

Note to the Congregation of
Riverside United Ottawa

The “Come Back Strong” Initiative

It’s been a tough year. The ties that link us together have been strained but not broken. We thank each one of you for being a part of keeping us together through these long months.

Despite the onslaught of the COVID-19 virus, our church staff, committees, and members have been working diligently planning and learning how to keep together with Zoom services, YouTube, e-mails newsletters and mailings and through your generous giving of time and money. Ministry teams and committees have been planning for the future.

We want to share the story of our efforts and adventures, and our visions of how we can refresh, remake and rebuild our Church into the uniting force that will sustain us beyond these times. So let us tell that story and explain all that we know about the next steps.

The Loss of our partner congregation - Church of the Resurrection

Perhaps the most profound and symbolic loss has been our partner Anglican congregation from the Church of the Resurrection who agreed to disestablish themselves in the summer of 2020. COR has been our partner since the establishment of The Corporation of Riverside Churches in 1969, and together we managed the church property, shared in our mutual journey of worship and the fellowship we enjoyed, and bore the financial and organizational burdens for our enterprise.

We have accepted their departure with sadness at that reality and are moving forward. We welcome those in COR who choose to continue with us as friends and continuing members.

During December 2020 we began the steps of winding down the Joint Holding Corporation of Riverside Churches and agreed with COR on a mutual satisfactory financial agreement. One of the terms of the 1969 agreement was that if one congregation left, the assets of the Corporation would transfer to the remaining congregation. So, the Trustees of Riverside United have title to the property on behalf of The United Church of Canada and now have assumed full responsibility for the maintenance and sustainment of the facilities. The employment of the Caretaker has been transferred to RUC. We obtained new insurance and assumed legal liabilities for the future. We are now replacing the joint management team with new structures to ensure transparency, accountability and enthusiasm for the times ahead. Our church is sound structurally and will maintain it in the future.

Our finances - Under stress but under control

For many, it is extremely important to feel confident that we have the means to continue our journey as a congregation and to sustain our church. We entered this lockdown year in good financial shape with strong givings, a healthy Endowment Fund, and control over our obligations. We thank you for your generous givings that have enabled us to keep ourselves in a good financial position this year, as have wage subsidy monies from the Government of Canada. Upon the disestablishment and settlement with COR, we received the equivalence of their share of the financial support for a full year.

Despite the loss of many rental opportunities, we are pleased to remain the home of the Riverside Park Nursery School, now under the control of the Andrew Fleck Children’s Services organization.



They are breaking ground on a new Day Care facility near the Canoe Bay Development, but plan to continue the Nursery School function at Riverside United Church. We thank them for continuing support throughout this past year and for the time to come. In addition, we have welcomed the Ottawa Organic Food Market who will hold weekly sales on Saturday mornings (10 a.m. until 12 noon) until at least the end of August, with an option to renew on a continuing basis after that. This rental arrangement is good for them, good for us and good for the community.

We hope that with the return to a new normalcy we can be open to many more rental opportunities and the associated revenues.

At the end of December we have agreed to the leasing of part of the property to host a cell phone tower in a new church steeple on the Southwest corner of our church that will be built by with Freedom Mobile. We will still need to monitor the progress to obtain the approval of that proposal with the regulatory authorities. This will also give us a sustained source of income.

Our Legacy of Initiatives for Change

As an enthusiastic congregation, we eagerly look to the future with ambitions. Despite the setbacks for the current situation, we have made progress on several initiatives to refresh, upgrade, and make our Chancel area accessible. We have further studied the addition of a ramp in the Chancel to ensure accessibility to all of our members. We will be ensuring that the Chancel will be on a single level, with relocation of the Choir and Organ to make better and more flexible use of the area with a view to future worship and rental opportunities. Finally, we completed a design project with a contractor to upgrade our audio and visual support systems. This upgrade will improve our ability to offer our congregants better sound quality, including for those who are hearing impaired. Coupled with a mounted camera and more microphones connected to a computer-controlled console, we can provide “on-line” virtual services (similar to our current ZOOM model of connection) for those who cannot be present. This will enable us to continue the “electronic outreach” that has linked us with each other, family, friends and distant partners in Jamaica. Finally, we will propose a new projector and display screen that will improve the view for all. We are exploring various grant and loan options to assist with the funding of this work.

We will bring this forward to the members of our congregation for review and approval in the near future. We ask that you consider the possibility of a special and targeted funding campaign of contributions to cover this work.

Our community is changing around us. You have seen the new paving on Riverside Drive that thankfully was completed while we were participating from home. But, there is also much work underway at the future Canoe Bay development also on Riverside Drive just north of us. The Riverside Mall shopping centre beside the Norberry Apartments may be the site of a major development. To the east of this centre, there are plans to add additional apartment units to the complex on Springland Dr. The large apartment complex on Brookfield Drive will also bring new folks and shops to our area. Finally, work on the Hogs Back Dam/Bridge and Canal Bridge has completed and the road has reopened after more than a full year of construction.

For those that yearn for the return to our fellowship time we can report that work to refresh the kitchen area with new cabinets and fresh paint has been completed. While we were unable to plan our bazaars and Garage Sale under these circumstances, we can report that the Riverside “Table” opened in coordination with the Organic Market, has succeeded very well gaining \$2500 in sales of food and crafts. Our use of Kijiji (on-line small goods sales) has gained \$1400. We thank all those whose creativity and caring made this possible. So while we can’t do things the way we used to right now, we are succeeding under new means.



It is also worth remembering the Mission Forward strategic planning process we began a few years ago that included engagement with various community organizations to identify our joint needs and opportunities. We identified four priority areas as shown below.



The work at pursuing these priorities has been on hold through this pandemic time but we have moved onwards from our decision in 2019 to be An Affirming Ministry. We declared our intention to be proactive and public in proclaiming that our understanding of faith and love includes all persons. Our Vision and Mission Statements give voice to what we see ourselves to be as a community of faith.

Vision - *Living faithfully in the Spirit of Christ to make a loving difference in the world.*

Mission - *With open minds and curious hearts, our commitment is:*

- *to nourish our faith in God, as revealed by Jesus*
- *to care for one another and*
- *to build partnerships of mutuality, respect and hope in our neighbourhood and beyond,*

as we worship, learn and serve together.

We embrace the rainbow as a promise of God's affirming love for all, and include people of all ages, races, cultures abilities, sexual orientations and gender identities in every aspect of the life of our faith community

The Return to a New Normalcy

We cannot predict with certainty how things will progress but here is our best guess. The continuation of provincial lockdowns and restrictions on travel and visitors should have the effect of reducing the number of new infections and reducing the load on our hospitals. The coming of spring and summer as well as the surge of inoculations will lower this burden further. When this trend is confirmed and has lowered the infection rate to a manageable level - perhaps next fall - we expect that rules governing gatherings of people will be outlined. Prudence suggests that this will be progressive so we can anticipate a period when we transition slowly from totally on-line services, to mixed limited in church plus on-line, to primarily



in-church with on-line access to accommodate those who may still be at risk or who cannot attend regularly due to other factors. In line with these lowering restrictions, we may see church services return to our normal times or activities (such as barbecues or pot lucks) outside in the open being offered. When permitted, we will move forward on those options.

Summary - and a call for support

We are calling this the “Come Back Strong” initiative and seek your support. We are looking for your reactions, your ideas, your help and finally, yes, your financial support. The future of our church will be different. That is a fact.

But it will also be equally warm and welcoming and supportive founded upon our best abilities to create a uniting church, well organized, well managed and fit for the future. So rest assured that your church continues to be active and looking to the future.

We want you to be part of that.

COME BACK STRONG



Remember ?



Together

