

Council Minutes March 4, 2026 Grace United Church

Tory Walko	Chair	Present
Daniella D'Andrea	Vice-Chair	Absent
Marion Staples	Past Chair Finance Committee Representative	Present
Cecily Chiles	Secretary	Present
Paul Cooper	Treasurer Outreach Committee Representative	Present
Kenji Marui	Ministry	Present
Pat Morrison	Ministry	Present
<u>Committee Representatives:</u>		
Marilyn Barros	Region Rep	Present
Christopher Cooke	Communications	Absent
John Cooke	Property	Present
Laura Black	Ministry & Personnel (M&P)	Present
Joanna Catterson	Trustees	Absent
Gord Walkling	Worship	Present
Jim Wicks	Planning	Present
Bev Walkling	Congregational Care & Growth (CC&G) Proclamation and Special Events	Present
Shirley Willis	Christian Development	Present

The Meeting was held in person and via Zoom with 13 participants and began at 7:05 pm. There was a quorum.

1. Devotion:

Marion Staples on behalf of Finance offered a devotion on the theme: "Rock Bottom" a poem by Ullie-Kaye.

2. Reading of Scripture, reflection on the theme *Seeds of Curiosity*

Reflection on John 4: v 4-30

As we share our work on Council in in our committees, listen for:

How are we engaging in faithful practices?

How are we sharing God's love and word with others?

How are we setting a table for the community to engage in ways that bring God into their lives and how this is unfolding in our church?

3. Approval of Agenda

MOTION: to approve the agenda, as amended. [Marion Staples / Marilyn Barros] – Carried

Discussion: Add a report from the Nominating Committee under New Business

4. Approval of Minutes

MOTION: to approve the Council meeting minutes February 4, 2026 [John Cooke / Paul Cooper] – Carried.

5. Business Arising from the Minutes

A. Worship to follow up with Property about revisions to the Rental Policy.

B. CD and Property are discussing ways of addressing issues around the Nut Allergy Policy.

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6. Correspondence

- A. Paul Cooper shared a letter from Canada Foodgrains Bank. Supporters of the Bluewater Grow Project were thanked for their support in this letter from Jack Koetsier and John Young. To read of the success of the Bluewater Growing Project in 2025 see the full letter at the end of these minutes. This week proceeds from the Soup Luncheon will go towards Bluewater Grow Project.
- B. Kenji shared a message of thanks he received from Kara Root, at Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis. The letters and cards of support received were read to the Minneapolis congregation. The letters were a poignant and tangible reminder that “We are all church together and belong to each other”. Kenji has printed the message and posted on the bulletin board in the Narthex for everyone to read.

7. New Business

- A. Report from Financial Review Team.

It is the opinion of the reviewers that the bookkeeping and other financial procedures carried out by the Financial Team at Grace United Church in 2025 were appropriate and were being complied with. It is their opinion that there are reasonable safeguards in place to minimize the risk of significant error or fraud. The reviewers commend the members of the Finance committee and Office Administrator who are directly involved with the routine activities and management of the system for their excellent work. The reviewers confirm the figures that were reported by the Finance committee in their 2025 annual report to the congregation.

The reviewers made 2 recommendations.

- The first recommendation is for Council to adopt a policy statement to clarify the details of the Grace Sarnia Community Foundation (SCF) Fund and the Tom and Donna Moore Fund.

Motion: to adopt a policy statement in 2026 to clarify the details of the Grace Sarnia Community Foundation Fund and the Tom and Donna Moore Fund (part of the SCF) and include as appendices to the Grace Constitution [Gord Walkling / Marion Staples] - Carried

Discussion: Review the contract with SCF, include the essence of the contract in the policy statement. Gord will work with Paul and Marion to create the policy statement.

- Council reps and committee chairs are asked to take note of the details related to handling Expenditure Authorization (EA) forms.

Motion: to accept the 2025 Financial Review report with thanks to Laura and Gord for their work on the review and preparing the report. [John Cooke / Jim Wicks] – Carried

Tory, chair of council will present a summary of the report to the congregation at the annual meeting on March 8, 2026. Gord Walking is available to answer questions related to the report from the congregation.

- B. Finance report on idle funds. Paul Cooper reported on a list of funds that have been identified as Idle. 4 separate funds were identified and the committees responsible for oversight of each fund. Committees with funds identified as idle were asked to report to Finance of their plans for the fund. See Grace Funds Summary table at the end of these minutes.
- C. Dunlop Central United Church. Ministry staff would like to send letters of support to Rev. Adam Kilner and the congregation of Dunlop Central United Church, given the recent development in their pastoral relationship. Council was supportive of the ministry staff initiative to send pastoral letters.

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D. Nominating Report. Marion Staples, chair of Nominating committee presented the list of Council reps to present at the Annual Congregational Meeting on Sunday March 8. Nominations remain open at the Annual meeting until a motion to close nominations during the meeting. The slate of candidates is listed below. Joseph Chan will be elected as Vice-chair after he becomes a member of Grace.

Past Chair	Tory Walko
Chair	Daniella D’Andrea
Vice Chair	Joseph Chan
Secretary	Cecily Chiles
Treasurer	Paul Cooper
Assistant Treasurer	Marion Staples
Christian Development	Shirley Willis (C&R)
Communications	Chris Cooke (C&R)
Congregational Care & Growth	Bev Walkling (C&R)
Finance	Paul Cooper (C&R)
Ministry & Personnel	John Cooke (C)
	Laura Black (R)
Outreach	Paul Cooper (C&R)
Planning	Jim Wicks (C&R)
Property	John Cooke (C&R)
Regional Representative	Marilyn Barros
Special Events	Bev Walkling (C&R)
Trustees	Joanna Catterson (C)
	Bruce Davies (R)
Worship	Bryce McGarvey (C&R)
Nominating	Tory Walko (C)
A.O.T.S.	Paul Cooper
	John Cooke
Ministers	Rev. Dr. Kenji Marui
	Rev. Pat Morrison

C = Chair of committee

R = Representative on Council

8. Pastoral Team Reports and Teaching

A. Kenji Marui

- In season of Lent, we continue to invite people to share stories during the Worship service.
- Participated in a new TV broadcast show called Politically Speaking, hosted by Lo-Ann Chan on the local YourTV Sarnia on Cogeco. The broadcast discussion is general in nature, non-partisan, focusing on conversations with community leaders, former municipal officials and dedicated community builders.
- Assisting in a preaching course, working as a lab instructor for students for the spring term.
- General Council renewed Kenji’s appointment as Business Coordinator for 46th General Council of the United Church of Canada.
- Carmen Lansdowne, past Moderator of the United Church of Canada, will be guest speaker at Worship on Sunday March 15.
- Jazz Worship services are evolving; the next service is on March 22.

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B. Pat Morrison

- The United Church of Canada and the Presbyterian Church in Canada join together to host a biennial conference for youth, young adults, and youth leaders. The event is called Collective and is happening in August in St. Catherines. It draws about 400 participants from across Canada. I have been working with the planning team for this event for the past 16 months. My commitment so far has been minimal, but as we get closer to the August event my time investment will intensify.
- Over the past few months, young people have been naming concerns around the increased reliance on Artificial Intelligence by students and teachers alike. With the advent of AI comes pre-emptive warnings from sociologists, philosophers, developmental theorists etc. who forecast a number of serious concerns including those that relate to our children and youth. I have begun reading the literature and engaging talking partners to explore what this might mean for the young people entrusted to our care here at Grace.

9. **Key Ministry Committee Reports**

A. Worship

- Rental Policy: The committee discussed the Rental Policy, which was presented at last month's Council meeting. There are three items that relate to the Worship committee and sanctuary use, which we feel need to be tweaked. These comments will be shared with John Cooke for the next iteration of the Rental policy.
- In recent weeks, the long Gospel Readings were presented using videos. Unfortunately, we could not secure licensing rights because the licensor was not in total agreement with Grace's policy statement of being an inclusive, intergenerational, community partner. This meant that we had to interrupt and restart our livestream, which negatively affects our online viewers. Upcoming readings are shorter and we will return to having people read the scripture.
- Worship Schedule: Communion will be held on March 1 and April 12. On April 12, confirmation Sunday, we have decided to use the traditional serving-the-elements-while-seated-in-the-pews option.
- On March 15, past moderator, the very Reverend Carmen Landsdowne, will preach at the worship service.
- The March Jazz service is scheduled for March 22 and will feature the vocal group, Wavesong.
- April 26 will be new members Sunday, and there are approximately 17 new members.
- The Maundy Thursday service this year will be at Dunlop Central, and the Good Friday service will be at Grace.

Gord Walking

B. Christian Development

- Price of Admission events, committee will continue to grow the program. New formats will include a non-gendered group.
- Children's worship program, discussing having enough time to cover the curriculum items.
- CD committee will be working with staff and Property committee to discuss Nut allergy policy violations, how to handle it within the church.

Shirley Willis

C. Outreach

- L4L fund at Sarnia Community Foundation (SCF). L4L funds at SCF distributed as per guidelines from High Park UC bequest.
- Next soup luncheon is scheduled for March 8. Donations will support Bluewater Grow Project (the local Canadian Food Grains Bank initiative). Thanks to John Young and Norm Holbrook for being the minute people on March 01. Proposing April 12 soup luncheon (assuming no conflicts on that day).
- 82 clients served on February 25 Inn of the Good Shepherd meal.
- 73 pounds of food taken to the Inn following March 1 food bank Sunday.
- Big Kitchen refresh project will be tabled at Council. Committee has come up with some ideas to renovate, refresh the kitchen. Outreach would be responsible for fundraising for renovations. Planning requested that Outreach submit a Project Proposal Form for review. See Kitchen Refresh Project Plan at the end of these minutes.

Paul Cooper

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D. Congregational Care and Growth

- Letters to the 3 church congregations in Minneapolis. The ones that were written at the church after the Sunday Worship Service were gathered, packaged, and mailed out. Some of our members called to say they had written letters from home. Addresses are available to send letters if members are still interested in sending letters, connect with Bev for addresses.
- Continual encouragement to keep in touch with members of our congregation
- Affirming Committee: PIE Day in conjunction with Grace United, and Dunlop Central United, will be held at St. Luke's United Church, on March 14, 2026, at 6 p.m. With pizza pie supper and trivial pursuit. Rev. Carmen Lansdowne is coming to the event. She will also be preaching Sunday March 15, 2026.
- Drop-in – Coffee & conversation – the second Tuesday of the month at 10 a.m
- Student letters: Caleb Ferguson, Elizabeth Veldman, Ryan & Andrew Davies, Logan McKay. Amy Schmidt, Joanna Schmidt, Lauren Morrison, Reiko and Kai Marui, Eli Watson. Several donations were received which covered the cost of the Tim Horton's cards with some to spare
- Benevolent Fund: Received \$450. Balance \$796.43.
- Flowers: Diane Werezak organizing Easter flowers to be delivered on March 31, 2026

Bev Walking

E. Proclamation and Special Events

- Big Sing Thing Friday March 20. People are encouraged to purchase their tickets in advance through the office or by e-transfer.
- Planning a Mother's day fundraiser.

Bev Walking

10. Governance and Support Committee Reports

A. Property

- Recyclables are now picked up on the Friday commercial/institutional collection route provided by the City of Sarnia.
- The flat roof over the Cathcart entrance was overloaded with snow causing water ingress at the entrance doors and the library windows. We will reassess the situation in the spring.
- A large critter was spotted around the building in the last 2 weeks.
- The automatic opener on the Narthex N inside door stopped working and must be replaced. A budget estimate of the cost is \$3500 + tax. Initial quote was obtained and a replacement plan will be developed in March. Submit this to Planning for a Project Proposal review.
- Gas Stove repair will go to Planning for Project Proposal Review.

John Cooke

B. Finance

- The 2025 UCC Stats and HST rebates from July – December have been completed.
- Annual Report documentation submitted.
- Income tax receipts have been issued.
- Worked closely with the financial review committee for 2025.
- Waiting for direction from Council on how to utilize idle and under-utilized funds to reduce projected 15k deficit in 2026.
- January income statement shows a positive balance of \$20,736 which is roughly half of 2025 period. Timing of investments is the reason for the difference. Things should even out in February. If we get the statements in time these figures will be reported to Council.
- Discussed the movement of RBC money market funds.
- Discussed the M&S donation options.

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- Looking for new member(s).
- Marion will be unavailable for 4-6 weeks due to health. Bob Newman has generously offered to step in and take care of deposits and covering expenses.

Marion Staples

C. M & P

- No report

Laura Black

D. Planning

- Planned Giving Workbook will be updated and make it available to Council.
- Committee will be meeting at the end of this month.

Jim Wicks

E. Communications

- No report

Chris Cooke

F. Regional Council

- London Gospel Collective is presenting a joint concert with London Kids Community Gospel Choir on Sunday, March 29th, 2026 at 6:00pm. Go to www.londongospelcollective.ca or www.lkcgcc.ca for more information
- Region announce the hiring of Laura Black to the position of First Third Ministry Faith Formation Minister, serving the Antler River Watershed, Horseshoe Falls, and Western Ontario Waterways Regional Councils.
- Collective 2026 youth event is happening in August in St. Catherines.
- Regional meeting at the end of June, if anyone is interested in finding out more about the Region, speak to Marilyn.
- Challenge to Council members: look at the UCC website, find one thing that captures your interest (i.e. blog, news items, . <https://united-church.ca/>
- To view entire regional newsletter: <https://arwrcucc.us20.list-manage.com/track/click?u=ee15470ca4eab124ea964929b&id=b977844195&e=8325eff85f>

Marilyn Barros

G. Trustees

- No report

Joanna Catterson

H. AOTS

- No report

John Cooke

11. Reflection and Closing Prayer

Reflection on Devotion. Council members were invited to share their reflections on

Meeting closed at 9:10 pm.

Kenji led a closing prayer

Next Regular Council Meeting: Wednesday April 1, 2026.

Tory Walko, Chair

Cecily Chiles, Council Secretary

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Sunday Lock-up Responsibility		
2026	January	Communications
	February	Outreach
	March	Property
	April	Planning
	May	Trustees
	June	Worship
	July	CD
	August	CC&G
	September	M&P
	October	Finance
	November	Communications
	December	Outreach
Devotional at Council Meetings		
2026	January	Regional Council
	February	Communications
	March	Finance
	April	M&P
	May	Outreach
	June	Trustees
	July	na
	August	na
	September	na
	October	Planning
	November	CC&G
	December	Property

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GRACE FUNDS SUMMARY – 2025 (IDLE FUNDS)

FUND	Jan 01, 2025	Dec 31, 2025	2025 Fund Activity		CTTE/OPPORTUNITY
			IN	OUT	
Reserve	42,286	57,794	15,508	0	FINANCE/NO
Legacy Fund	315,909	315,909	0	0	FINANCE/NO
L4L	12,380	12,380	0	0	OUTREACH/YES
Youth Worship	2,532	2,726	244	50	CD/NO
Communications Initiative Fund	3,045	3,795	1,750	1,000	COMMUNICATIONS/NO
Youth Initiatives	7,390	7,510	2,097	1,978	CD/NO
Inn of the Good Shepherd	1,838	2,146	4,005	3,697	OUTREACH/NO
Benevolent Fund	1,437	346	199	1,290	CC&G/NO
Memorial Fund	14,779	30,145	17,199	1,833	WORSHIP/YES
Capital Replacement	30,283	12,626	5,914	23,571	PROPERTY/NO
Ken Plumley	11,657	12,232	1,775	1,200	AOTS/NO
Inspiration	8,996	10,038	7,836	6,794	P&SE/NO
Lay Leadership Development	7,001	5,001	0	2,000	CD/YES
Resonance Project	2,925	1,061	850	2,714	TO BE RETIRED
TOTALS	462,458	473,708	57,377	46,127	
Sarnia Community Foundation	72,120	TBD	TBD	0	FINANCE/YES

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2026 Grace United Church Kitchen Refresh Project Plan Synopsis

Existing kitchen is being refreshed to improve work area. Estimated completion of all work to be by June 2026. Work will involve:

- 1) *repair of existing gas stove,*
- 2) *refresh condition of cupboard doors and handles*
- 3) *New counter tops and back splash*
- 4) *Paint walls and cupboard doors*

Present Project Scope (Kitchen Refresh) and Plan to GUC Council.

Will request funds (maintenance – Safety) to complete Gas Stove Repair, as soon as possible, from Property Committee. Members of the Outreach Committee will be involved with fund raising for this project.

Paul Cooper – March 4/26

Complete getting quotes (and samples) for contracted supply and services.

Debbie & Karen – March 24/26

Develop project estimate

Debbie – March 24/26

Plan fund raising to pay for project (Outreach Committee)

Collette to lead the membership in fundraising – April 7/26

Complete Outstanding Decisions for colours, handles, counter tops

Outreach Committee with feedback from the congregation– April 7/26

Ask Congregation for Volunteers for cupboard removal, refinish and wall painting.

TBD (by Committee) – April 12/26

Outstanding Decisions

Cupboard paint (colour TBD) (samples from Cameron paints procured)

New handles (style TBD) to be purchased. (samples from Sarnia Cabinet procured)

Counter tops and back splash to be selected (TBD) (quote initiated: Sarnia Cabinets- samples procured)

Wall paint colour to be selected (TBD) (samples from Cameron paints procured)

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January 12, 2026

Dear Supporters of the Bluewater Growing Project:

We couldn't have done it without you! The Bluewater Growing Project (BGP) is thrilled to report that we have forwarded **\$181,000** to the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB) for the 2025 growing season! This is the largest annual donation we have been able to raise! At this time of the year, we wish to offer thanks to those in our community who assisted with this impressive donation.



It started in March, when planning began for the 2025 growing season. A group of local farmers gathered to discuss the crops to be grown on the fields entrusted to our stewardship. We are privileged to have a professional agronomist to provide guidance and support throughout the year. During this meeting, we were also joined by Don Miller from Tearfund. Don gave us an inspirational presentation on how they use CFGB funding for their overseas mission work.

The BGP received generous donations from several local churches who raised funds to assist with our spring planting expenses. Crop inputs continue to be a major expense for our group, but several seed companies provided much needed support in the form of donated or discounted seed. We appreciate the many donors who help keep our input costs manageable.

Spring planting was relatively timely, with many farmers graciously donating their time and equipment to tend to the fields. Our local Co-op continued to assist with custom application services. Our collective efforts were blessed with generally good growing conditions in this area.

We are pleased to report that crop yields were higher than our long-term averages. With the help of many friends and neighbours, we harvested over 17,000 bushels of corn, 6,000 bushels of wheat and 5,100 bushels of soybeans. As the harvest wrapped up, we received even more donations from local individuals and businesses to top up our fundraising efforts.

We would like to thank all the landowners who enable our group to carry on. When you consider that the money raised by the BGP is eligible for government-matching funds up to a 4:1 ratio, we know that our efforts are making a big difference in the world. This money is allocated to fund the great work done by the following faith-based partners:

World Renew
United Church of Canada
Mennonite Central Committee
Presbyterian World Service & Development
Canadian Baptist Ministries
Alongside Hope
Tearfund

If you are interested in learning more about the great work done by these organizations, please check out our website: (www.bluewatergrowingproject.com), and click on the tab "Project Partners". We also invite you to reach out to us if you want to learn more about the Bluewater Growing Project, or have someone speak to your group.

Thank you very much for your contribution to another great year!

Sincerely,

Jack Koetsier, Coordinator
John Young, Secretary-Treasurer

Bluewater Growing Project,
c/o John Young, 5555 Mandaamin Road, RR#1 Wyoming ON N0N 1T0