

PARISH HOUSE

Newmarket Church of Christ



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THE POWER OF RESURRECTION

Nathan Pickard

On account of funerals, the first quarter of 2022 has been a rough start. I have preached more funerals in the first three months of 2022 than I preached in all of 2021. Unfortunately, most of these funerals have been challenging funerals. Consider the last four funerals I conducted during the month of March:

- 58-year-old who died of COVID
- 43-year-old who died of cirrhosis of the liver

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Meet Our Neighbours

Without a doubt, our neighbours have been instrumental in helping us as a Christian faith community live into the mission of God. Our neighbours have helped us understand the neighbourhood, worked alongside us in various ministries, and even at times hosted the church for various events. We are who we are because we live in relationship with our neighbours. For 2022 Parish House Newsletter, we'll introduce you to some of our neighbours and the gifts they share with the Newmarket Church of Christ and the neighbourhood.

Meet Larry, Jonathon & Keith

Larry, Jonathon & Keith live at 212 Davis Drive, directly beside the church. They each have their own story, their own paths of life, and gifts. Each of them volunteer countless hours on behalf of the church and have become the de-facto caretakers of the church property.

Keith ensures the outside of the church is painted appropriately, empties the cigarette butt containers, helps cut the lawn and manages the community garden. Jon helps ensure the grass cutting is performed on a weekly basis during the summer and helps with general maintenance. Larry is *Mr. Fix It*. When someone kicked the shed door in, Larry fixed the door; when the front door needed attention, Larry came with his tools. Both Larry and Keith work alongside us in the monthly food box program. All three serve as a bridge between the church and 212 Davis.

In anticipation of this newsletter, I asked all three how they learned to trust us as a Christian faith community and, with this trust, decided to work alongside us, even though they do not attend our worship services, nor for at least one, claim to have a Christian belief.

Larry said he learned to trust us by watching us serve the neighbours through the creation of a community garden, food boxes, and the welcoming green space for the neighbours to walk their dogs.



Jonathon said he learned to trust us by the church recognizing his gifts and subsequently, the invitation for him to use his gifts. *"I moved from a large house and was bored when I moved into an apartment building. This church allows me to do what I love."*

Keith said his experience with church is that churches do not always show trust towards their neighbours. *"This church showed trust, even though you didn't know me from Adam."*

We are deeply grateful for the partnership we have with our neighbours. Our neighbours are using their gifts in such ways whereby our Christian faith community can continue to bear witness to God's in-breaking kingdom. In what ways does your faith community welcome the neighbours and invite the neighbours to use their gifts? In what ways do your neighbours partner with you?

- 19-year-old who died of an infection received from a medical procedure
- 31-year-old who died of brain cancer

The other day I was driving through a small town named Minesing. On the Main Street, like most typical small towns, stood the local church. In Minesing, the United Church was established over 150 years ago. St. Peter's Anglican Church also was established over a century ago and it too held prominence in the Town of Minesing. Unfortunately, in 2013, St. Peter's closed after 120 years of worship. While driving through Minesing, I couldn't help but notice the sign out front of the United Church: "*Church Closing*." As far as I can tell, this means that in the Town of Minesing, there is no longer a local Christian church.



Driving past the church and reading the sign, "*Church Closing*," I couldn't help but recall the conversations I've been having over the last several months:

- Churches selling their buildings due to budget constraints
- Churches realizing they are smaller in a post-COVID world
- Paid church staff leaving ministry and as a result, churches struggling to find individuals/families to lead them
- Divorce of parish ministers

As I was contemplating these conversations, I began to recall a story that Barbara Brown Taylor wrote in her book, *The Preaching Life*. The story is about walking around the Kachkar Mountains in Eastern Turkey. On this one particular afternoon, the tour guide took the group up a dirt road toward a small settlement behind some trees. As the group rounded the bend, the ruins of an ancient cathedral appeared. Poking around the ruined cathedral one could see the remnants of camp fires, a makeshift garbage dump where rats prowled for scraps and a few sheep grazing under what would have been the apse. Reading the story I couldn't help but wonder what happened? What happened whereby this particular Christian faith community ceased to exist? Pondering this story (and current realities), I think it's safe to say the church is always one step away from death.

If we pay attention to Scripture, we find Scripture is filled with stories of death and brokenness: barren women, slaves, exiles, and the sick. As we discover numerous stories of death and brokenness, we are, however, never left in death and brokenness; Scripture moves us to the power of resurrection unleashed in our world through the crucified and risen Christ.

We must not forget, even as we live in a society in which the transcendence of God is being buffered and pushed further into the margins; in a society where churches are closing down; the power of the resurrection is still at work in our midst.

As I write this, I heard a knock on the outside door. A lady is standing at the door. She introduces herself by telling me she lives at 212 Davis (our neighbours). With tears in her eyes, she tells the story of her 49-year-old friend who is nearing death because of cancer. The lady asks: "*Can I pray? Can I pray for the power of God to be at work in her life?*" We walk to the front, light a candle, and I watch her pray. When the neighbour leaves, I quietly pray for God's resurrection power to continue to be at work in our lives and in our churches!



Gathering for Easter

After 25 months of hybrid worship, we are planning to gather for an Easter meal as part of our worship service. We're not sure what exactly will happen after Easter (will the congregation continue to gather in a hybrid model or will we gather fully in-person?), what we do know is that we will continue to be a congregation that bears witness to the resurrection power of God at work in our midst:

- By working with local partners to provide a free tax clinic to low income families
- Working with local partners around food security
- Working with local partners around housing rights
- Providing a space for our neighbours to grow vegetables
- Providing a space for AA to help those struggling with addictions
- And much more . . .

Easter is our time to celebrate, announce, and live into the resurrection power of God at work!

"To be most effective in bringing about change in a community or a neighborhood, it helps if you live there."

Larry James, *The Wealth of the poor*

**NEWMARKET
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God through friendship
with the neighbourhood

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