

## RETIREES

### **The Reverend Jeff Bacon**

When I graduated from Queen's Chemical Engineering in 1979, a minister was the last thing I thought I would be! I headed out to Calgary in my 1972 Volkswagen Beetle and started my career as a Reservoir Engineer with Imperial Oil, helping to develop the Norman Wells oilfield in the Northwest Territories. And then oil prices crashed and I took a leave of absence, got married to my high school sweetheart, and enrolled in an MBA program at Western University.

When I graduated with my Western MBA in 1983, a minister was the last thing I thought I would be! I joined Gulf Canada in their head office Financial Planning and Analysis group where my engineering, oilfield development, and MBA experience would all be important. I coordinated the business unit financial plans, valued them, and consolidated them into our Annual Financial Plan for the Board. An acquisition offer was made for Gulf Corporation in the U.S., and because of my work with the Canadian business unit financial plans, I was selected to work with a Board Committee and their Financial Advisors, Burns Fry. After the transaction, Gulf Canada reorganized in Calgary and I was asked to join the Burns Fry Mergers and Acquisitions team.

When I joined the Burns Fry M&A team, a minister was the last thing I thought I would be! After working on M&A deals for more than 25 years, during a backyard discussion with Rev. Hugh Reid, minister at Kingsway-Lambton United Church, I expressed my curiosity about Christianity. I asked if there was a course he might recommend; maybe at Emmanuel College. Hugh suggested that if I had the flexibility, I could enrol in the first year of an MDiv degree. If the first year didn't satisfy my curiosity, I could continue on.

After enrolling in the MDiv program at Emmanuel College, a minister was still the last thing I thought I would be! But my curiosity was never completely satisfied and I continued on, growing in faith and ministerial ability. I was ordained serving part-time at Aurora United Church and then I was called to lead St. Bartholomew's United Church in Brampton, which I have done my best to do since 2013.

On January 31, 2022, what I thought was just a sore neck from poor computer and cell phone posture, required complicated surgery to repair vertebrae degenerated by cancer that originated in my prostate. The cancer is in several places and the doctors tell me it cannot be cured. It's time for me to retire. I face each day with hope and faith, knowing that each day is a miracle. Looking back on my diverse pursuits, I have two main observations: always do what inspires you; and all things eventually lead to God!

## **The Reverend Connie denBok**

My parents joined the United Church as immigrants, eager to make a new life as Canadians in Toronto, and so I followed a Baby Boom trajectory: Baptism with a dozen other babies, Sunday School in public school classrooms while St. Bartholomew's United Church was still under construction, a spiritual awakening at old downtown Grace United, and youth Group at St. Paul's – all in Brampton. At the time, when both Ontario and the United Church were predominantly British heritage, having parents who spoke English with a different inflection was unusual enough that we were often asked where my family was “from,” even into seminary at Emmanuel College.

I met my husband, Rev. Doug McLeod, just as he was beginning his candidacy and together we did summer internships in Alberta, Saskatchewan, the eastern townships of Quebec, and the interior of British Columbia. We chose to be settled on the prairies – and still cherish friendships with classmates, colleagues, parishioners, and mentors who have been such an important part of our lives. Imagine being ordained at the age of 23 – and entrusted with a two-point charge!

My graduating class of 43 students from Emmanuel College represented the full theological diversity which was the ecosystem of The United Church of Canada and, I think, a source of resilience and vitality. As I leave this stage of ministry, it is with a heart filled with gratitude – to God first, to my always patient spouse and family, to the people in the pews who have been such a source of inspiration and support, to colleagues and committees, to the brave Executive Secretaries, Personnel Officers and others who let me try new things before they were mainstream, and brought me back to earth again – you will always be part of the Call I love.

## **The Reverend Karen Hilfman Millson**

More than thirty-three and a half years ago I was ordained into a ministry that has been rich, expansive, engaging, exciting, exhausting, energizing, filled with learning, and at times heart-breaking. From my internship at Harcourt in Guelph, settlement in rural Comber Pastoral Charge, ministry with St Paul's Orillia, consulting as a Facilitator of Significant Conversations, to conference then regional staff to develop Clusters and Networks and Collaborative Ministry Models, I have experienced and been blessed by the incredible opportunity to walk with people as they discovered their gifts and calling, and deepened in their relationship and connection with the Divine to root us in the source of love, with the power of Spirit to guide us, and with Christ Consciousness to awaken us.

A central focus of my calling has been to identify and develop the principles and practices of creating Circle Culture or Authentic Connection Culture through Small Group Ministry and Circles Processes for visioning and healing – where we create a culture in which we are encouraged and supported to engage life from our true essence which is love, and to listen deeply for the wisdom and creativity within us and amongst us to discern the life-giving and transformative power of God's vision for us. The impact of this work rooted in my passion for awakening to what is possible as we seek to be a reflection of God's love in the world, has been seen when people's personal lives have shifted as they discover the power and wisdom within them, and the ministry of communities of faith has deepened as they experience a renewed vision that emerges amongst them for engaging with their neighbourhood and collaborating with other communities of faith and

organizations in the ministry we all share. There is a transformational call that enlivens us when we seek to create opportunities for people to experience the kingdom of God's love here and now which is supported by an intentional shift toward the theme of this year's regional council meeting of the Common Good whose principles align with Circle Culture and Beloved Community.

After being on medical leave with cancer for a year, I returned to work for four months before my retirement when I had the opportunity to develop what I think of as my legacy project – a resource to support communities of faith to develop their Living Faith Story that includes Self-Assessment processes that are rooted in the Covenant with the regional council. My hope and prayer is that when this resource is introduced it will be supportive and life-giving and create experiences of the blessings of Circle Culture in communities of faith.

Three months after retiring I found out the cancer has returned. It is now stage four. So, I am entering back into my pilgrimage with cancer, a journey I am writing about to be the basis of my second book to offer my perspective and insights that are rooted in my life work of creating beloved community where we face hard realities and are open to life-giving possibilities, a perspective that is timely in the life of the church at this time.

As I again intentionally choose how I will respond to the reality of my life, I surround all of you with light and love with a prayer that Spirit's nudging will lead the church in expressions of healthy life-giving relationship with those whose stories and presence we encounter, with the earth we walk upon, and with ourselves, to deepen our connection to the Divine Holy Mystery that calls us into community to respond to our deepest longing for authentic connection that honours the light and love at the core of all of life.

Wherever the journey takes us, may we be open to the blessings of joy, open to the raging energy that empowers us to stand up to domination that destroys, open to the creativity, wisdom and love longing to emerge amongst us, open to the peace that holds us and draws us deep into awareness of what really matters.

### **The Reverend Doug McLeod**

My journey in ministry began at York University Toronto when I came to faith in Jesus Christ in the early 70s. Graduating in 1975, I sensed a call by the Holy Spirit to ministry. Encouraged by my pastor, I was a candidate from St Paul's Brampton and attended Emmanuel College from 1975-78 which included summer internships in Alberta and Saskatchewan. I delayed ordination and served as lay minister at Lemonville Pastoral Charge near Stouffville ON. After ordination by the Toronto Conference in 1980 I was settled in Creelman, SK later accepting a call to Saskatoon. In 1988, we returned to the London area and served near Ilderton, ON. I left the ministry for a few years to get a degree in education and teach school. Later I served as minister at Painswick United Church in Barrie, a new church development. I arrived at Parkdale United Toronto in 2012 and retired January 1 2022. Forty-four years in ministry!!

I appreciate all those who I worked with in the various courts of the church over the years and my ministerial colleagues who I call friends.

It has been a blessing and a privilege to serve the local church. Many thanks to the people of the congregations I worked with over the years across Canada. I love you and you will always remain in my heart.

### **The Reverend Edith-Ann Shantz**

Edith-Ann was called to Don Mills United Church in Toronto in 1986, and went on to be the minister of Don Mills-Thorncliffe Park Pastoral Charge when they amalgamated in 2000. Edith-Ann retired from her call with her long-time community of faith in December 2021.

### **The Reverend Dr. Andrew Stirling**

It has been a singular honour to have served the ministry of The United Church of Canada over the past 41 years. Having grown up attending United Churches in Bermuda and the Maritimes, I began my ministry after having left Cape Town, South Africa in the fall of 1980. I was graciously received as a Trained Lay Supply in River John, Nova Scotia, and through my sojourn there completed my M.Div. at the Atlantic School of Theology.

After ordination in Maritime Conference, I served the Parrsboro-Port Greville Pastoral Charge in N.S. After enjoying the beauty of the Fundy Coast and its warm people, I accepted a Call to Woodlawn United Church, Dartmouth, N.S. where I was privileged to serve for six years. Woodlawn was a dynamic congregation with a vibrant youth ministry and strong social outreach. During my time there I commenced my writing ministry and was a Visiting Scholar at Harvard Divinity School.

In 1992, Parkdale United Church in Ottawa approached me and over the next six years I enjoyed the life of the church at the heart of the capital city. It was a time of tension in the nation as it struggled with the Quebec Referendum and it was fascinating to be part of the national conversation. Parkdale is an engaging community, and it was during my time there that they encouraged me to be engaged with the wider church and the ecumenical and inter-faith community.

For the past 23 years I have served Timothy Eaton Memorial Church in Toronto. This has afforded me the opportunity to enjoy preaching and pastoral ministry in a full way. Over the years it has enabled me to complete doctoral work, teach homiletics in various seminaries, preach in various countries, write and edit books, and be an academic Visitor at Oxford. I am also delighted to have helped establish Chairs in Preaching in three divinity colleges. However, the most important part of any church is the faith of its people, and it is that that above all I will remember for the rest of my life

I have been blessed, therefore, to serve our glorious Triune God among faithful and caring people who have loved the Gospel and have been actively concerned for the justice of the world. I continue to serve this same God now as the Ambassador for the Canadian Bible Society but owe a debt of gratitude to the United Church for its love and support.