

We celebrate these ministries:

ORDAINED to UNITED CHURCH MINISTRY

Marlene Salmonson, BTh (Hon), MTS, MDiv

RETIRING FROM ACTIVE MINISTRY

John Burrill, OM
Denise Davis Taylor, DM
Kurt Katzmar, OM
Henriette Kelker, OM
Ian Kellogg, OM
Peter Kugba-Nyande, OM
Heather Koots, OM
Wendy Molnar, DLM
Anne Telford, DM

RETIRING REGIONAL COUNCIL STAFF

Kathy Jackson, Office Administrator



Marlene Salmonson

Ordinand

Marlene Salmonson grew up in her home church, Oxford Street United, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where she sang in the choir and attended CGIT. Her spiritual path diverged when she entered her twenties and became involved in the Pentecostal Church. It was during this time that she completed a Bachelor of Theology (Hons.) at Vanguard College in Edmonton.

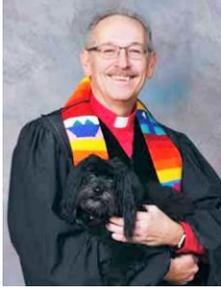
Due to differences, she left the Pentecostal Church and began attending Garneau United Church, where she met her spouse, Evelyn Porter. After that, Marlene completed a Master of Theological Studies degree at St. Stephen's College. Her thesis, "Making a Spiritual Connection with Jewelry," was supervised by David Goa, who Marlene met while volunteering at the "Anno Domini: Jesus Through the Centuries" exhibit at the Alberta Provincial Museum.

From there, she entered the Master of Divinity program at St. Andrew's College, and graduated in May of 2022. One of the most thought-provoking events during that degree was a course that she took through zoom on Indigenous Youth at the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre. Between degrees, she was chosen to be the Bard of the Avenue, writing poetry about her Edmonton community of Alberta Avenue. She has spent time walking Alberta Avenue during Kaleido; and talking about her poetry, which is also on her blog.

Marlene has the distinction of being a MDiv. grad, who began and ended her Supervised Ministry Education during the pandemic. She was blessed to spend the entire period at Two Hills United Church, Two Hills, Alberta, which she found to be a resilient and engaging faith community. Marlene had fun experimenting with a Round Table Bible study and creating stories with her finger puppet, Becca, the tree-hugging-ankle-biting turtle.

They say that it takes a village to raise a child, and it certainly takes a village to raise a theology student. Marlene would like to thank the congregation at Garneau United, especially Moira Warke, who headed up her Discernment Team; her home congregation of Spirit of Hope, where she was privileged to work for two years as Congregational Care Team Lead. Also, many thanks go to Louise Rogers, who has been Marlene's accompanier throughout her many interviews. And, to Bill Doyle and Britt Aerhart, for their support and encouragement.

Marlene's passion is theology, especially the intersection of theology with everyday living. Sometimes a puzzle, sometimes a revelation, and at all times a reflection of the mystery of the God who loves her and who has led her to this place.



The Reverend John Burrill

Retiree

After completing studies at St. Andrew's College in Saskatoon, I was ordained by the Alberta and Northwest Conference at McDougall United Church, Edmonton, in 1984. The next month, the blessings continued with marriage to my soulmate Anne Marie. A month after that we were settled in Swan Hills, Alberta.

This was followed by the opportunity to serve at Central United Church in Calgary, and then a call to Highlands United in Edmonton, where I have had the privilege to serve for the past 33 years. This is where I did my internship, and I believe they thought that I needed to come back and receive some further training! I am not sure if it's a matter that this congregation is very patient, or whether I couldn't get the message, but it certainly gave us many years of memories to cherish. I would do it all again!

In the past, my favourite part of Conference Meetings was hearing the stories and words of experience from the Retirees. Over the years, these mentors have been a rock to me; so not being sure what to share, let me offer three gems that were passed on to me that I hope will also speak to you.

My father, the Rev. Prescott Burrill, was always in the wings and willing to offer support when called upon. To have a parent who understood the demands, challenges and loneliness of ministry was such an asset. I could compile a book of the words of wisdom that he passed along, but if I were to choose just one and share it with Candidates for Ministry, it would be this: *"Make it the text of your life to win the approval of God"*. Where you have people, you have power. And where you have power, you have politics. You will be pulled in many directions within your ministry, and you will have to contend with unmet expectations of both others and yourself. In the midst of these, take time to listen to the voice that called you; first and foremost – *"Make it the text of your life to win the approval of God"*.

The second gem was shared at the memorial service for the Rev. Harold Alston. Harold was a pastor at heart, and gave extensively of himself to serve others who were in pain. While in palliative care, he shared these words with a colleague: *"Life is all about relationships, everything else is just furniture"*. What a statement of truth. May we infuse our relationships with a sense of the Holy and share love as freely as it has been shared with us. For where two or three are gathered, Jesus is there!

Finally, the last gem was shared with me by the Rev. Aubrey Edworthy. We had gone out for a meal, as we would do from time to time. He had taken me under his wing, and I felt so privileged to be in his presence as I had nothing but respect for him. Over lunch we discussed the heartbreaks and the challenges that the church at large was facing. I had returned to the church and was preparing for Sunday, when Aubrey called later that afternoon. He shared that he had just read a quote and felt compelled to pass it on. It read: *"The Church has a Covenant with Spring"*. In other words, as long as there is God, there is Hope. The faithful body of Christ will never die!

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We are an Easter people, and in the midst of this broken world that Christ came down to and calls us to minister in, remember – *“The Church has a Covenant with Spring”*. Resurrection and New Life abound. Thanks be to God. I am eternally grateful for the opportunity to have served within this church of ours.

In His Service,
By God’s Grace,
Reverend John Burrill



Denise Davis Taylor Diaconal Minister

Retiree

I was commissioned to the Diaconal Ministry in May, 1982, and I retired June 20, 2022. It is hard to believe that, as I retire, I have been in Diaconal Ministry in The United Church of Canada for forty years! How rich those years have been. I count it a privilege to have been able to work in team ministries where I could serve from my strengths and passions, and support colleagues to use their own. I have learned much about professional relationships and the many strengths of working together in team ministries. This is not a privilege very many clergy have right now and one I hope will return as the United Church continues to grow and change with the times, shedding what is cumbersome and taking on new life.

After completing an undergrad in Music at McMaster University, I trained at the Center for Christian Studies (when it was in Toronto) for two years, graduating in 1982. I worked part-time at Oriole-York Mills United in Toronto for another two years while doing lots of volunteer work in Toronto. Of significance to me was the work I did with the Canadian Council of Churches in the Anti Apartheid movement. This work continued when we moved to Edmonton where my marriage partner Lawrence, and I shared a position at St. Andrew's United Church. This congregation welcomed and were family to our two sons who were born during our tenure there.

I took a year-long leave from active ministry to take an Externship course at the Center for Pastoral Counselling in Edmonton. This was followed by a year with the leadership team at Knox-Metropolitan United while that community did a needs assessment, and a short term placement with St. Albert United one spring. During that same time period, I was also in ministry with the people of Strathearn United for three years. From 1987 to 1998 I completed my Masters of Theological Studies at St Stephen's College. This too considerably enriched my skills and knowledge as I honed my craft.

I spent twenty-five(ish) amazing, fun, challenging years with St. Paul's United in Edmonton. Twenty one of those years were spent as a Chaplain at the University of Alberta, half time, where I worked with an ever-changing team of Inter Faith Chaplains. In the time with St Paul's, I worked with four different clergy colleagues, five administrators, five different musicians and many lay ministers, both volunteer and paid. All of my colleagues and lay leaders generously

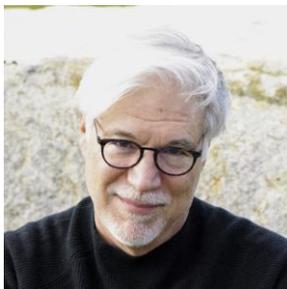
shared their skills to work together to do some pretty wonderful things with the people of St. Paul's who, in their turn, supported us in our efforts.

Highlights of those years at St Paul's and the University of Alberta were musicals, chancel dramas, pageants with children, youth and adults working together to create meaningful, joyful messages for the congregation. I took youth and adult volunteers on five different Mission/Education trips to Guatemala, Mexico, and Cuba, with as many different groups of youth. In twenty-five years of ministry with one congregation, I got to see just how crucial the presence and participation of children and youth are to the vitality of a community. St. Paul's has a long legacy of nurturing its youth.

Working in the wider church has also enriched my ministry: ten years with the (then) Conference Interview Board, the National Committee for Diaconal Ministry, the Theology and Interfaith Committee and several different committees locally. The Interfaith Experiences on campus and locally with the Interchurch Interfaith Committee brought me into contact with many wonderful Interfaith leaders and gatherings. I still carry learnings from my time at the Parliament of World Religions in Melbourne, Australia. There, a group from Edmonton presented a workshop on churches coming together with Indigenous communities. I have also continued my growth and learning as a Learning Facilitator and Diaconal Mentor for a number of students at the Center for Christian Studies and by sitting on various committees for the Diakonia of the United Church.

I have been very blessed by these rich and challenging years of ministry and look forward to seeing where the Spirit will lead me in the years to come.

May we continue to join with all others who wish to be part of living God's love and justice around the globe of our precious planet.



The Reverend Kurt Katzmar

Retiree

Rev. Kurt came to Sherwood Park United Church in 2016, from the United Church of Christ in the United States.

Since 1985, Kurt has served congregations in southern Oregon, northeast Ohio, upstate New York, and inner-city Chicago.

He also did a stint as a news anchor and classical music announcer for a public radio station in Oregon.

A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Kurt is a graduate of Chicago Theological Seminary, holds an advanced degree in public finance from Syracuse University, and did post-graduate work at Columbia University.

He worked for the City of New York for several years, and worked at the U.S. Treasury in Washington, D.C. before attending seminary.

Since coming to our region, Kurt served on the Western Intercultural Ministry Network for several years.

Kurt began his retirement on May 1, 2022.



The Reverend Ian Kellogg

Retiree

I am grateful that The United Church of Canada (UCC) was still in existence when I returned to it in 2001, and that I followed many threads found here that led to my ordination in 2011.

But I would have found it much more wonderful if church leaders had had the courage to accept our status. In 1957, the year I was born, the UCC confirmed 40,000 teenagers; in 2019 (the last year for which the UCC Statistical Yearbook reports), it was 1600. a more than 95% decline. All other indices are similar.

At the same time, world population grew from 2.8 billion in 1957 to 7.9 billion today, and Canada's population from 16 million in 1957, to 38 million today.

There are many things that might interest one about the UCC. For me, the most relevant and interesting thing about it is its imminent death.

When I returned in 2001, 280,000 Canadians worshipped in a UCC service each week, which was a huge drop from the years of my youth. By 2019, it was less than 120,000. The church has declined 60% since I rejoined it 20 years ago and it has about 5% of the weight in Canadian culture that it had when I was born 65 years ago.

These figures are sobering; and they might occasion grief for those of us who are partisans of the UCC – unless we remember that our central mission is death and resurrection. From the latter viewpoint, our death could connect us to other social shifts – from population explosion, to climate disaster, to the exponential spread of computer networks.

I am glad that I spent the last 11 years of my career as an ordained minister, first in small-town Saskatchewan, and then in Edmonton. But, if the UCC were worthy of the legacy of Mark and St. Paul, it would have embraced its death, grieved an ocean of pain, and searched with other denominations for new ways of pursuing faith, hope and love in a post-monarchical, post-patriarchal, and post-religious context.

The United Church of Canada will soon die, but I fear this will be more akin to the death of a corporation like Nortel than to the death of Second Temple Judaism in the First Century.



The Reverend Heather Koots

Retiree

Heather Koots (Shepherd) was born and raised in Vancouver, British Columbia, with a few years spent living in Kamloops. At age seven, she began studying the violin, and became a member of the Vancouver Junior Symphony; at one time it's youngest member. Music became a dominant force in her life, and it was generally assumed that she would continue to study and make music her career path.

However, she was also a cradle United Church kid. Her maternal grandfather had been a medical missionary in China in the late 1920s and through the 30s, so Church was definitely in her blood. When not practising or being actively involved in her congregation, she dreamed of having a horse (not the most practical aspiration in a city like Vancouver). That particular dream was put on hold but stay tuned.

After graduating from High School in Kamloops, Heather spent a year working, and studied at the Vancouver Music Academy. It was in that year that something shifted within her, and a call to Ministry became a little relentless. So, she began her undergraduate degree at the University of British Columbia, and was soon hooked on Ancient Near Eastern studies, Hebrew Scripture and history, and archaeology. Another vocation began to compete for her attention. Ministry won out and she studied Theology at Vancouver School of Theology.

Ordained in 1985, Heather and her husband, Don Koots, were settled south east of Camrose, Alberta. They had one son as they started joint ministry, then another son came and Heather decided she wanted to take some time for full time parenting. The family moved to Cochrane where three more sons joined the family. Although they were living in the heart of 'cowboy country', still no horse.

Heather went back to work when their twins were in Grade one, at first in temporary places until she joined Don at St. Andrew's, Cochrane. The church and town had grown enough to support a children and youth minister, and this was a perfect fit for Heather. Music had not been forgotten however, and she continued playing her instrument whenever she got the chance.

Heather had always held a special interest in grief support and spiritual counseling so, after a move to Edmonton to be nearer Don's aging parents, she began Clinical Pastoral Education. She became a Spiritual Care Practitioner at Alberta Hospital Edmonton, and grew to love working in all aspects of Mental Health. She achieved her Certification with the Canadian Association for Spiritual Care, however cuts to support for Spiritual Care left that department decimated, and she, and only one colleague, were called upon to care for the entire hospital. Heather moved to Saskatoon for the next three and a half years to be the Director of Spiritual Care at the Oliver Lodge Special Care Home, a United Church-founded long term care centre. And it was in Saskatoon that that Heather's childhood dream came true, when she finally got a horse! When she moved back to Edmonton, her horse came with her and they continue to spend as much time together as possible.

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Heather always thought she would end her working years the way she started ... in pastoral ministry. So, following her return to Edmonton, she was called to the Stony Plain and Mewassin Communities of Faith, and it is from here that she will retire.

Heather's retirement plans include as much music as possible, time with Owl (her horse), and in continuing her other passion, dog training. There will hopefully, also be some interesting travel involved, and of course, as much time as possible with her grandchildren.



Anne Telford Diaconal Minister

Retiree

I grew up in London, Ontario, attending Maitland Street Baptist Church. Our family of nine had our own pew close to the front: we knew we had to behave because everyone could see us. My faith story began here among gentle loving people who readily shared their own faith stories. During the early years of my marriage we moved to a small town with no Baptist church so my faith evolved when we joined the United Church in Bond Head, Ontario.

Thirty-five years ago, I saw an ad in the United Church Observer for the Diaconal Ministry program at the Centre for Christian Studies in Toronto. That was the first time I heard the word diaconal. Their educational format fit my current life situation, with studies spread out over a five-year period, as my children were eight and ten at the time. The emphasis on social justice, pastoral care, and education resonated with me. And so, my faith journey grew by leaps and bounds, continuing in a way that I had never imagined.

After I was accepted at the Center for Christian Studies, I had a dream that I was sitting at the end of the bed, yelling at God and crying that I couldn't do it. "I'm not an A student, I'm not smart enough, I really can't do it". An angel somehow came through a closed window and was standing beside me, wrapped me in her arms and let my tears flow. All I heard was a whisper, "Yes, you can, because you are not doing it alone. I will be with you every step of the way. I will hold you, I will laugh with you, I will not leave you." When I woke up I felt heard, comforted and at peace. My belief in angels began that morning.

This has been a journey I never thought possible, but then we never know the plans God has for us. My first church was Kincardine United, on the shores of Lake Huron. For five years, while I went to school, I was the youth pastor and bible study leader. When I graduated and went into the settlement process, our family moved out west to Daysland, Alberta, for three years, then to

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Grace United in Lloydminster for six years, and Sherwood Park United for nine years. I am now finishing six years at Morinville, Busby, Bon Accord and Namao United Churches, and I am into my first year as a ten hours/week Pastoral Care Co-Ordinator at McDougall United in Edmonton.

I leave full-time ministry with joy and sadness. My heart is full of gratitude for all the people I have crossed paths with throughout my years of ministry. We have laughed, cried, supported each other, enjoyed many meals, and grown together, sharing our insights and wisdom. You have inspired me to listen with an open heart, to not assume anything, and to ask the hard questions. Thank-you. We can't turn back the clock in aging, so I look to the positive, and appreciate everyone who has walked beside me. We will continue our journey never knowing what God has planned around the corner.

Blessings,
Pastor Anne



Kathy Jackson

Retiree

In September 1997, on my first day in the former Alberta and Northwest Conference Office, George Rodgers, then Executive Secretary, plopped a huge binder on my new desk, and advised that I read it through before I got caught up in anything else. The binder contained the *United Church Human Resources Policy for General Council and Conference Staff*. At the time, I thought that it was good to learn the rules and responsibilities early on. But, on reflection over the past 25 years, I believe that the most important thing I gained was a clear sense that I am working for something larger than my job, larger than our office and staff, larger than our Conference and its Presbyteries and Pastoral Charges: connection to the “wider church”, and its wide range of denominational, ecumenical and global partnerships, is key to our existence as United Church Staff.

Over the past 25 years, there have been many changes to my position. For the Conference, I began as Support Staff, then as an Administrative Assistant, and finally, as the Office Coordinator. I began by supporting Christian Development, Communication, and Mission Support and Stewardship Education. The position grew as staff configurations were adjusted, until, at the final few new Ministers' Orientations, I could honestly state I “did everything except the work of the Executive Secretary, the Program Staff, the Pastoral Relations Assistant and the Accountant”. It sounded good, anyway. *Continued ...*

And now, in the Northern Spirit Regional Council Office, as Office Administrator, I have added support for Pastoral Relations to my other interests, and have given up some of the former tasks. My days are varied. There are surprises almost every time the phone rings or the computer dings. I thrive on this hodgepodge, and I am grateful that I am rarely bored.

I have not worked in a vacuum, and I have had many mentors over the years, particularly my Conference, Regional Council and General Council Staff colleagues. These are the people who have shaped my experience of working for this huge and wondrous United Church of Canada. Colleagues have supported, advised and held me throughout 25 years of employment and

personal ups and downs, and for them I will always be grateful. And, finally, I must reveal that I am grateful for my very own support staff, Stuart Jackson and our family, who have provided me with advice, along with technological and emotional support in everything I do.

In all of this I have held on to my conviction that what my colleagues and I do is significant beyond our tasks and “other duties as assigned”. I have worked with and been blessed by the people who have given so many volunteer hours to the former Conference and Presbyteries, the Regional and General Councils, and their Pastoral Charges and Communities of Faith. As a complex and multi-faceted church, we hold so many threads, and can weave so much good in the world. It’s magical!

As we all know, since 2015, The United Church of Canada has been in a state of transition to a new structure. Over that time, as administrative staff, I have enjoyed a balcony view of the aims and progress, as well as close involvement with the chaos. It has been a wild ride, and I said from the beginning that I wanted to see it through, to be part of the new United Church that would emerge. This may well be my only regret in retirement. We aren’t there yet, but, as long as we keep evolving, we will be where we need to be, and then move to the next place.

Even before 2015, I told people that if I couldn’t live my hope that the changes and chaos are leading us toward something good, I wouldn’t have been able to come to work each day. I may not be coming to work each day after September 30, 2022, but I will continue to rely on that hope and my firm belief that wherever our Church lands, it will be a good place.