

The Church Mouse

The Newsletter of Oxford Presbytery in the United church of Canada

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Because there has been no rain on the land the farmers are dismayed; they cover their heads. - Jeremiah 14.4

Dear friends in Oxford,

Global climate change is truly catastrophic in Mozambique. The weather is erratic and extreme. We are sorry to have to tell you that where we live in the Zambezia river basin, after two years of destructive flooding in 2007 and 2008, now for almost a year there has not been rain at all, not near enough to grow a crop. Two crops have been lost. This should be harvest time but the corn is dry browning stalks not half the height they should be. They have no cobs; the yield will be zero. You don't hear this on your news. Drought comes slowly. It is not a sudden and photogenic disaster.

The people are eating the tuberous roots of nyica, a water-reed in the shrinking lagoons. The size of a golf ball, the tubers have no nutritional value; they are only fiber. The people are risking crocodiles to gather them.

Now that it is too late for this crop season, in some spots it is raining. In the lowest lands there is promising moisture. The United Church of Canada has sent emergency funds to hold market fairs for 2000 farmer families without seeds to buy them and plant. CCM is organizing the merchants, who have seed but no-one to buy it. Each farmer gets a book of vouchers, which they give to the merchant at the fair to buy seed, who exchanges it with CCM for cash.

If you are a farmer in Oxford who has had no harvest two seasons running, and have no money to buy food in stores, what would you eat? What would you and your family forage that would keep you alive? Perhaps you could count on the United Church of Canada. And the Canadian Food Grains Bank, whose work here in this drought time we'll be telling you about next month. *Karen and Bill Butt*

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Don't let your worries get the best of you; remember Moses started out as a basket case.

## HUMAN RIGHTS IN UGANDA

I've now received a number of enquiries regarding an on-line petition posted by AVAAZ, and available at this link:

[https://secure.avaaz.org/en/uganda\\_rights/](https://secure.avaaz.org/en/uganda_rights/) Many have asked if this petition is endorsed by the United Church of Canada, and I am pleased to now inform you that I have been advised that: **"The UCC social policy is totally in agreement with the intent of this petition."**

I personally have checked out this site, and I am also compelled to believe that it is quite legitimate. Again, I personally have willingly added my name to the petition, for I am saddened to discover that at this stage in our universal struggle to ensure equal rights and justice for all of humanity, any nation would even contemplate legislation as repressive as what the Ugandan parliament is debating right at this moment. As a Christian I am ashamed to have to further acknowledge that certain American organizations who purport themselves as being "Christian", have in fact encouraged the Ugandan government to even consider adopting legislation that proposes to execute persons judged through criminal prosecution to be homosexual, lesbian, trans-gendered, or bi-sexual. Imagine a law that can put a person on trial, and condemn them to the death penalty, purely on the basis of the sexual orientation with which they were born!

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If you are not as yet aware of this situation, the AVAAZ site noted above contains background information for you to consider. This issue has also received a good deal of coverage in respected media outlets, and if you would like to read some of this material from neutral sources I invite you to please do so. You might wish to begin your research with two separate reports that the CBC Radio One programme "The Current" has run over the past few months, one of them as recently as the third segment of Wednesday's broadcast. You can reach transcripts and podcasts at the following links: <http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/2010/201002/20100217.html> and

<http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/2010/201001/20100113.html>

You will be interested to know that the United Church of Canada has already sent a letter to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, along with the Ugandan High Commissioner in Ottawa, expressing our collective opposition to this proposed legislation. The Prime Minister has acknowledged receipt of this letter, and indicated that his government has taken the matter under advisement.

If after considering all of this information, you are likewise appalled by this situation, I urge you to add your name to this world-wide petition. Regardless of our own sexual orientation, I believe that we must not remain on the sidelines while this outrage continues to fester. I make this appeal to you simply as one human being who believes that following Jesus' teaching means that we are "called" to actively uphold the dignity and inherent worth of every other human being.

Miigwech & zhawendaagozi. *Matthew Stevens*

### **A NEW PASTORAL CHARGE**

After voting at our Annual meetings we have great news, it is official now that Avondale Zion , Brownsville & Delmer will become a new pastoral charge on June 30th 2010 . A new name for our charge will be chosen. In the mean time we have a lot to look forward to . *George Beard*

### **Ingersoll's Habitat for Humanity Project**



On Dec 13<sup>th</sup> 2009 Becky Doyle and her two young sons, Levi and Reilly received the keys to their new home in Ingersoll. This home was the first Habitat for Humanity home built in Oxford County. Becky and her family were able to enjoy their first Christmas in their new home - a home that would insure a future, comfort, safety and affordability for years to come.

This is the mission of Habitat for Humanity lived out in one of our Oxford County communities. Habitat for Humanity is a faith based, non-profit organization with the vision of a world where everyone has a decent, safe, and affordable place to live. Habitat helps families in need of affordable housing by building homes in partnership with individuals, organizations and companies in the community who contribute funding, materials, skills and time. Habitat "partner" families are also required to contribute 500 hours of their own labour to building of their home or other Habitat activities. Once completed the homes are sold to the partner families by HFH with no down payment and an interest free mortgage that is geared to the family's income.

This Habitat for Humanity began in 1976 with the building of one home in Texas, and has grown so that over 330,000 Habitat homes have been built in over 100 countries throughout the world. And today, on average, one Habitat home is completed every 15 minutes. The founder of Habitat for Humanity, Millard Fuller, often said of this amazing growth, "If this was just humans at work, it would not last. But, it is God's work, and nothing can stop it!"

The Ingersoll project started to take shape in the spring of 2008, with the Ingersoll Rotary Club hosting a Town Hall meeting of interested individuals and representatives from the local faith community, service clubs, businesses and government. At the meeting, there was a lot of enthusiasm for starting a Habitat project in Ingersoll and a general sense of “we can do it”. Several individuals from key organizations volunteered to form a steering committee to undertake the project.

The first job for the committee was to develop a partnership with Habitat for Humanity, London. This, not only allowed us to use the well known and respected Habitat “name” and systems, but HFHL provided the Ingersoll group valuable advice, training, accounting and financial support.

The second job for the committee was to recruit the necessary volunteers with the skills to lead the many activities that are essential for a successful Habitat project – property acquisition, partner family selection, volunteer coordination, fundraising /material donation, public relations, and construction management. This is certainly where the dream started to look like it would become a reality. The support from all facets of the community was amazing and by the summer of 2009 we decided we were ready to build in the fall. By the end, over 50 organizations or business contributed to the success of the project. Much of the material was donated or significantly discounted while essentially all the skilled labour was volunteered.

The faith community of Ingersoll and district was particularly supportive of the project. They held concerts, dinners, auctions and craft sales to help fund the purchase of construction materials. Their fundraising efforts totalled about \$15,000. Just as important was their volunteer support during the build. The faith community supplied about 30% of the “unskilled” labour as well as several skilled trade people. They provided virtually all of the snacks and lunches for the onsite volunteers and Trinity United Church, with their proximity to the build site, generously opened their doors throughout the build for snack time, lunches, washroom facilities and volunteer sign-in/sign-out. Finally, a group of quilters who gather at Knox United Church (Embroid) made special quilts for the family and presented them at the home dedication. Page 3

The Ingersoll Habitat project was certainly an opportunity for Christians to come together and put their faith into action right here in our community.

Ultimately, all Habitat projects are about helping families in need of a hand up not only to have a safe and decent home, but also to have hope for a brighter future. Sounds like God’s work!

*Don Campbell*, co-ordinator

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## TOGO PROJECT

When talking to Rev. Eloi about the Togo Project, his passion is contagious. It is a dream of his and is a tribute to his late Mother, who always wanted to be of help to the most needy people in her country. She was not spared to see her dream become reality, but her son is bringing it to reality.

Through prayers and hard work, with the support of his two congregations, Drumbo and Richwood, the first year enough money was donated to purchase land in Togo, a hundred acres. Families were recruited mostly single parent families with children. One stipulation was that the children would go to school. Money was provided to cover the costs, there is no free education in Togo. Their first crop was destroyed by improper spraying. Not to be discouraged, that mistake will not be repeated as they are working with agricultural specialists in that country. The second year dream is to provide a tractor to help with the field work. Impossible, not with God. A parishioner had an old tractor in his shed and he was willing to donate it. Another farmer (mechanically inclined) offered to refurbish and repair, paint the tractor and store it until ready to ship. New parts were purchased by money donated for the project. A cultivator and other smaller equipment were purchased and most cases donated. A two row corn planter was hard to find, but another farmer had the main frame and was able to use two planters from a larger planter no longer in use, these were brought up to scratch and a picture in the Sentinel-Review showed them loaded into a container, being loaded to ship to Togo. When it arrives it will not be opened until Rev. Eloi arrives for his holidays. He is taking lessons to learn how to operate the tractor so he can teach his people in Togo. He very much appreciates all the support. *Ruth*

Norwich United Church has purchased a case of 1 000 disposable communion cups. If any church is needing some, we will sell a few at our cost.

Contact Lenore Reeves [flenorer@execulink.com](mailto:flenorer@execulink.com)

Jim and Jean Strathdee are looking for a church venue to hold a concert, in or near London, after the Annual Meeting of London Conference, on the evening of **Sunday, May 30 or Monday, May 31**. Jim and Jean Strathdee are internationally honoured concert artists, worship and song leaders. The Strathdees have written hundreds of hymns, songs and anthems including "I am the Light of the World" and "What does the Lord Require". Their music is published and sung by faith communities on six continents, offering a message of compassion and unity, justice and healing.

If your church is a potential host, please contact Maya Landell, [mlandell@mac.com](mailto:mlandell@mac.com) for details.

### **FIVE OAKS: Therapeutic Touch: Level 3 March 19 - 21**

Jitka Malec & Regina Sheere to deepen skills & knowledge of this gentle healing art that affects body, mind, emotions & spirit. Cost \$390

### **Confirmation #3: Revelations \* March 26 - 28**

Join with other confirmation groups to explore Christian Tradition, the United Church and what your faith means to your friends, parents and the church. Cost \$190

### Licensed Lay Worship Leaders/Lay Preachers Program

April 9-11

Peter & Olga McKellar, Robin McGauley & Maggie Plant, this is 1of4 weekend courses offered at 5 Oaks for certification as a LLWL with the UCC. \$330

### Neos: Youth Ministry in an Intercultural World

April 23-25

Come and explore with Adele Halliday what intercultural ministry might mean when working with youth, Cost \$250 (\$275 after March 26)

### Luke's Jesus & Sabbath Economics May 7 - 8

**Ched Myers** Cost \$345 (\$380 after April 9)

Phone: 519-442-3212

[www.fiveoaks.on.ca](http://www.fiveoaks.on.ca) Page 4

"There's Music in the Air" was sung at Innerkip, the last day of February by the Mass Choirs from Norwich, Embro, Innerkip and Eastwood at their Winter Concert. Each group also had their own contributions. Innerkip and Eastwood Junior Choirs also participated. A wonderful evening of great music. An offering was taken for Operation Sharing of \$650.

The same evening there was a concert in Avondale Zion and another one at Trinity in Ingersoll. These concerts were in support of Haiti. Our church people have very generously supported the efforts for Haiti. In fact the support has been all over the County. Now we may need to send help to Chile who has also suffered a massive earthquake.

### **UCW Presbyterial Spring Event**

Speaker: Lammy DeRuiter

Mission to Haiti

Monday, March 22 at 6 pm

Mt. Elgin United Church

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It was brought to my attention this week that when a new minister comes into a church in Oxford, there is nothing available to give them information about services that are available in the community and how to access them. People are told if you are having difficulties go to your minister for help, but the minister can't help if they do not have the contacts and information they need.

The Oxford Suicide Prevention Coalition group have put together a very helpful booklet "When Someone is Thinking of Suicide", which has a list of services available on the back cover complete with phone numbers.

The local OMAFRA office has a list of services that are available for farmers and their families when they are facing difficulties. This information should be gathered and made available to new ministers in our midst. The Oxford Suicide Prevention Coalition is ready to help with training information and support. Call 519-539-8055 Ruth