian Food Grains Bank combines the work of almost 30 Canadian Christian churches, working together to end world hunger.

SLIDE 11 - Soon after we were leading large food shipments to North Korea – \$5 million worth of grains shipped yearly from Canada for the starving population of North Korea. This continued for 10 years as we coordinated efforts with the Mennonites and the United Church. Matching funds from the Canadian government helped us tremendously to achieve this large-scale response, something we couldn't dream of doing on our own. Such an operation was risky but strong collaborations and the establishment of a local office to coordinate activities made it possible to reach out to those who were facing drastic food shortages.

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SLIDE 12 - I have had the opportunity to visit our partners in India many times during the years. One of the programs we had was the community health program in the tribal areas of central India, in and around Jobat.

It was Pauline Brown, a Canadian nurse sent as a missionary by the church, who introduced us to the area and for many years we helped to train community health workers who reached out into rural villages identifying the health needs, and teaching families how to stay healthy and where to seek medical attention when needed.

SLIDE 13 - They particularly focused on maternal health, ensuring healthy pregnancies and healthy deliveries, thereby reducing the number of maternal and infant deaths. We have since undertaken similar maternal and child health programs in Afghanistan and in Malawi with great life-saving and life-changing results.

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An event of particular significance for the world and for PWS&D took place in 2004, on Boxing Day morning, when the news came that a great earthquake and tsunami occurred in the Indian Ocean.

SLIDE 14 - For many of us, it was the first time we grasped the biblical magnitude of a tsunami.

We were immediately in contact with our partners in Tamil Nadu, India, to find out what the situation was – and it was bad.

Thousands of fishermen along the coast had suddenly lost relatives, homes, livelihoods. We quickly joined with the Anglicans, the United Church, and the Mennonite Central Committee to create a joint response and put together a \$6 million proposal to the Canadian government.

SLIDE 15 - For the next five years we engaged in rebuilding houses, building community shelters, training youth in trades other than fishing, providing nets and boats to those who would continue to fish,

SLIDE 16 - supporting women with establishing small businesses, and providing psycho-social care for so many who had experience loss and trauma.

Our joint initiative, known as PUMA (standing for Presbyterian, United, Mennonite and Anglican) ended up being the largest that the Canadian government funded in India in its tsunami response. We were able to do this thanks to the ACT Alliance and our partner CASA in India.

Every year, we respond to large and small disasters around the world whether or not they are covered in the news. We respond because we are called by our faith to respond. As we read in our Living Faith statement: *We cannot claim to love God, whom we do not see, if we hate those about us, whom we do see. Love of God and of neighbour fulfils the law of God.*

Through our partnerships with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank and the ACT Alliance we have a broad network that gives us the ability to respond rapidly to emergencies. We contribute resources to a Rapid Response Fund at the ACT Alliance which allocates resources for quick responses to disasters as they happen.

I cannot name the exhaustive list of disasters we've responded to in our history but I have to mention the

SLIDE 17 - Haiti earthquake of 2010,

SLIDE 18 - Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013, and

SLIDE 19 - Cyclone Idai in southern Africa in 2019, all of which received generous donations from Canadian Presbyterians.

SLIDE 20 - Unfortunately, there are disasters that are much more complicated to respond to and that have deeper and more lasting consequences. We tend to call those 'human-caused' disasters as they originate from conflicts that force families to leave their homes and seek safety far away.

Sometimes across borders, sometimes for many years, sometimes indefinitely.

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SLIDE 21 - On September 2nd, 2015, a 3-year old Syrian refugee boy named Alan Kurdi died in the Mediterranean Sea, his body washed up on a beach in Turkey. Alan and his family were Syrian refugees trying to reach Europe from Turkey. This event was a trigger for Canada to wake up to the tragedy of the Syrian refugee crisis.

PWS&D and the Presbyterian Church in Canada scaled up their refugee sponsorships efforts to respond to the needs.

SLIDE 22 - Prior to that, we had one part-time staff focusing on refugee sponsorships, now we have two full-time staff dedicated to that ministry.

As we speak, we are looking to support sponsorships of Afghan refugees but there are many roadblocks. Canada has come short so far of meeting its promise to bring in 40,000 refugees from Afghanistan, with only 15% of that number having arrived so far. I still receive messages from current and former staff from our partner there, asking us to help them to get to Canada as their lives are seriously threatened under the Taliban, because their work was linked to our Christian outreach.

SLIDE 23 – PWS&D is also ready to assist people in Afghanistan with food assistance to get through the winter months but are facing new challenges. The global community faces pressure to prevent a widespread famine that has its origins in global sanctions against the Taliban, which has been labelled as a terrorist group.

We hope that our country can soon provide the legal framework to make humanitarian assistance possible as the vast majority of people in Afghanistan, who are the innocent victims of this tragedy, are facing serious food shortages.

North Korea, Afghanistan, why do we decide to work in those places under such tyrannical regimes? ...Our call from Christ transcends political differences - a hungry person is a hungry person and we have an obligation to respond to need regardless of where it occurs. They are our neighbours too, even if they are hard to reach, even if they are not Christians.

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SLIDE 24

So here we are, in 2022, looking back at 75 years of work and looking forward at the challenges ahead of us. Climate emergencies, political instability, conflict, all of these are creating new parameters with new challenges to reach out to those who are left out.

Christ calls us to turn the tables so that we don't favour economic interests of the few at the expense of those who don't have the basic necessities needed for minimum human dignity – a safe place to stay, access to education, access to health services, access to resources to meet the needs of their families. Christ calls us to name our blessings and to share our blessings as much as possible. Each child of God is born in a place they have not chosen. For some it means access to an abundance of resources, for others it means a lifetime of struggle to stay alive. The church has recognized the need to act so that all children of God may have life with dignity. God has provided us with a planet of abundance, with enough for all. It is our challenge to build bridges of solidarity and to reach out.

SLIDE 24

Presbyterian World Service & Development is an agency of The Presbyterian Church in Canada with the mission to build a more sustainable, compassionate and just world, and more challenges lie ahead. Thank you for being part of this great story of solidarity so far, and, as Jesus invited us, I invite you to continue to love your neighbor – the one you can see and the one you can't see but to whom you can reach out through Presbyterian World Service and Development.

Thank you and may continue to God bless you as you continue to accompany us on this journey of solidarity.

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

Prayer of the People and the Lord's Prayer

God of mercy and justice,
You love your creation intimately and passionately.
You revealed your love in Jesus Christ,
as he walked in our shoes,
as he suffered and died.
Jesus redefined love forever.
To love one another is to give of ourselves.
To love one another is to suffer on behalf of others.
When we love one another with passion and generosity,
we demonstrate our gratitude and love for you.
We ask for the courage and wisdom to serve others
in humility and without counting the cost.
When we cross boundaries, when we encounter other cultures,
help us to be good listeners and willing partners.
Kindle in us a vivid imagination, so that we can serve
even those whom we cannot see or hear.

We ask your blessing on Presbyterian World Service & Development.

Give to its staff a strong sense of your presence and purpose.
May the partners of PWS&D around the world flourish and discover creative solutions for their many challenges:
the scarcity of food,
the abuse of human rights,
the challenging forces of nature,
unemployment and poverty.

May those who are most vulnerable be blessed with a sense not only of your presence,
but of our willingness to serve.
Help us to hold their feet in our hands,
to love them concretely,
so that lives will be transformed.
In gratitude, we respond to your love by serving your creation,

And by joining our voices in the prayer Jesus taught us to say together:

Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Offering:

Today we honour the work of Presbyterian World Service and Development. Its partnerships and service take our gifts into places of deep need around the world and in our own country. With God's blessing, our offering truly makes a difference, touching lives with God's love and mercy in Jesus' name.

Doxology:

"Praise God from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below.
Praise Him above ye heavenly host.
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost."

Offering Prayer:

God of surprising generosity,
Jesus encouraged his disciples to share whatever they had – fish, bread, or an extra cloak when they had two.
Encourage us to keep giving even when needs seem overwhelming and resources scarce.
We entrust our gifts to you with the faith you can surprise us and others through all they can accomplish in Jesus' name. Amen.

Hymn: "For the healing of the nations"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MDyHS_9S_6Y

For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords;

To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us forward into freedom;
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned;
pride of status, race, or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span.

You, Creator God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind,
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.

Benediction:

(Micha 6:8)

As we leave this time of worship, let us go thinking about the words of the Prophet Micah: "God has shown you what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

As us go out to care for each other,
May we act justly,
Love mercy,
And walk humbly with our God,
For He is with us, guiding and empowering us,
This day and always.
... Amen.

Hardwood Lands: Choral Amen

Elmsdale: Parting Song: “Go now in peace”

Go now in peace, never be afraid

God will go with you each hour of every day,

Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true,

Know He will guide you in all you do.

Go now in love and show you believe

Reach out to others so all the world can see.

God will be there watching from above

Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.