



# CONNECTIONS

A Newsletter for St. James United Church • 197 Main Street, Antigonish, NS

By the Outreach & Communications Committee

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*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.*

- Isaiah 9:2 (ESV)

*Christmas 2020*

*Dear Friends in Christ,*

This has been a difficult year. Starting in March when Covid-19 arrived in Nova Scotia our lives have been turned upside down and we have experienced a “new normal” that none of us imagined. We’ve persevered and carried on but all of us are looking forward to things changing in the days ahead. We’re looking toward a future which contains the good things from the past and some of the things from the present but above all is free from worry and fear. That is what we are praying for, hoping for, and waiting for as people of faith.

The year Jesus was born was difficult. The people were living in an occupied land and they had no idea when or how things would get better. Some despaired and thought things would never change but more persevered and carried on. They prayed, they hoped, and they waited in faith for God to act. And when a baby was born in a tiny town everything changed. The promise of God was now among the people and the heavens rang out to proclaim that this new thing was happening.

The good news of great joy is something that we remember and celebrate at Christmas. With every decoration we put up, every card we send, and every act of kindness and generosity we are joining with the angels in proclaiming God is greater than our difficulties and we are praising God loudly like the

shepherds. That doesn’t change the fact that the year has been difficult for us it simply shows that we have faith that God continues to be with us and the gifts of God- the hope, the peace, the joy, and the love which we give thanks for in Jesus - are still within our lives.

May God bless you and your family in this very different Christmas Season and may the blessings of God be with all of us in the year to come.

Yours in Christ’s Service,  
The Rev. Peter A Smith



*Remembering*

## Introducing . . .

We are proud to introduce the new Deputy Mayor of Antigonish, Andrew Murray, seen here with his proud parents at the swearing in ceremony for Town Council. Congratulations to Andrew!



## The Eyes Have It...



*This picture was taken after church on December 13, 2020*

## Lifewater Canada

by Marlene Groenenberg

Everyone needs a good news story and I think as followers of Christ we need to lead by example. One such example is a charity founded by the late (July) James Gehrels in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Jim was the first cousin of Gerrit Groenenberg of our congregation.

The charity is LIFEWATER CANADA. They work with people in struggling countries to have clean drinking water. LIFEWATER CANADA recently received national recognition for being in the top ten of eight hundred charities and were recognized for being the most effective in what they set out to do.

Please go to [www.lifewater.ca](http://www.lifewater.ca) to learn more. Jim's wife Lynda and team are continuing with this wonderful work that they do.

In these difficult times, when smiles are often difficult to see, it's important to remember the words of Paulo Coelho:

"The eyes are the mirror of the soul and reflect everything that seems to be hidden; and like a mirror, they also reflect the person looking into them."





# A Series of Positives

by Cynthia Dobson

Alexander Graham Bell first said, “When one door closes, another opens.” This is certainly true during this pandemic year. Libraries closed... check out books virtually, can’t hop in the car and visit friends...welcome to zoom, churches closed... hear uplifting sermons on YouTube. I have done all three for months.

Week after week the services at St. James with Rev. Peter Smith have brought thoughtful and en-

couraging sermons even if we couldn’t be sitting in a pew...and now that the church is open, I’m happy that the on-line services are still available to those hesitant to attend in person or quarantining from far away. Thank you, Rev. Smith. You probably aren’t aware of how much your sermons have meant to me and so many. Please continue them.

With travel being limited many are experiencing the “travel blues”. Thanks to Fran Wittgens for putting information on Facebook about the Camino de Santiago challenge. Doing the pilgrimage is something I had wanted to do years ago and now, thanks to technology, I can. At our weekly family zoom I sug-

## A Lovely New Voice



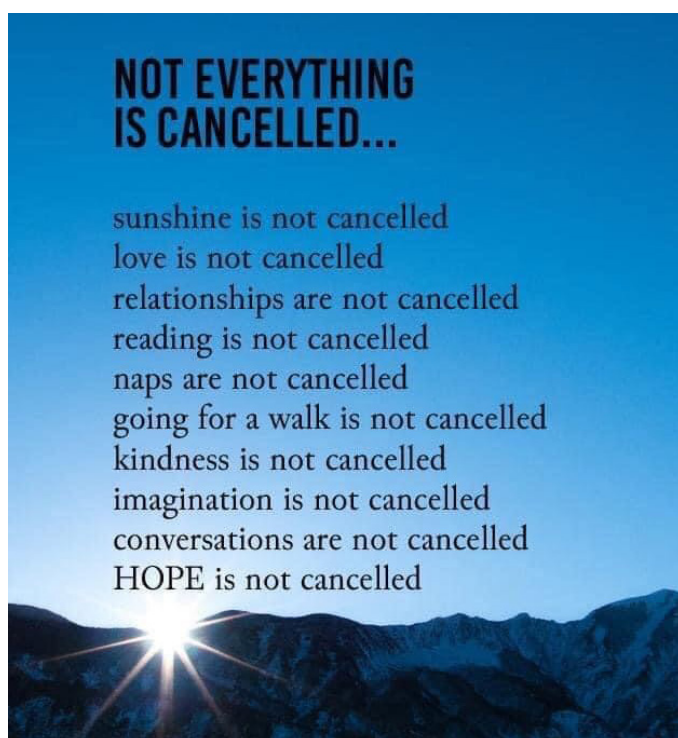
*Claire Singer accompanied by Barbara Fortin on violin and Cheryl Minkoff on piano, sings O Holy Night by Adolph Adam and I Know that My Redeemer Liveth from Handel’s Messiah. Yellowknife 2018*

Claire Singer moved to Nova Scotia in September 2020 from Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, to attend the PhD Applied Sciences program at Saint Mary’s University. Claire grew up in Yellowknife, and this is her first long-term move to another province (and it is weird moving to a new province in the middle of a pandemic)! Despite studying science, Claire has been performing as a

soprano in Yellowknife for about the last 15 years, including many years practicing and performing with Amy Hendricks, before Amy and her family moved to Antigonish from Yellowknife several years ago. Outside of school and music, Claire enjoys hiking, gardening, reading, and knitting (and is so happy to have an opportunity to get to know some of the lovely people in Antigonish!).

gested to my adult kids that we take the challenge.... fun to do and a way to stay in touch and get fit. As of now there are seven of us starting the walk from six different locations.... my son, John, and his eleven year old son, Ben, my daughters Lee and Nancy, Lee's husband, Bruce, and his sister, Adrienne... and of course me. This is a virtual experience that has come out of the pandemic and has opened a door for family connection.

Interested in your own journey: visit Camino de Santiago virtual challenge at [www.theconqueror.events](http://www.theconqueror.events). There is even a walk that features the Cabot Trail.



## Taste of Christmas Past

by Chris Morrison

At this time of year, with Christmas around the corner, my thoughts turn to my mother. It was always now that Mom made her wonderful whipped shortbread cookies. Such a treat, a melt in your mouth delight. I'm going to share this very old recipe with you so that you could start your own tradition, as I have.

### Ingredients:

1 lb butter, I find salted works best

1/2 cup cornstarch

1 cup icing sugar, not granulated

3 cups flour

Set oven for 325 degrees

Using a large bowl, beat the butter. You must have well softened butter, preferably left out overnight. Don't use melted butter! Add the other ingredients in small amounts, beating each time until smooth.

Take out a large handful of the batter and shape into a ball. You can knead this dough as much as you like. Go ahead and use your hands!

Roll out onto a floured board to a depth of between 1/4 inch or 1/2 inch. You'll soon decide which thickness you prefer. Use cookie cutters. I'm sure you have some wonderful Christmas ones.

Place on an ungreased cookie sheet. They will spread a little so leave a bit of room between them. You'll be using about 4 sheets. The number of cookies will depend on how thickly you cut them.

Bake the cookies for approximately 15 minutes. They will stay a lovely golden colour. Look for a slight darkening of the bottom edges.

Let them get cold and package them in your favourite tin! You won't want to part with them but they make a great gift.

I hope you enjoy this recipe as much as I do, for the taste but also for the memories you'll be starting.



# Treaty Education – We are all Treaty People!



Treaty Education is an organization which has been teaching Treaty History to the general public, public servants and in Nova Scotian schools since 2016. Treaty Education addresses four questions specifically:

- Who are the Mi'kmaq historically and today?
- What are the Treaties and why are they important?
- What happened to the Treaty relationship?
- What are we doing to reconcile our shared history to ensure justice and equity?

The organization is very active in the NS school system where elementary school music teachers now have the Mi'kmaw drum program included as part of their professional development. Students learn the Mi'kmaq Honour Song and the importance of the drum in Mi'kmaw culture. Future curriculum will include education on Indian Residential Schools. Efforts are also being made to make the public service more all-inclusive, culturally sensitive and equitably diverse. This has included workshop lectures by leaders such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Commissioner Dr Marie Wilson. Dr Wilson also met with provincial Deputy Ministers in 2016 to discuss the TRC's "Calls to Action". Awareness building work continues among senior public servants regarding Treaty Education. This is all part of the ongoing Truth & Reconciliation process.

If you are interested in learning more about this important aspect of reconciliation, please visit their website at: <https://novascotia.ca/treaty-education/>

Michèle Ashby

# Garden Club Report

The St. James United Church gardeners have had a quiet season, but our beautiful church yard still shone. The planting of annual flowers and maintenance of beds had to be done with social distancing and the wearing of masks during the international pandemic. The plants also had to contend with low moisture levels due to a lack of rainfall and a non-watering directive from the town.

An addition to the grounds included the planting of two perennial heath bushes placed in front of our Scottish first ministers' markers, Rev. J. Munroe and Rev. T. Trotter, as a reminder of the wild heath from their ancestral home. A winged burning bush shrub was also placed. (Can anyone guess where we got that idea from?)

The funds for all these plants came from our ever-supportive Men's Club. Thank you. Crocuses were also graciously donated by Betty Webber. Scott & Stewart Forestry c/o Shaun Scott donated two maples, two red oaks, and two linden trees. They will grow to provide umbrellas for our early pioneer graves and those who come to visit.

We are ever so grateful to Chad Brazier for his daily care of the church yard.

Greetings from Marlene and Gerrit Groenenberg, Liz Millett and Mike Cook, Andrew Murray, Diane Theuerkauf





## Regional Council 15

The United Church of Canada

### Regional Meeting Report

The Regional Council 15 held its recall Annual meeting on November 5 via Zoom. It is a very different meeting online, as participants don't get to interact and talk to others but it was a very educational and interesting meeting and it didn't go on too long.

The meeting began with worship led by the 3 people who will be ordained and the 1 person to be recognized the following Sunday. Each person also had an opportunity to introduce themselves. It was very interesting to hear their journeys.

There was also a presentation by the Justice, Mission, and Outreach (JMO) Committee. It was great to hear about all the work that they are doing. They began with their purpose as stated in the United Church New Creed "to live with respect in Creation, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil". They stressed the importance of how each of us is the church and how we can each act to bring justice locally and globally. The areas of justice they highlighted included Indigenous peoples, Palestine and the United Church sponsorship of Syrian refugee families in Cape Breton, plus anti racism.

Another large part of their work is the Ecological Justice Working Group and their work in climate justice. In this they work closely with the Anglican Diocese of NS and PEI. They are currently studying a book by Jim Antal called Climate Church, Climate World on how the climate crisis is part of the work of the church. They also mentioned a webinar which I have been taking part in called "For the Love of Creation" about resources for small groups on climate change and actions to reduce carbon emissions. They noted that the United Church has made a com-

mitment to reduce their carbon emission by 80% by 2050.

We also voted on 6 proposals which were discussed in a webinar prior to the meeting. The first proposal was one I have been following as it is a request to review the Green Shield health benefits plan for employees and retirees. It was agreed to send this to the Executive of the General Council for action. While this concern is widespread, especially among retirees, Alan Hall, Executive Minister, Ministry and Employment, wasn't very positive about changes as the plan is owned by the United Church and only administered by Green Shield and funds are lacking. However the Division of Ministry Resources in JMO is going to keep working on this with further conversations with Alan Hall.

The other 5 proposals were from the JMO Committee and all were passed and will move forward.

- Proposal 2 is to support and protect the human rights of Palestinian children in Gaza and Palestine.
- Proposal 3 is on anti racism and to continue the work of learning, listening and action to oppose racism in all its forms.
- Proposal 4 is to press the government to do what it promised regarding missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and also a public inquiry into the fatal deaths of Chantal Moore and Rodney Levi.
- Proposal 5 is Opposition to Equating Criticism of Israel's Unjust Actions with Anti-Semitism. It is not Anti-Semitism to criticize Israel's treatment of Palestinians.
- Proposal 6 asks the General Council to respond to requests from Kairos and Palestinian Christians that the United Church through study, action and advocacy show the reality of the tragedy and oppression in Palestine.

These proposals can be viewed in their entirety on the UCC East website ([ucceast.ca](http://ucceast.ca)).

I was pleased to be able to take part in this meeting and webinar. Thank you to Rev. Peter, Michèle, and Tim who also were part of this meeting.

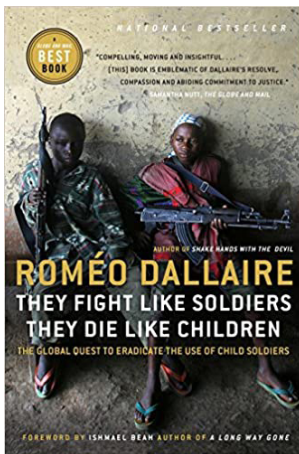
Joan MacGillivray



# Book Reviews

by Michèle Ashby

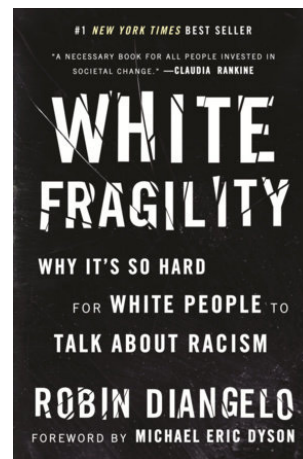
Well, like so many of you during the pandemic I've had more time on my hands for reading. While much of it has been general interest and/or "lighter" fare, (mysteries and history being favourites), three recent reads with a "social justice" perspective that may be of interest to others were the following (all of which are now, or soon will be, available in our church library):



## *They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children*

by Roméo Dallaire, softcover, 263 pages, 2010

I learned a lot from Dallaire's first book "Shake Hands with the Devil" which was extremely well written. His second foray as an author doesn't disappoint. He aptly explains why and how children as young as ten years of age are being recruited and used as soldiers in many societies today. As a soldier, what would you do upon coming face to face with an enemy aiming their weapon at you, and realizing they were a child? Possibly a girl? These are the difficult moral dilemmas facing soldiers in conflict zones throughout the world today. Once again, he draws on his personal experience in Rwanda and other theatres of war. Dallaire writes on topics he knows intimately and understands thoroughly. Which makes for a truly compelling read. He has suggestions for solutions, but the political will must be found to bring an end to this scourge. While this is not a book for the faint of heart, it needs to be read widely. It is a challenging call to action!



## *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*

by Robin Diangelo, softcover, 154 pages, 2018

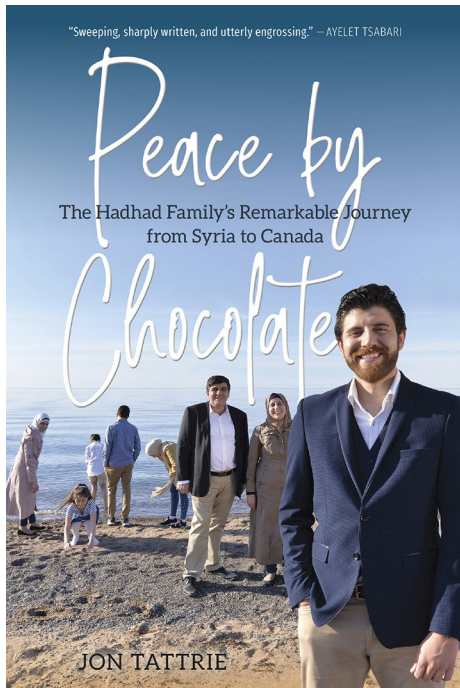
*White fragility* noun Discomfort and defensiveness on the part of a white person when confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice. Origin early 21st

century: coined in a 2011 journal article by the US academic and diversity consultant/ educator Robin Diangelo. [Oxford Languages]

This book had a huge impact on me. Even though I don't buy into all of the author's concepts, it's an exceptionally thought provoking read. She clearly spells out how the white binary way of thinking that pits "racist = bad" against "non-racist = good" is unhelpful. There is a lot of grey area in there. Also, as Diangelo points out, if you belong to the majority portion of our white supremacist society, you can't help but be informed and influenced by it. She shows that "white supremacy" does not refer only to cross burning alt right types, but to all white Americans who are raised within a majority white education system, influenced by a majority white media and ruled by a majority white government – all structures replete with systemic racism. There are many interesting observations on a variety of subjects – the difference between racism, prejudice and discrimination for example. One warning – this book is American based and focuses entirely on the US but there are many Canadian parallels.

John McWhorter, a contributing writer at The Atlantic and professor at Columbia University writes in an eloquent rebuttal on July 15, 2020, that "The popular book aims to combat racism but talks down to Black people." He doesn't agree with most of her premises and I must concur with several of his arguments.

Nonetheless this book opened my eyes on many basic issues, including my own racial misunderstandings. I would still recommend it, but read it with a very open mind.



***Peace by Chocolate: The Hadhad Family's Remarkable Journey from Syria to Canada***  
by Jon Tattrie, softcover 201 pages, 2020

This ultimately uplifting story will delight and satisfy your soul. It starts by describing the happy days the Hadhad family enjoyed in Syria prior to the rise to power of Bashar Al-Assad, the many tragic and frightening incidents at home that forced their difficult decision to flee to Lebanon, and their life there as refugees. The problems they faced in trying to immigrate and the serendipity that led them here to Antigonish. You will recognize some of the locals who were instrumental in their arrival and new start. You are probably already familiar with the bare bones of the success of their “Peace by Chocolate” business, but this read will give you an in-depth understanding of how much effort the Hadhad family had to put into their rebirth story. There is a pleasant digression into the biology of chocolate plants and the chocolate making process. But the bulk of this well-crafted book follows this heart-warming family’s progress and their exploration of their new country. We should all be extremely proud that the Hadhad’s have joined us here in Antigonish.

## Nations United: Urgent Solutions for Urgent Times

The United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. On the 75th anniversary of the United Nations and the 5th anniversary of the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals – in the midst of a pandemic radically transforming our economies and societies – this 34-minute film tells the story of the world as it is, as it was, and as it could be. Directed by renowned film maker Richard Curtis “Nations United” presents the facts, data, and opportunities we have as a human family to reimagine and reshape the future. This stimulating film is available for viewing at: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

The 17 sustainable development goals to transform our world include:

- Goal 1: No Poverty
- Goal 2: Zero Hunger
- Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being
- Goal 4: Quality Education
- Goal 5: Gender Equality
- Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation
- Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy
- Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- Goal 10: Reduced Inequality
- Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
- Goal 13: Climate Action
- Goal 14: Life Below Water
- Goal 15: Life on Land
- Goal 16: Peace and Justice Strong Institutions
- Goal 17: Partnerships to achieve the Goals



# Faith, Family & Friends

by Michèle

My 2020 has unfortunately been dominated by two health issues - COVID-19 and being diagnosed with Stage IV Lymphoma. They intersected in many occasionally surprising ways. Because of pandemic protocols Tim was not able to accompany me to my appointments. I couldn't see my health care professionals' faces. I wasn't able to receive heartwarming hugs from friends. On the other hand, so many caring offers of support and thoughtful gestures from our amazing St James' family were really helpful and cheering and, I'm sure, went a long way to promote my recovery. I was grateful to receive the best of care, both in Halifax and here at St Martha's. Missing out on all my usual activities was guilt-free - as they simply weren't happening for anyone. In addition to gratitude for so much kindness, I was even able to find a lot of humour in both COVID-19 and cancer - who knew?

Sustaining me throughout 2020 have been faith, family and friends. It would have been a very different time without email correspondence. And I found I was writing letters, phoning friends and reaching out more than I have for years. But I remain eager for the resumption of normal activities. Church, choir, UCW have all been greatly missed and will be a joy to be involved with again.

Here's to better things for the world in 2021!



## Christmas-time in X-Town

Joyce Hilling was chauffeured around the town by her daughter and son-in-law, admiring the many clever Christmas decorations on display. This one in particular caught her fancy, in front of the president's house on Nicholson Court. It is hoped that everyone was thanked for their hard work in brightening the community.



# A Very Different Christmas



Christmas in 2020 is like none we have ever seen. So much of the usual pattern of life in our community has already been disrupted by the virus, from the cancelled Highland Games to the reduced Remembrance Day services. Traditional and other beloved events that enrich our quality of life and draw people into our community, like parades, festivals, and every type of indoor gathering have not gone ahead, and they have been sorely missed (remember the Holly Tea and Sale?). In the midst of Advent, Connections reached out to members of the St. James congregation to see how Christmas might feel different this year..

The major shakeup to what we would normally expect from a regular Christmas season, and the one that will be felt most deeply, will be the absence of family members around the dinner table or tree.

M. Swim has several grown children in N.S. and N.B., but is “not encouraging” them to attempt a visit. “It would be nice to see family, but this year that might not be possible”. Thankfully, son Andrew and wife Marie live in town with grandson Aaron, and there should be an occasion for continued visits, with usual precautions.

Likewise, M. Murray will not be travelling to a Halifax family gathering this Christmas, and will not be in direct contact with family in Ontario and Quebec. Her son, also named Andrew, will be on hand, and they will all be part of a festive Zoom call.

Asked about plans, B. Webber says she’ll be “laying low”. “It was my turn to host family dinner” she relates, explaining how family is conscious of the risk and “very nervous.. we’d be 9 or 10, it wouldn’t be safe.”

Unsurprisingly, for anyone who’s ever attended a normal Advent or Christmas Eve service at St. James, there is a yearning for the comforting sights and sounds of the season as experienced through our church. This includes appreciating the many talents of our choir or singing beloved carols. P. Hunter, a longtime member of the choir, does miss being able to sing the beautiful Christmas music that we all love so much. In addition, not being able to see people you normally see (in church) means that “life is very different, but you go with the flow.”

For M. Murray, the singing of a solemn carol at the Christmas Eve candlelight service is “so moving.. I can’t imagine not singing Silent Night”. [In the past, she relates, the lit candles were a part of the main service, but as numbers of attendees swelled, danger of fire must have become an overriding concern.. in 2020, this concern is replaced by another, i.e. how to extinguish the candles safely?]

One of the most-cherished and popular events that is held at St. James every year has been the Christmas Day Community Meal. After long consideration, Betty W. says the “difficult decision to cancel the meal, even for takeout” was made. Given the impossibility of safely seating the usually-large numbers expected, and out of concern for the possibility of transmission among volunteers in the face of a resurgence, cancelling, while unfortunate, becomes the responsible and loving thing to do.

Certainly the desire to reach out with compassion and embrace others hasn’t gone away – there will absolutely be a future where St. James again provides a community Christmas meal as well as its popular and renowned hot meal program. By way of closing, I’ll ask each of us to please consider giving of your time or material resources to worthwhile St. James initiatives like these, to ensure that our warm feelings are translated into positive action in the world. The church office will be able to answer any questions about this. Merry Christmas to ALL!

Chad Brazier







JOY  
NOEL  
ANGEL  
JESUS  
PEACE HOPE  
WISEMEN  
CHRISTMAS  
BELIEVE FAITH  
PRINCE OF PEACE  
THANK YOU







## How are Canadians Who Live with Poverty Coping with the Pandemic?

by Michèle Ashby

Most of us, (but not all), who attend St James United Church are fortunate to have no real concerns about where our next meal will come from. Or whether we may be “reno-evicted” from our homes. Or whether we have to decide between feeding our families or heating our homes. But there are many people in Antigonish who don’t share these luxuries.

The organization Canada Without Poverty has produced its first report during the pandemic, titled Poverty Pandemic Watch: The Effects of Poverty During COVID-19. This report covers the period of April > June 2020 and discusses Housing, Food and Income Insecurity; and both the Federal and Provincial/Territorial policies and responses to these concerns. There are sections that address each

province’s specific issues and First Nations/Métis/Inuit responses to the pandemic. The conclusion looks at “Where Do We Go from Here?”. To view this important document please go to: <https://cwp-csp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Poverty-Pandemic-Report-FINAL-Nov2.pdf>

The major conclusion of the report is that while governments at all levels are providing some relief for current, immediate poverty crises, the ongoing need to address long term housing/food/income insecurity issues is still there and not going away any time soon without the political will to make change. Consider ways you can let politicians at all levels know this is a concern for you! Phone calls, emails and letters can all help to reinforce the message.

