

News from UPC *The Season of Lent 2026*



**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead
(1 Peter 1:3)**

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From our Interim Moderator Rev. Joan Masterton

Friends,

Lent has a way of slowing us down just enough to notice what we'd rather rush past. It invites us to look honestly at the world as it is – its fractures, its injustices, its griefs – and also to look honestly at ourselves. Not to shame us, but to awaken us. To remind us that transformation begins with truth-telling.

This season of Lent has brought us news of increasing violence in a world already rocking with uncertainty. That's on the global scale, but we also know that some of us have had personal challenges that were unanticipated and unwanted. Our own wellbeing as a congregation continues to be the subject of conversation and, no doubt, concern. Where's the hope?

In Psalm 51, the psalmist prays, *"You desire truth in the inward being; therefore, teach me wisdom in my secret heart."* Lent is that teaching season. It asks us to sit with the truth of our lives and the truth of our world, not to be overwhelmed by it, but to be opened by it. Opened to compassion. Opened to courage. Opened to the Spirit's quiet insistence that things do not have to remain as they are.

We in UPC know that faith is not an escape from the world's pain but a call to engage with it – thoughtfully, humbly, and with a love that refuses to give up. That is Session's goal for 2026... to discern with truth and wisdom our own future. Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem was not a detour around suffering; it was a path straight through the heart of it. And still, he walked it with purpose, with tenderness, and with a vision of a world made whole.

We, too, walk that path. Some days it feels like Good Friday is far too close: the weight of injustice, the ache of loss, the uncertainty of what comes next. But Lent reminds us that God is not finished. That even in the shadowed places, seeds of resurrection are quietly taking root. The snow *is* melting; daffodils *are* on their way.

So, we keep going. We keep praying. We keep showing up for one another and for our neighbours. We keep trusting that the story does not end at the cross. For certain, Easter is coming – not as a denial of suffering, but as God’s bold declaration that suffering will not have the final word. Hope rises, even from the places we thought were beyond redemption.

May this season deepen our courage, sharpen our compassion, and prepare our hearts for the astonishing, world-changing hope that awaits us on the other side of Good Friday.

In faith,

Joan

Travel news on our Interim Moderator



Joan has set off on an adventure

March 12 until March 30...

This is a unique opportunity to learn about the life and witness of the church in the current and historical context of South Africa, 30 years after the end of apartheid: to witness how people in South Africa seek to live out the promise of a democratic and non-racial country, what Archbishop Desmond Tutu famously called the Rainbow Nation, to hear different voices and perspective, through conversation with people from many different backgrounds.

There will be an intentional focus on the similarities and differences between Canadian colonial history and current realities, particularly in relationships with Indigenous Peoples—a chance to learn about the challenges and opportunities of working together as the global church.

The trip is taking place in collaboration with the Volmoed (translated as Filled with Hope) Community in South Africa. Among the sites to be visited will be historic and cultural sites in Cape Town and Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned.

We pray for safe travels and a meaningful study tour for our Joan.

We look forward to Joan’s sharing her experiences with us upon her return.

A note from Session

At our Annual Meeting on Feb. 22nd, Joan noted that 2025 was a year of adjusting to the departure of the minister and now, 2026 is a time to refocus on the future. What are UPC's options? Led by Session, the congregation will participate in discerning the path forward from the possibilities, among which could be:

- Part-time minister (stated supply or 50% called)
- Enter a cooperative or shared ministry (e.g. Two-point charge)
- Continue with interim moderator and pulpit supply or stated supply
- Lay leadership
- Amalgamation with another congregation
- Dissolution
- Repurposing (e.g. Redevelopment)



In a recent Knox College lecture entitled "To See or Not to See? A Theology of the Future", Dr. Anna Robbins advised congregations to work with *scenarios*, not *inevitability* and with what is plausible that aligns with our purpose, mission and values. What is our mission as a church? What's driving us? *Thriving* is not size, it's *spiritual health*. Let's create spaces for imagination. Think long-term as the First Nations principle of making decisions based on their impact on descendants seven generations into the future.

Grounded in the Love of Jesus Christ, let's move into the future together with open hearts and minds.

"See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?"

I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland." Isaiah 43:19

For each thorn, there's a rosebud ...
For each twilight – a dawn ...
For each trial – the strength to carry on ...
For each storm cloud – the sun ...
For each parting – sweet memories when sorrow is done.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Submitted by Eleanor Clayton



Easter Services

Palm Sunday Service (with Christine Way Skinner)

Sunday, March 29, 11:00 am

Maundy Thursday Agape Meal (with Christine Samuel)

Thursday, April 2, noon

Good Friday Service (with Christine Samuel)

Friday, April 3, 10:30 am

Easter Sunday Communion Service (with Christine Samuel & Rev. Joan)

Sunday, April 5, 11:00 am

A monk and his large stone

The story begins with the young monk asking his elder,

“Master, what is the greatest value of my life?”

The elder smiled at him but didn’t give him the answer. Instead, he told the young monk to go on a little journey:

“Before I give you the answer, I want you to complete a mission.

Go outside to the garden and find a large stone. Then take the stone down to the market to sell it. If someone asks you for the price of the stone, stay silent, and instead just stretch out 2 fingers in response. If someone offers you money for it, don’t sell the stone! Bring it back to me, and I will tell you the answer to your question.”

The little monk set off early the next morning and carried the large stone to the market to sell.

The market was crowded that day, and all the people were very curious about the mysterious young monk and his stone. Suddenly a housewife came over and asked:

“How much are you selling that stone for?”

The young monk stretched out two fingers. The housewife said: *“2 Dollars?”*

The little monk shook his head, and the housewife replied: *“So it’s 20 Dollars? Well, ok! I’ve been looking for a good paper weight to use at home.”*

The little monk couldn't help but think to himself:

"My goodness, someone's willing to fork out 20 Dollars to buy this worthless stone! There are thousands more in the hills where that came from! "

However, the little monk followed his master's instructions and, keeping the stone, cheerfully went back to report his accomplishments:

"Master, you won't believe it. Today there was a housewife who offered 20 dollars to buy my stone. Now can you tell me, what is the greatest value of my life? "

The elder monk replied:

"Very good! But your mission is not over yet! Tomorrow morning, I want you to try it again. This time, take the stone to the museum instead. Come back to me afterwards and I will tell you the answer to your question.

The next morning, in the museum, a group of curious onlookers stood whispering amongst themselves:

"It looks like an ordinary stone, what's so special about it?"

"There must be some hidden value, or why would the little monk bring it here?"

At this moment, a person sprang out from the crowd, and shouted out to the little monk asking:

"Little monk, how much are you selling this stone for?"

Once again, the little monk didn't say anything and just showed him 2 fingers.

The man said: *"200 Dollars?"*

The little monk shook his head, and the man replied:

"Of course! 2,000 Dollars then. I will carve this stone into a statue and make it a work of art."

Upon hearing the offer, the little monk was taken aback.

Almost giddy from excitement, the little monk remembered his master's instructions and rushed back to the monastery before anyone could say another word.

"Master! Today someone offered 2,000 dollars for my stone. I don't believe what's happening! Now can you tell me what the greatest value of my life is?"

The elder monk laughed and said:

"Not so fast! I have one last task for you. Tomorrow, I want you to try one more time. This time, take the stone down to the art collector's shop. When you come back, I promise to give you your answer."

So the next morning of the third day, the little monk brought his stone to the art collector's store. It seemed the story of the little monk and his mysterious stone had spread throughout the town, as immediately he was surrounded by a group of people.

They murmured excitedly to each other in hushed tones.

"This little monk is shrewd! He must know the true value of this precious rock to bring it here."

Finally, one person asked him: *"Little monk, what is the asking price for your wonderful stone specimen?"*

As before, the little monk stretched out two of his fingers without replying.

"20,000?" another man asked. Completely stunned, the little monk blurted out a garbled reply before covering his now wide-open mouth in a fluster.

Thinking that he had angered the little monk with a low-ball price, the man immediately corrected himself.

"Oh, no, no... I meant to say 200,000 then! Wait!"

So stunned was the little monk that he picked up the stone and ran all the way back to the monastery, leaving the entire crowd in an uproar.

Panting excitedly, he described his experience at the art collector.

"Master, Master! We're rich! Someone just offered 200,000 dollars for the stone! Surely, now you can finally tell me what the greatest value of my life is. Please!"

Smiling, the elder monk patted the young monk on the head and gently said:

"My child, you have already discovered the answer to your own question.

The greatest value of your life is just like this stone.

At the market, you are only worth 20 dollars,

And at the museum, you are worth 2,000 dollars,

But if you place yourself at the art collector, you're worth 200,000 dollars!

So the value of your life is exactly where you place yourself to be.

The decision is yours to make."

Story submitted by Lynn Thompson



♥♥♥ Happy 89th Birthday to Betty! ♥♥♥♥

Hope Built on Promise

Optimism arranges reality in a way that enables us to say things will get better. Pessimism arranges the same reality so that we can say things will probably get worse. When it rains, the optimist says, "How wonderful! Things will grow." Seeing the same rain, the pessimist says, "Everything will drown."

Being neither an optimist nor a pessimist, Jesus speaks about hope that is not based on chances that things will get better or worse. His hope is built upon the promise that, whatever happens, God will stay with us at all times, in all places. God is the God of life.

Henri Nowwen

"They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built." - Luke 6: 48