

Beyond Sunday

NEWSLETTER

ADVENT/CHRISTMAS
EDITION 2021



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A MESSAGE FROM THE LEAD MINISTER

Dear friends,

As we move into the season of Advent and into a new church year, I confess that I find myself in a time of transition, a hopeful time of transition.

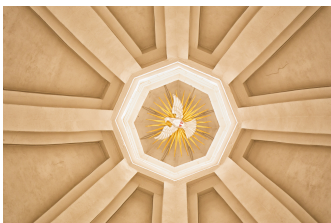


When people see me, they often ask, “how are you doing?” Sometimes I answer in rote ways, just responding with phrases like, “I’m fine,” or “I’m okay,” or the well practiced, “I’m really busy!” But if I were more honest, I would have answered a few months ago, “I’m not really sure,” or perhaps even, “I’m not doing great.”

I have to confess that, like many of you, this pandemic and the changes it has brought into our lives and into the life of the church has been traumatic and so unpredictable. Most of us have never lived through something which has been so thoroughly disruptive as the Covid-19 pandemic has been. Back in August, when after nearly a year and a half, we returned to in-person worship and church activities, instead of feeling what I thought I would feel, a sense of joy and relief, hope and excitement, I found myself more muted, more uncertain, more unsure. While it was good to be back in worship with others, it didn’t feel the same and there was a constant sense of “where will this all go” that lingered with me.

Yes, we were back in the church, back in worship together, but it was hard to envision where it was all headed. I know that numbers aren’t everything, but they are important as one measure of congregational health, and we started small, as was expected. I remember saying that our return would be slow and gradual, not a sudden return to pre-pandemic numbers. But the reality of the return and how slow it might end up being was a bit of a shock to the system for me. How would we know when we were back to what might be called full strength? How would we know whether those who hadn’t returned would return or when they would return? It was frustrating to realize that I had no control over these issues and we would always be at risk of another outbreak or variant or more restrictions.

So I have to say it was a bit of a struggle for me when we returned to the church for worship and fellowship and discipleship. I spoke with my colleagues, both locally and more broadly in the denomination. They were facing the same challenges, often in contexts much more challenging than ours. But in those conversations I was also encouraged, encouraged by what I saw in colleagues doing their best in trying circumstances, encouraged by a people who live with hope and vision for renewal and revitalization.



I think that the way God works isn’t always in sudden spurts of revelation, but more often in slower ways of nudging, of encouragement, of bringing into our lives the people and perspective we need to move from one place to another. I have truly felt that nudging from the Holy Spirit and the people that God has surrounded me with over the last few months.





I can say now that my attitude and outlook are vastly different now as we stand on the cusp of Advent than it was only a few months ago. There's been a change from a sense of pessimism to one of optimism and that just seems so apt given where we are in the church year. Part of that change came about because of the work we did together on the theme of the Lord's Prayer, both in our worship and in our Bible studies. Preparing for those sermons and that study, remembering that praying is about bending in the direction of God's will, not ours, was a great reminder that ultimately for all my worries and insecurities, God is in control, God still loves what God has created and God is with us.

God is with us, that's really the spirit of Advent isn't it! Advent is a time of preparation, a time of hope and anticipation for the birth of Christ, who is Emmanuel, God with us. I know that as we look ahead to Christmas, we are celebrating the birth of Jesus, a birth that took place physically over 2000 years ago. But Christmas every year is the remembrance and celebration of the fact that God is with us and that in the birth of Jesus those many years ago other things were also birthed, things like hope, peace, joy and love, things that can be and need to be birthed again and again, year after year, generation after generation.



Our theme this Advent/Christmas is one of "Homecoming." It seems so appropriate for us, particularly this year, to use Homecoming as our focus. There is a sense of homecoming for us who have been too long separated from others. Many of us weren't able to celebrate Christmas with families last year and this year might be our way of returning home, whether home is a physical location or a relationship connection.

Then there's a sense of homecoming as we continue to gather strength in our return to worship, to in-person church activities like our fellowship, like opportunities for sharing in the gift of music, like a celebratory pageant, like our discipleship together and in the mission and outreach of the church as we feed the hungry and help share what we have with those in need. It will be good to be with the people of God as we journey through Advent, as we explore the joys and challenges of home and homecoming. And we will gather at Christmas, around the manger with Mary and Joseph and the Christ Child, God with us, we will gather in a place that we understand to be home.

Homecoming in the most intimate sense is a return to our connection with God, a return from wherever it may be that we have been. It's a move from confusion to clarity, from worry to hope, from fear to love, from isolation to presence, to know that God is with us, God has always been with us. Homecoming is the invitation to move towards God, the God who has been faithfully present with us through the pandemic, through the myriad of challenges we have and are still facing in our world.





There's much we are planning this Advent and Christmas. An invitation to host Mary and Joseph for a day, an opportunity to help with our Christmas Pageant, an encouragement to join us for our "O Holy Night" musical evening, and so much more. We will continue to feed those in our community every Monday night who need a meal and who seek the grace of the people of God. We will worship every Sunday, whether in person or online and we will praise God and sing to God's glory. We will gather for an Advent Bible Study. There is much to be grateful for.



Perhaps the biggest change in my outlook has been that of seeing our situation and context as one of potential and opportunity rather than one of confusion and uncertainty. Because God is with us, because Emmanuel is born, because hope, peace, joy and love are always needing to be reborn, renewed, reclaimed, what lies ahead of us is potential, the potential to be more and more the people of God that God desires us to be, to bend more and more in our living and loving towards the vision of God's kingdom and the love of God's Son. We have an opportunity to begin a new church year as a people of hope, a people who see opportunity in where God has placed us, to be a church that shares the hope, peace, joy and love of God, of God with us, with one another, with our neighbour, with our world.

I am looking forward with joy to the new church year, to this season of Advent, to Christmas and to the new year that lies not too far ahead of us. I know that you will join with me in thanksgiving to God for God's faithfulness to us and that we may journey home together!

Blessings!

Victor Kim.



*Rev. Victor Kim
Lead Minister at RPC*





WHAT'S RATANAK DOING TODAY?

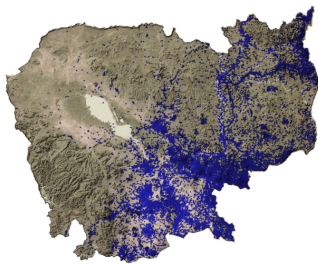


RPC has a tradition of supporting Ratanak International via the Ride for Refuge, held every October. This year we raised about \$3500, so a big shout-out to all you supporters and riders. We got connected with Ratanak about 15 years ago when founder Brian McConaghy spoke passionately to us one Sunday morning about why Ratanak exists and what it does. That message still resonates, as shown by the congregation's continuing support.

Some necessary background:

During the Viet Nam war, neighbouring Cambodia was neutral, but the Viet Cong were using it as a supply route. Consequently, the US dropped over two and a half million tonnes of bombs on rural Cambodia. This devastation opened the door to the communist Khmer Rouge led by Pol Pot. In 1975, following a civil war, the Khmer Rouge was established, and they began a virulent program of political, economic, religious, and ethnic cleansing to return Cambodia to the supposed strength and purity of the ancient Khmer Empire.

This program resulted in the Killing Fields: mass starvation, executions, slave labour, and epidemic disease. Doctors, teachers, and other professionals along with their families were liquidated. Three million Cambodians had died before the Vietnamese communists invaded and ended the slaughter. But the arrival of this new regime triggered international embargos, resulting in another civil war which lasted to 1992.



Can we imagine a country where an entire generation had only known violence, poverty, illiteracy, and despair? In 1989, during a trip to Asia, Brian found himself at 'ground zero' of the civil war. Moved by the crisis, he stayed to help a Christian medical team. Then, back home, he saw a documentary of the death of an 11-month-old Cambodian baby from a simple lack of basic medicine. Her name was Ratanak, 'Precious Gem'.

At the time, he was working as a forensic scientist with the RCMP. But the Spirit had other plans. Unable to forget what he'd seen and overwhelmed by a desire to somehow help, his first step was to smuggle drugs into Cambodia.



Brian McConaghy
Founding Director





God didn't let the work end at a couple of suitcases of drugs. Brian soon established the Ratanak charity, and its first activity in Cambodia was setting up medical clinics. This expanded to schools, orphanages, agricultural development, and food distribution. While organising these ministries, Brian saw how the complete social collapse in Cambodia had become known to international sex predator rings. Impoverished parents who'd grown up without a moral framework were willing to sell their children into slavery.

Though appalled, Brian felt unequipped to take on organised crime. But in January, 2004, he was consulted by Vancouver police on a case of sexual abuse involving 7 Asian girls under 10 years old. His task was to identify the country where it had happened. After viewing the unspeakable videos, the Spirit convinced him to do the impossible: find and rescue those girls. In his own words, "I had to do something. In crossing that line, God finally had me where he wanted me—motivated, passionate and utterly dependent on him."

That same night he saw a television news report on child sex slavery in Cambodia, and he realised he was looking at the same room and the same victims that he'd seen on the RCMP tapes. Through the news team, he could reach them! Returning to Cambodia, he founded a safe house where trafficked girls could escape from exploitation and experience healing on physical, emotional, and spiritual levels. For them, this was a homecoming in the profoundest sense.

In the years since, Ratanak's work has expanded beyond the immediate provision of shelter for victims. Now, in 2021, five projects are highlighted on their website ratanak.org:

Ratanak Achievement Program

A reintegration program providing transitional services (either in a live-in or outpatient format) for young women who are survivors of domestic or international sexual and labour exploitation. Women have access to repatriation assistance as well as supplementary life skills training alongside their vocational training, or further academic pursuits.



Men's Achievement Program

A reintegration program providing transitional services (outpatient format) for exploited men. Particular focus is on men who are caught in labour trafficking situations across the Thai-Cambodia border. Men and their families have access to counsellors and social workers as well as opportunities to pursue job skills training.





Case Management Support Project

A repatriation program based on NGO collaboration designed to empower and assist Cambodian women and men who have been exploited and trafficked internationally. In-country assistance is provided to some of the trafficking survivors returning to Cambodia using the RAP home as either a residential or outpatient location. Assistance is also given to help clients reintegrate back into families as well as provide support in the search for permanent housing, education, and employment.



Community Hero Prevention Project

Prevention, intervention and awareness training programs in at-risk communities through equipping volunteer community trainers. Focuses include educating communities on issues of human trafficking, sexual abuse, illegal migration and ways to protect children and child rights.

Empowerment Training Project

This project addresses the vulnerable working conditions and lack of empowerment experienced by women working in the Karaoke Bars and Beer Gardens (KBB) in four neighbourhoods in Phnom Penh. It provides training of current KBB workers as Peer Leaders to lead life skills classes to other KBB workers. These classes help the women to develop strategies to prevent further exploitation and position them with the life skills to make different life choices for their future.



This is the sort of practical, redemptive ministry that we can support through organisations like Ratanak International. One person’s inspired efforts have brought new life to many victims and helped others not to become victims. For us at RPC, not only can we feed the disadvantaged or welcome refugees here in Richmond, we can be a part of restoring God’s shalom in Cambodia.



*Graeme Stager
Elder/Session Clerk at RPC*





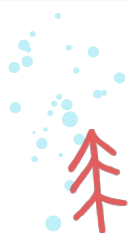
GIFTS OF FAITH, FRIENDSHIP, COMMUNITY, AND CREATION

Dear friends,

What a year this has been thus far, with the pandemic, a heat dome, an atmospheric river, and more! But also, with the many gifts God has provided us with, including the technology that has allowed us to maintain and develop relationships while physical distancing has been required, the vaccinations that have been developed, and the ability to meet in person again, whether cautiously in-person indoors, or outdoors. So, we approach this Advent season with gratitude and hope. Here I articulate some of the people and activities that we are thankful for and some of the experiences that we look forward to.

We are grateful to have received funding for three positions with the 2021 **Canada Summer Jobs** program, all for twelve hours a week over 23 weeks. Each program planner position in 2021 has had a different focus. We were delighted to welcome James Lolong back as our Program Planner with a Multimedia and Environment Focus, from early May through October, and to employ Chloe Niderost as a Program Planner with a Protecting and Conserving the Environment Focus for the same period. We are grateful that both James and Chloe continue to contribute their time in a volunteer capacity. In early July, we were also delighted to welcome back Jacqueline as our Program Planner with a Community and Special Events Focus. She will continue in this capacity through December.

We enjoyed various opportunities to foster **faith, friendship, and community** over the summer. This included a Camp Douglas Day Camp, August 9-13, for ages 8-12 year. Five of our younger generation also participated in the Intermediate or Youth Camp Douglas overnight camps. An RPC in-person half-day camp later in August, with outdoor activities, was yet another highlight. This included a field trip to Iona Regional Park, to experience Birdwatching with Dr Richard Topping. Other highlights included hosting an Ultimate Frisbee League through the summer and fall, an intergenerational Bird Watching walk, several Walking Church experiences, and a Pizza and Movie night.





Fall faith formation opportunities for elementary age students have drawn primarily on Illustrated Ministry resources, and have included a “Lord’s Prayer” series and now “An Illustrated Compassion” series. Jacqueline Cleland and James Lolong continue to host a weekly faith formation time for high school students, Sunday 7-8 pm, alternating a review of the Westminster Confession with an application and exploration of our beliefs using the tool of Minecraft.



We look forward to participation in Intergenerational activities throughout **Advent**, including the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem and O Holy Night. We are enjoying collaborating on the creation of a new variation on the virtual Christmas Pageant *Do Not Be Afraid*, which will “go live” on Christmas Day, as part of a virtual service.



In early 2022 we will engage in a variety of activities focusing on **Creation Care**. This will include partnering with Be the Change Earth Alliance in the creation of a Rain Garden.



*Blessings,
Anne-Marie Ellithorpe*



*Dr. Anne-Marie Ellithorpe
Director of Children & Youth Ministries at RPC*





MUSIC, WORSHIP AND MORE

Dear Friends,

Choral singing renews our spirit and as choirs all over the world have started singing again, we give thanks to the Lord! We are all masked, vaccinated, and cautious... but what a blessing it is to inhale and lift our voices in harmony once again, praising God together as a community.

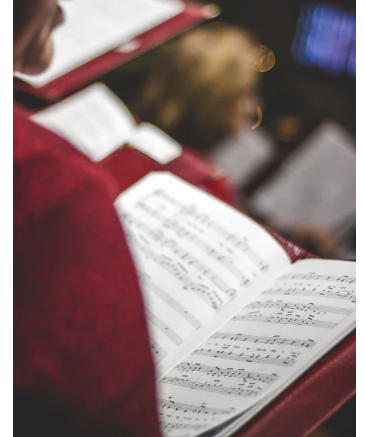


O Holy Night

This year, we will return to an in-person O Holy Night concert on December 10 at 7:30pm. The evening will include music and readings presented by our choir, members, and youth, a congregational carol-sing, a Christmas sweater contest, a photo booth, and hot chocolate and cookies. What could be better on a cozy Friday evening! All are welcome and please invite family and friends!

Christmas Cantata

The RPC choir has been meeting regularly since September of this year and we are eager to offer on the morning of December 19, 2021, a wonderful Christmas cantata titled **Peace**, by Joel Raney. I don't know about you, but the news cycles of 2020 and 2021 have felt more intense than I can ever remember. We have just experienced extreme flooding in B.C. (after record-breaking heat and fires this past summer), June of this year brought Canada into shock after the discovery of unmarked mass graves of children at residential schools, and since the pandemic hit, racism towards all people of colour has been on everyone's mind. Joel Raney's work, **Peace**, is in its essence, about the enthusiasm and passion for peace through Christ's appearance on earth during the Christmas season. Raney writes at the beginning of the cantata:



Let there be peace of earth



This has been the desire of humanity since the beginning of time. But peace isn't merely the absence of war. Peace represents tolerance and understanding between nations, ethnic groups, religions, and even neighborhoods. While our world often seems overrun with conflict, it's the Christmas season and God's promise of peace on earth that keeps us hopeful. Jesus came to offer the ultimate form of peace and to remind us that peace on earth begins in the hearts of individuals.

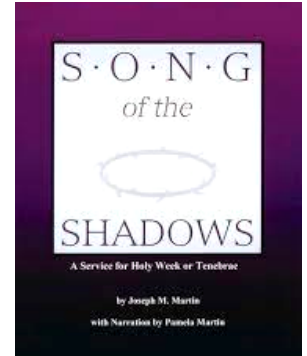




We have had so much fun rehearsing this piece together. This 35-minute work contains within it everything from jazz to gospel to calypso. We will be joined by pianist Fergus Kwan, who is a second-year student at UBC. We so hope that it will inspire you to open your hearts this Christmas season to Christ's ever-present joy and towards one another so that we may follow his example of peace, understanding, and unconditional love between all peoples.

Looking ahead...

In 2022, the RPC choir will offer a beautifully stirring Good Friday cantata by Joseph Martin titled ***Song of the Shadows***. Please look forward also to our end-of-the-season concert on May 29th at 7:30pm, **Out of Silence**, where we will present a full one-hour concert program. If any of our singing moves you to sing with us, please know that you are always welcome at our Thursday 7pm practices at any time of the year! Please do not hesitate to contact me at jannieburdetti@gmail.com.



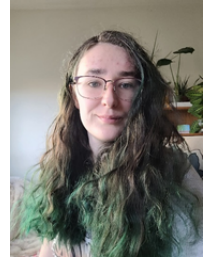
Dr. Jannie Burdetti
Music Director at RPC





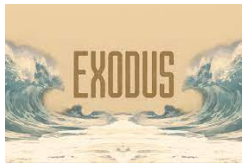
Greetings from your current favourite VST Intern!

Yes, I am your only one currently, so I feel comfortable stealing this title! I hope you will all help me live up to it as the months progress. My name (besides fav intern) is Jacqueline Cleland, and I am originally from St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Fredericton, New Brunswick.



Yet, it is my absolute delight and pleasure to be able to do my Theological Field Education Placement with you all as I complete my M.Div. at the Vancouver School of Theology. It is truly remarkable to find not only such a kind and engaged congregation, but one so dedicated to their connections to the larger community around them. Since I started attending VST, I have heard good things about Richmond from instructors such as the Rev. Dr. Richard Topping and the Rev. Dr. Ray Aldred.

Some fun facts to learn about me is that I believe you all are awesome before even meeting you. (feel free never to prove me wrong 😊) I am growing a jungle in my apartment; I love ultimate frisbee, I am great at typos, and I have a love of Prince Edward Island Potatoes.

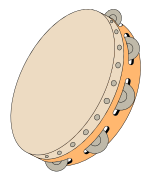


One of my favourite biblical passages that best outlines my outlook on life is the song of Miriam in Exodus 15. It is right after the parting of the Red Sea, and God saved the Israelites from a challenge they could not have faced on their own.

I love the image of Miriam here, not as the sister of some famous brother but as a priestess and prophet. Someone so trusted and respected, leading the women in a triumphant dance of exuberance of celebration. This gathering in the Bible is not a polished, organized assembly tempered music but an exuberant celebration moved by the Spirit in this time of Trial. There is a celebration at that moment for God, for the Lord.

Here Miriam is, a minority woman, is playing a tambourine. Our equivalent percussion instrument is a tambourine (I am a woman who plays percussion, timpani, not a tambourine, though.) You might ask why this is important for me to highlight. A method of fixing a problem is percussive maintenance, which is hitting things to make them work. It does not always work that way, and yet God did do it with the seas being thrown into the rider.

I want to point out that Miriam intentionally travelled with a tambourine to celebrate the Lord, even in their hasty evacuation from Egypt. Even in the time of trial, praise and celebration was a vital part of living their faith. Some people might judge her because you can't eat a tambourine, so why pack one while fleeing?





It is a choice to always be with the joy of being saved. We can also choose to be in this time of jubilant celebration. To carry joy with us to celebrate at all times of the day. Does this mean we are in a safe space? Does this mean that we will not have struggles on the road forward? Of course not. But this story shows us the value of celebrating as we journey in life. We are not alone; God has always been there for us and will continue to be there even in small things that we might overlook.



So my question is constantly, how will we celebrate the Lord today?

Well, I am looking forward to celebrating the Lord with you all in different ways over the next few months. Some of the plans are learning to lead worship and the hands-on, day-to-day ministry from writing critiqued sermons, session meetings, educational ministry, missional opportunities, discipleship and volunteer development. I will also be learning how to be a good minister in the broader context of the church. The most exciting project focuses on one of Richmond's learning goals and leaning into living into their Indigenous land acknowledgement. The first semester a group from Richmond participated in a Master Class on Indigenous Realities and the Canadian Church with Ray Aldred, hosted by Food for the Hungry.

The plan is to take the time to learn so that we can help facilitate and participate in a community conversation with Ray Aldred and select others. From the learning, we do as a community, and as the Spirit reveals, we will adapt to work with our siblings on this land on one or more issues of common concern. There was a meeting with Ray on October 28th where the idea was broached, and we are going forward with a 3-tiered approach. We are planning to divide this time evenly into three parts:



1. We will be talking about the Healing of the Land as a developed theology of "we are here" instead of thinking of land belonging to the people or ecology.
2. We will work on raising our emotional intelligence to learn to listen and be present from a place of trauma-informed love.
3. We will lean into Unity that does not end in synchronism.

Realistically we hope that 1/3 of my time is spent listening in conversations with others, with Indigenous businesses, writers, etc... to find out who they are and where they are in relation to us. Another 1/3rd of my time will be spent talking to other churches to see what they are already doing so we can come alongside them to have a more long-term positive impact. Finally, I will spend the final 1/3rd helping facilitate a gathering where we as a church can hear with loving hearts to come to some form of understanding.





This collaborative learning we are leaning towards are the community conversations. A safe place and space where we do not need to have the answers but where we can have resources to learn and grow. To celebrate the blessings that are our Indigenous brothers and sisters. We envision this as a ministry built around a more thoughtful, engaged, and generous holistic understanding of Indigenous relations that comes from their sharing and not a colonizer-centric view as we journey through repentance.

Now, this is a new journey for many of us, and we all come from different places of experience. Some of us may feel we want to read more to understand or have a deeper appreciation for our shared history before the community conversations start next semester. I would love to hear your impute of how you want to explore this topic together. What questions do you have that you are committed to learning more about?



Blessings and love,
Jacqueline Cleland

Resources to look up if you so desire:

Saving the Gospel from the Cowboys by Richard Twiss,
Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision by Randy Woodley,
Miller, J.R. "Compact, Contract, Covenant: Canada's Treaty-making Tradition," in The Michael Keenan Memorial Lecture 2003 (Saskatoon: St. Thomas Moore College, 2007),
Adrian Jacobs, Richard Twiss, Terry LeBlanc, "Culture, Christian Faith, and Error.",
Deloria Jr., Vine. "A Violated Covenant," in For This Land: Writings on Religion in America., Deloria Jr., Vine. "Philosophy and the Tribal Peoples.",

UNDRIP,

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

UNDRIP Bill C-15,

<https://parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/bill/C-15/first-reading>

TRC Calls to Action

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls_to_action_english2.pdf

