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Lent / Easter Edition, 2022

The Light Shines in the Darkness

Every time we drive down to Toronto on the 401, there is a church that we pass in Etobicoke that catches my eye. It is called the *Triumphant Church of Jesus Christ* and is right up against the north side of the collectors lanes. Now, I have absolutely nothing against this church. I'm sure that it is made up of a wonderful group of people who have a great ministry. But that name always gets me thinking about how we define our churches. You see a lot of names of churches like that these days – names that evoke triumph, victory and celebration.

And, on the one hand, that seems perfectly appropriate because the church is supposed to be about those things. I know that people come to churches because they want to experience triumph and victory and they want to be able to celebrate. And Jesus does offer us these things. Easter is, above all, a celebration of Christ's victory after all.

And yet, at the same time, I have always been a bit hesitant to say that the church should *just* be about triumph and victory and celebration. The simple reality is that the Christian Life, as most people live it, is not just an endless string of victory and celebration. We will all encounter hard times and trials and difficulties as we make our way through life. The temptation has often been to try to minimize that, even sometimes make people feel as if they lack in faith if they do not always feel victorious.

The simple truth is that we cannot experience the extraordinary victory that Jesus won for us at Easter unless we are also ready to enter into the darkness and despair of everything that he suffered during the week of his passion. An Easter morning completely devoid of an understanding of the suffering of Good Friday would not be a true victory, it would simply be a

rather empty exercise in positive thinking.

So, during the season of Lent this year, we have attempted to face the very real specter of darkness in this world. We have symbolized this by extinguishing a candle each Sunday in Lent and on Good Friday. It was an approach to the season that seemed appropriate maybe especially this



year. It has been, as we put up on the sign for a few days, "The Lentiest Lent we have ever Lented."

I hope you understand that this was not an exercise in pessimism or despair. It is an expression of a much more powerful hope that proclaims:

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1:5)

PCC Partners in Ukraine: The Reformed Church in Transcarpathia

Presbyterian Church in Canada

"So many refugees reached our region. The capital city of Transcarpathia, Uzhgorod, accommodated more than 30,000 refugees and cannot receive more. The city is filled. The governing of Transcarpathia asked for help from the neighboring villages. Nearly the same situation in Beregovo as well.

"Our reformed congregation also has refugees from different parts of central Ukraine, mainly from Kiev and Harkov. Our pastors, elders and volunteers try to accommodate them in different ways. Mainly mothers with little kids, even with little babies."



The Reformed Church in Transcarpathia took on the responsibility to take care of mothers with their kids coming from central Ukraine, giving them accommodation and health care.

The Home Care project of the Reformed Church, which operates in six working points, takes care of more than 200 elderly people unable to leave due to illness and isolation.

The church also takes care of children with special needs and their families by helping them with food packs and sanitary parcels.



"Thanks to foreign partners, congregations and different natural support we can give them help to maintain social kitchens and prepare hot meals for refugees. We also have to buy washing machines, refrigerators, boilers, etc. These are necessary tools for refugee shelters."

The bakery of the diaconal centre bakes more than 400 breads each day and cooks hot meals every day for those who are in need.

The Reformed Church's Bishop's Office and the Diaconal Coordination Office also receives humanitarian supports from various organizations and private donors. These supports go to places where refugees are accommodated.

With the help of the Hungarian consulate, thousands of mothers and kids were evacuated from the war zone and transported to Hungary where they received safe accommodation. Hungary has received 641,775 refugees since the beginning of the war.

"[On Sunday, March 13] we organized a church service for Ukrainian refugees. We had nice worship, sang Ukrainian songs, and prayed together. . .at the end of the worship they said that it was the first day after their long journey that they could smile and take a real rest. Bless the Lord."

Congregations belonging to the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia try to invite Ukrainian speaking refugees to visit church services and to take part in children's programs twice a week. These occasions are blessed because, after some hours, mothers could talk to our staff, could tell their stories and could feel themselves safe.

The PCC and the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia

The Presbyterian Church in Canada sent David Pandy-Szekeres, along with his wife, Anna, as mission staff serving with the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia from 2000 to 2018. David is retired now and lives in Hungary.

The Reformed Church in Transcarpathia is the oldest Protestant Church in Ukraine. It was founded in 1921, when the Sub-Carpathian region became a part of the Czech-Slovak Republic. During the Soviet era, the church lost its legal status and many church-owned properties were seized and privatized. The structure of the church did not exist, atheist propaganda was promoted and many pastors were deported. Eventually, the fall of the Soviet Union brought relief, and with the help of church sponsors, schools and churches were re-opened.

The Reformed Church in Sub-Carpathia currently has around 70,000 members, mostly ethnic Hungarians, in nearly 100 parishes. It is organized into three presbyteries. It is a constituting member of the Hungarian Reformed Church, which was established in May 2009, and consists of Hungarian-speaking Reformed communities in the Carpathian Basin. It is also a member church of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the World Council of Churches, the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and the Conference of European Churches.

The official name of the church in Ukrainian would be "Transcarpathian," as this region lies beyond the Carpathian Mountains, seen from Kijev. In Hungarian, the commonly used term reads "Sub-Carpathian." The two terms are used interchangeably.

Your gifts to Presbyterians Sharing and Presbyterian World Service and Development supports this important work.



David Pandy-Szekeres with Julius, his "always-smiling colleague"

Holy Week 2022

Holy Week is the week just before Easter and also the last week of Lent. It begins on Palm Sunday and ends on Holy Saturday. Holy Week is always a very special time at St. Andrew's. Martin Bohl will be joining us to provide music for these services this year. Please remember these special services and times:

Palm Sunday (April 10) Palm Sunday will be very special this year. We will be celebrating a baptism and ending our Lenten theme by focusing on the story of the passion of the Christ and what it means for us.

Maundy Thursday (April 14) we will gather for a simple communion service at 7:30 pm in person and on Zoom.

Good Friday (April 15). This year we will be celebrating with a morning service at 10:00 am for a solemn remembrance of Jesus' last hours. Once again, you can join us in person or on Zoom.



Holy Week

Don't forget that Fundscrip is an easy and fun way to support the work of the church. Card orders should be submitted outside the office by the last Sunday of each month and look out for monthly specials that give back super high percentages to the church.

Did you know that each card you order you get the full value of it and St. Andrew's receives a percentage of the value. It really doesn't cost anyone anything!



Thank you to the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 272 Hespeler!

Joni Smith

On December 22, 2021 Karen Kincaid, Rev. Scott McAndless and Joni Smith were invited to the Hespeler Legion to accept, on behalf of Hope Clothing, a cheque for \$4,066.70. This was a portion of the proceeds from their Chase the Ace event. We are so thankful to the Legion for choosing to support Hope Clothing. We are only able to continue reaching out to those who need help in our community with the help and support from our community. Many, many heartfelt thanks to the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 272 Hespeler!



This very special hand-made thank you was received by the congregation this week from Winnipeg Inner City Mission. They very much appreciated our support for the work of Flora House.

Prayer Card

Please write your prayer on this card and place in the collection plate. Your prayers will be included in the Prayers of the People.

*"Therefore I tell you,
whatever you ask in
prayer, believe that you
have received it, and
it will be yours."*

- Mark 11:24

We have recently introduced our new Prayer Cards. These prayer cards can be used by those in the sanctuary to request prayers for our Prayers of the People. Cards will be available at the back of the sanctuary and can be placed on the offering plate, also at the back of the sanctuary. The Prayer Cards will be delivered to Scott during the pause before Prayers for the People. Please remember that we need permission to pray, publicly, for others.

Christian Education News

Joni Smith



Family Ministries:

Family Ministries are continuing with our Faith @ Home program. The Faith @ Home boxes were reloaded and delivered to our families. Each week during Lent porch drop offs of Faith @ Home packages were made that included special weekly Lenten activities to help us prepare for the good news of Easter. We also encouraged everyone in our congregation to participate along with our families.

Your Christian Education Committee will soon be making plans for what comes next. Please pray that we will follow God's path for us and that we will be able to help families and children learn more about their faith so that they can live their faith outside of church.



During the March Break a group of young people met up at the church for some work, fun and pizza. We helped Hope Clothing switch over from winter to spring/summer, cleaned out and cleaned up a storage space and enjoyed some social time with pizza. We are thankful for the generous person who provided the pizza for us. Thank you to all of our youth for your hard work and help. You are very much appreciated.

Generosity

By: Joni Smith

What is generosity? Generosity is defined as “A **willingness** to give **help** or **support**, especially more than is **usual** or **expected**” in the Cambridge Dictionary.

When we talk about generosity here we are talking about our attitude and our actions. We are talking about how we can share what we have with others, how we can share our gifts and talents, that God gave to us, with others. We are talking about how to give to a community in need: with outreach programs like the Cambridge Food Bank and Hope Clothing.

From a biblical perspective what is generosity? Authentic generosity comes with no strings attached, no judgement and complete trust in God.

“A talent given to us is a gift from God, how we use that talent is our gift to God.”

Lent and Easter is the perfect time to talk about generosity. Simply put, there is no one more generous than God. As we strive to be more like God we will find ourselves becoming more generous and trusting God that he will provide for us all that is needed and we will have enough. Take a moment to think about how generous God is. God saw our sins, or the sins of humankind and gave his son, to us, to people who didn't ask for it, who probably didn't even know they needed it, and maybe didn't even deserve it.

The more active we allow God to be in our lives and the closer we walk with God, the more generous we will become towards others. The blessings from God will overcome our needs allowing us to give where God leads us.

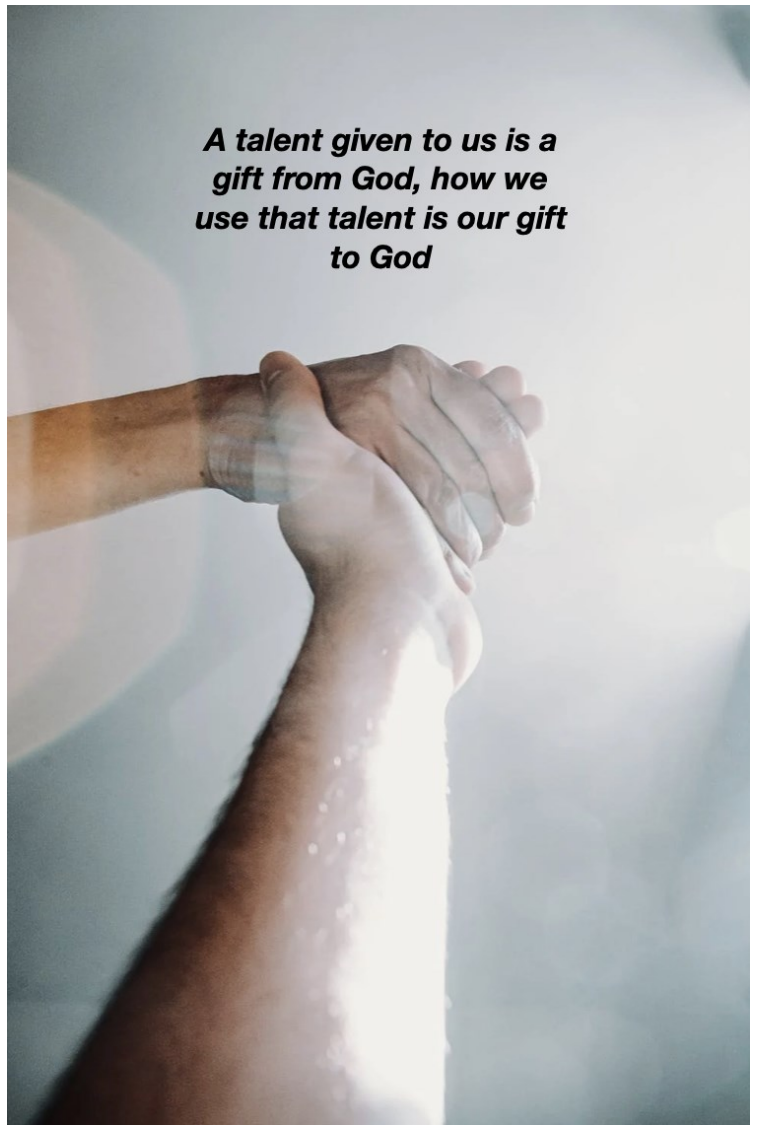
As the need for assistance in our community grows we are seeing more people from many different circumstances come for our help. It is sometimes hard to let go our our pre-conceived notions of how people should act, maybe even what people in need should look like.

Does that person who is driving a BMW really need our help? Does that person who has the newest cell phone really need our help? These are the kinds of preconceived notions that clutter our thinking, but can also be used in a positive way. These notions might make us think more deeply about how God would act, about how God would provide.

Let's think for a moment. That person who is driving a BMW ... maybe that car is borrowed. Or maybe life was just fine four or five months ago and then jobs were lost, or health was lost and now debt is piling up and the car is the last thing they have left. Maybe that car is now their home. We just don't know and we don't need to know.

What about that person who has a nice cell phone? Did you know it is cheaper to get a cell phone/number than a landline? For a landline you need a hefty deposit. And sometimes the cell phone is also the only device they have to connect to the internet.

When we see behaviour that we feel is more aligned with someone taking advantage of our generosity it is sometimes hard to see past that behaviour. We need to stop ourselves and ask what might be in that person's life or even, what was their morning like before they even got to St. Andrew's. What might have influenced their actions? We just don't know, nor do we



need to know. Although there is a fine line, sometimes, between generosity and enabling really poor behaviour, we need to be mindful that we don't jump to conclusions.

By offering a judgement free, no strings attached space for people to gather and to get some much needed help, we will eventually develop trust with our community friends and that will lead to providing a safe space for everyone. Trust takes a very long time to develop and grow, but it is so important. Trust will become the basis for a safe and inclusive space for people to gather.

Some illustrations of what a safe space can do:

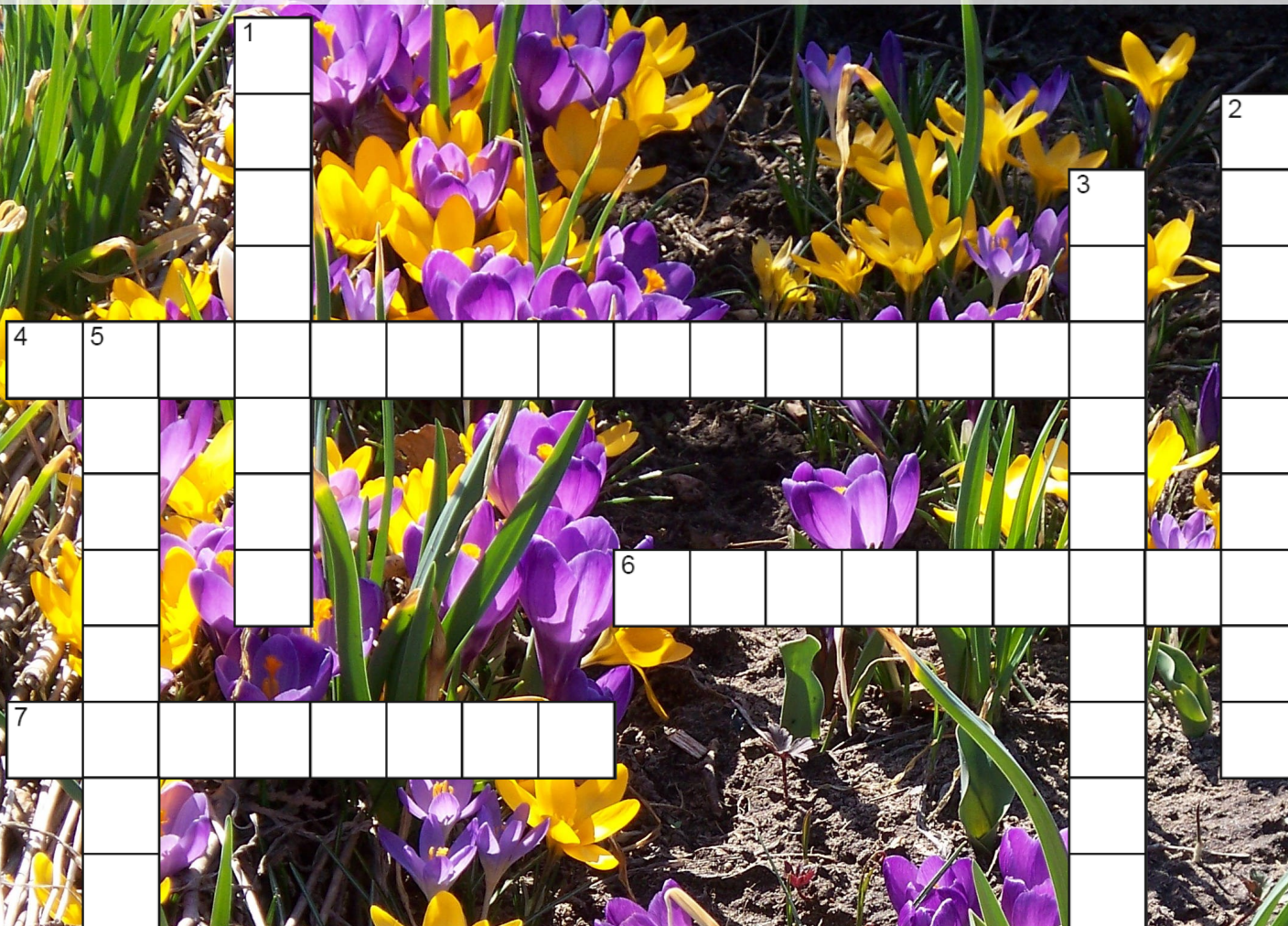


- we have many new international students from India accessing food. We have been told that the word is out that St. Andrew's is the place to come. The place to come to not only get food, but to be treated well. These students make us smile. They take the time to talk with us. We have all been learning new things; how to cook pasta (for the students) or how to use Matpa beans and make Dosas (for us).
- we have some Afghan refugees close by and a few of them have found St. Andrew's and the food bank. There is a language barrier, but we are all learning how to communicate. We are learning what a Halal diet looks like. We have become their safe place to come for help when they didn't know where else to turn. They are kind and grateful and now consider us their friends. It is an honour to be their friends.
- A young girl, who lives in a troubled home, now knows that St. Andrew's is a safe space for her. We all love to spoil this girl by helping her find some pretty clothes and finding some candies or cookies for her and providing some cake mixes and icing because she loves to bake.
- we have one gentleman, who when he first came, was more than a little ragged around the edges. Now we notice that he takes much more care with his appearance when he comes and he talks with us a lot more.
- we have some clients who let us know that they will be away and not at food bank for a week or so. They let us know because they know we worry about them.
- many of our clients share with us news about their families and what they are doing.
- we have created a safe space for people to come, where people can be accepted for who they are.

Generosity is the basis of this safe space and the trust that people have in us. Creating this safe space will bring hope to people. Generosity might take some work at the beginning, as we need to fully put our trust in God, but once you do it becomes very easy and very rewarding. Generosity will bring much joy!

The Back Page

Well, you have now read through this entire newsletter. Now let's see how much of it you remember. Can you fill out this whole crossword puzzle without looking back?



ACROSS

- 4 A region beyond the Carpathian mountains
- 6 A Municipality in Toronto
- 7 the denomination we work with in Eastern Europe

DOWN

- 1 It cannot overcome the light
- 2 A safe space doesn't have this
- 3 A willingness to give help or support, especially more than is usual or expected
- 5 over 600,000 have shown up in Hungary

An answer key to this puzzle will be placed in the bulletin on April 24