

# Belonging Project

April 2009



*Belonging: to be linked to somebody or something: to be linked to a particular person, group, place, or time by a relationship such as birth, affection, or membership*

**Rideau Park United Church  
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What does belonging mean to me?

It means friendships and hugging and belonging to a group of very talented people who care about you. I am a member of the Chancel Choir and also in A Touch of Brass handbell choir. Besides the obvious learning of some very wonderful music, under very talented directors, it means satisfaction when you have had a challenge and met it. It means being missed when you are away and greeted heartily when you come back. It means meeting new people and sharing your feelings and anxieties. It means laughing and feeling sad together. It means socials and tons of good food. It means quiet times and joyous times. It means satisfaction at sharing Christmas, quietly observing Jesus' birthday with like-minded people in the church.

Then, it means expanding your life as you go out to play concerts at retirement homes and other churches. You meet other fellow Christians and find we are all the same - caring for each other, friendly and content.

Don't just sit in a pew for the first two years as I first did. Get involved in something that you like and watch your circle of friends grow and grow and grow!

Heather Ingrams

I have grown up in Rideau Park (and am still growing). Baptized, confirmed, Sunday school, after school programs, choirs, UCW, Session, committees, you name it – I likely am/or have been involved. When I was looking to buy a house, one of the considerations was that was not just to be close to my father's but also close to church. Rideau Park is my second family, and I have many friends here also. When life presents me with unexpected challenges, my church family has been always there for me.

Sandra Weedmark

For those of us who are fortunate enough to call Rideau Park United Church "home", each time we enter the doors of this church we know the deep feeling of belonging to a very caring and supportive community.

I came to Rideau Park quite by accident. Having just moved to Ottawa from the mid-west of the United States, I first visited Methodist churches as that was the denomination of my past. It was very disappointing to me to attend a Methodist Church in Ottawa, as it was so different from my home church. Since I was already experiencing some lonesome feelings because of changing countries, the sense of "belonging" that I was searching for was certainly not felt until I visited Rideau Park.

It was truly a coincidence that I discovered this church. While driving by on my way to the Alta Vista Animal Clinic, I was taken with the look of the church. After the visit to the veterinary hospital, I took time to stop and read the signage for Rideau Park on my way home, so that I could note the time of service. The following Sunday, my son and I came to Rideau Park, and my sense of feeling that this is where I was meant to be even led to purchasing a home in this area.

Several people made me feel comfortable and welcome when I arrived, and to this day I am indebted to those members of the congregation. Soon I joined a UCW Unit, and then began to expand my friendships and deepen my commitment to Rideau Park.

It is hard to put into words the emotions that are within me when I think of Rideau Park. It is my extended family, my support, and a great source of happiness. To all of the members of this wonderful congregation and to the caring ministry staff, I offer my heartfelt thanks for creating an atmosphere of belonging, for accepting me, and for continuing to allow me to grow in my spiritual journey.

Judy Paré

I joined Rideau Park United Church in 1968 when my family moved to the Alta Vista area. We had previously gone to Parkdale United where I was confirmed and I had taught Sunday School for approximately five years. On joining Rideau Park I once again began to teach Sunday School and continued doing so until 1984 or 1985.

I have always found Rideau Park to be an inviting place where the Spirit of God is very much in evidence. The people are warm and friendly and show great concern for anyone whom they determine is having difficulty. The book at the main entrance on Sunday morning, for people to ask for prayers for friends and family, shows the congregation's concern for others. It is a rare Sunday when someone isn't mentioned.

Church and my faith are very important to me. Throughout my life I have always set aside Sunday morning to attend church. Even if I am away on holiday, if at all possible, I attend church on Sunday morning. I do not feel that giving one hour a week to worship God is an onerous chore. It is rather an essential part of my life. Many times during the peace and calm of the service, listening to the music, listening to the sermon and the prayers, I have found the answer to a problem that I have been encountering and I have felt the quiet presence of God through his son Jesus Christ leading me on in my journey.

Marilyn Law

Rideau Park provides outstanding leadership in worship...our children have experienced wonderful forms of spiritual expression through Sunday School, children's stories as well as participating in musical and dramatic productions since the tender age of three. We are grateful for the commitment and leadership Rideau Park provides in enriching our lives.

Judy Maclennan

Before belonging, some background .....

I had a need to reconnect to the United Church .... to get back on the path, so to speak. The United Church had been part of my growing up. As a parent, I and my family had been active in two United Churches (Scarborough and Newmarket) for over 20 years. Since our move to Ottawa I had been absent - for about 10 years. In November 2007, I took a step. My visit to four different congregations helped me to define what I was looking for in a church to join.

At Rideau Park I was drawn to:

- the approach and stimulation of the sermons (I used the web site to read previous sermons)
- the presence of and activities for the children,
- the two ministers - Elizabeth and Steve,
- the beautiful "blue" round window plus the other side and new windows,
- the general comfort of the building to my taste,
- the location (ease for me to drive to) and parking spaces,
- the coffee time and other activities which give me a chance to get to know others,
- the choice of music and the hymns .....
- and the beautiful singing of the choir - I wanted to belong.

Rideau Park came out on top and I transferred my membership. In February 2008 I experienced a huge loss. My husband of 40 years died. Chuck Spicer was truly a blessing in helping me over this difficult time.

Back to Belonging..... In a way, my belonging to Rideau Park is just beginning! Belonging to the choir is very fulfilling. Through the choir and other activities I am getting to know individuals and am looking forward to continuing. So far, what "drew" me is "keeping" me. I am finding it a positive experience to be part of Rideau Park. I know there is more, waiting to be found.

Joan Pettit

Though many years of have passed  
Since I first came to Rideau Park  
How can I explain the feeling of belonging  
That I feel here?  
I know I feel at home here when I sing  
In the choir  
And my heart rejoices  
But I also feel quietly welcomed and  
At home sitting in the congregation  
It's as if the two positions are different  
Colours in the same beautiful tapestry  
Having someone greet me by name  
Always makes me feel as if I belong here too  
As does knowing there are so many others  
That I can greet by name  
And my heart gives thanks to God for this  
Great blessing!

Judy Evans

When I returned to Rideau Park, [after moving back to the area] it was because I was looking for moral and emotional support and to feel like I was more connected to my community. I had no idea that being a regular attendee would give me so much – not just moral and emotional support and community involvement, but a strong feeling of being part of the wider world – not to mention new friends, enjoyable volunteer work, and about a two hundred per cent increase in my overall education and understanding of all kinds of issues, local and global.

Now I feel like something's missing in my week if I'm unable to make it to the Sunday service. And when I go, I always come away feeling like I'm balanced again and start the week in a more optimistic frame of mind.

Nancy McPherson

Rideau Park has become a cornerstone of our family history, for all the joyous milestones, as well as the ones where we have grieved. The ministers at Rideau Park have always been very supportive.

We have crossed paths with people that we know from other aspects of our lives, and we have made new friends - we continue to foster those friendships outside of worship. On the weekends that scheduling conflicts arise at home or someone is unhealthy, we know that Rideau Park will be there when our chaos settles down, and we are thankful for that.

The Sunday school programs are great for the children, and it's wonderful that they can be so involved. They are proud to tell their friends this is their church.

Sherri, Neal, Allison, Ryan and Colleen Howes

In August 2003 I moved to Ottawa from Don Mills, Toronto, to be near my sister and her family. Rideau Park was the closest United Church to Hunt Club Manor, where I now live. I have always taken part in church services or some part of church work. In our little country church at home, I played the organ and later I became church librarian at the Donway Covenant United Church in Don Mills, Ontario.

I am very fond of sacred music and have certainly enjoyed the music at Rideau Park.

To worship the good Lord on Sundays is like a "spiritual shot in the arm" to help me through the week.  
Lois Bowman

I have been attending Rideau Park United Church since 1954. At age 17 I moved with my parents to Washington, D.C. where my Father took a four-year posting at the Canadian Embassy. I returned to Ottawa when I was 21 and returned to Rideau Park Church as well! Other than those four years away, Rideau Park has been my church home.

Lent is a time for Reflection—I can reflect on many happy times at Rideau Park –attending Sunday School; (and also teaching Sunday School) being confirmed; singing in the Junior Choir; attending C.G.I.T; being a member of a very popular Young People's Group and so many other happy events. I reflect back on my marriage, held here at Rideau Park, the baptism of my two sons, and their subsequent confirmations. The church has always been an important part of my life and I continue to serve being an Elder, a member of the Pastoral Care Committee, and helping out where needed. I was a United Church secretary for 15 1/2 years. It was a job I thoroughly enjoyed.

Rideau Park is a vibrant congregation. There are so many programs that people can participate in from the very young to the elderly of the congregation. During this Lenten and Easter season, my hope is that the new people to our congregation and the long-time members will continue to come to Rideau Park and be a part of this wonderful ministry. Come, join our family.

Barbara Derby

I can say that RPUC has been a second home for me. I grew up on Cunningham on the other side of Alta Vista from the church, so the church always had a presence in my life. My family and I would scoot up to church each Sunday morning in two minutes or less - we were that close. I was fortunate to be married there and have valued my involvement at RP for so many skills and life lessons I've been able to learn. Those skills and experiences came from taking part in so many things from Brownies and Explorers to singing in the choir and taking part in the spring musicals and going on the Youth Council summer trips, to doing committee work and participating in fundraising activities like the annual Bazar and the auctions we held to raise funds for the new pipe organ.

I pretty much grew up in the choir beginning with the Junior choir, then the Youth Council then the Senior Choir. I've been singing there for almost my entire life. In the choir I learned how to read music, how to sing and have had wonderful experiences from being a choir member. I remember as a girl in the Youth Council having a "wow" moment when we sang with the senior choir. I just loved the fullness of sound in the music we were making and how being right there in the thick of that music-making was so exhilarating. Another wonderful moment was when the Youth Council sang in St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal as part of a massed youth choir and orchestra under the direction of Barry Gosse (Jamie Gosse's brother). We sang the "Old 100th" and at the end of the piece we stood there in awe as the full sounds of the choir and orchestra reverberated for what seemed like a lifetime as they circled higher and higher up into the dome of the Oratory. That was a life-changing moment for me. I felt a tingle go up my spine and decided that music would always be a part of my life. It has been.

Today I'm fortunate that my work at the National Arts Centre allows me to create opportunities for young people to train in their chosen field of orchestral music.

I've always felt a spiritual connection in singing. So much of the choir music is based on scripture. In singing the text I feel that connection with God. As life gets busier, I appreciate the music we sing as a choir and the Sunday services more than ever as an opportunity to feel a sense of peace and fulfillment.

I'm grateful for all that being part of Rideau Park has given my life. God Bless Rideau Park!

Christy Harris

About three Christmas Eves ago, my wife of 25 years died. She was sick for our last 13 years together. I was her primary caregiver. For approximately two years, following this, I lived in life's fast lane. I struggled to stay alive while doing this. I did the best I could. It was a very difficult and depressing time.

There were other deaths I had to bear around that time. I lost my Dad and a long time woman friend to cancer. I lost my mother-in-law, and another long time friend. I also lost my 8 year-old golden retriever, Champion. I lost my wife's cousin, a great friend of mine. A month later, another cousin became extremely ill. Since then, I have lost three more dogs. At one point I silently said to myself that I had enough death in my life and in my home. I said this to God and to Jesus Christ. I gave up hope and took all religious artifacts off my walls, replacing them with anti-religious items.

My life in the fast lane with fast living ended in my attempt to end my life last September, the 30<sup>th</sup> day of the month. I spent about 10 days in a coma in ICU. Then, I went to a general surgical ward. I had to learn to walk again, to feed myself again, to look after myself again. I went from a wheelchair, to a walker, to a cane, to a crutch.

I thought that God did not want me, but I wanted God. I met Dale where I now live. We are soul mates. She has participated in my seeing the light – getting back in God's arms.

She had been, and now is again, a member of Rideau Park United Church. I'm enjoying the services at RPUC and I am enjoying my life.

Thank you, God!

David Broddy

We moved to Ottawa in 1957 with a three-week-old baby, a rented apartment. Our daughter was baptized at Glebe St. James because her father had a friend who went there. We lived in Vanier and wanted a closer church. In July of 1958 we had a son. We rented a house on Foxbar Street and looked for a church. We attended Rideau Park in October 1958. Two days later Dr. Beecroft arrived at the door for a visit. He was such a charmer how could we not go back? And we wanted our baby baptized.

I joined the UCW to give me a night out on my own and made so many friends I soon became involved with all their activities. I was a stay at home mom because through the next seventeen years our family grew to eight and they needed all my attention. I needed those friends I had made through my church to help and guide me through all the trials of raising a family. In 1976 we moved to France for two years. I missed my church friends and activities and the Canadian way of life. In 1978 we moved to Victoria, British Columbia. I joined a church there but still missed my church friends in Ottawa. I got a job in Victoria so did not become as active as I had been at Rideau Park.

In 1980 we moved back to Ottawa. I got a job but it did not prevent me from rejoining my UCW unit. The Social Action/Outreach Committee was formed and Ada McEwen encouraged me to join. I made more friends whose interests were similar to my own. I worked on a recipe book with UCW Unit 3 and that was great fun. We still held the yearly Nearly New Sale, which I had tried to explain to the ladies' church group in France. They looked astounded when I explained it to them and could not imagine selling or buying each other's clothes! Perhaps that was because I was not totally literate in French and although some of them were bilingual, many of them were not.

My UCW unit group and social action friends are just like part of my family. I have become involved with the Ottawa Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Group and they too are like part of my family and way of life. I feel extremely blessed to have so many wonderful friends as well as six healthy children and eleven healthy happy grandchildren. The stresses in my life are few when I have so many places to go for talk and comfort.

Norine Wolfe

I've attended Rideau Park for 26 years. I worked here for many years as well, serving on Council for many years. I have volunteered in the Chancel choir, in handbell choirs, in the spirituality group, the prayer chain, the Circle group, as an Elder, as a member of Presbytery, and have helped to lead study groups. This congregation is very welcoming. There always seem to be special people whose passion it is to make new folks feel welcome. That certainly happened to me long ago, and I still see it happening today. The ministerial staff has always been humble, welcoming and wise, and for that I am thankful. Sunday services are filled with song and sermon, prayer and a sense of community. There are so many opportunities to serve at Rideau Park.

In friendship and love we care for each other. Prayers are offered for those in need. Hugs are shared and words of support are spoken. Smiles and tears are part of the family experience. Weddings, funerals, baptisms and confirmation times are all celebrations of this wonderful faith community. Retreats and spiritual labyrinth walks honour the traditions of our faith. The most important thing for me is that people are searching for an authentic faith. We are encouraged to examine our faith - to deepen it and to trust in God through knowledge of Jesus Christ. Through social and spiritual action, we ourselves grow and spread God's message of inclusive love.

I would encourage those of you who are new to reach out to someone whenever you stop by the church. Share a bit of your story with us so that we can get to know you and help you decide in what ways you can be of service to the church, or let us know what we can do to serve you. It appears to me that many people who make Rideau Park their home are lit from within with their search for a deeper faith and a strong desire to know and nurture their friendship with God.

I am truly thankful to all those who have helped, guided and prayed for me and my family through the years. Rideau Park continues to be a blessing to me.

Chris Inrig

In this fast-paced, technology-based society, we are all longing for connection. The faith community at Rideau Park United Church can be part of the answer. It is a gathering place for people committed to social justice – people who feel called to witness Christ's teachings in a world that sorely needs to hear His message of love.

When I was growing up, Canadians observed a common pause day. But, in this day and age, many workplaces operate seven days a week. And that does not even take into account the 24/7 availability expectations of the "crack-berry" generation!

On a personal level, I know I have benefited enormously from promising myself one day of rest each week – a time to reconnect with church and family. At Rideau Park, I've found midweek groups of like-minded folk, who broaden my horizons as we contribute to God's work in the wider community. Belonging to Rideau Park United Church, with its wealth of wonderful music and outreach programs, helps me live the joyful and abundant life that, I believe, God intends for each one of us.

Lorna McCrea

One of the reasons that I belong to Rideau Park is the sense of community. I appreciate the fellowship that being a member of Rideau Park brings. I also appreciate the opportunity to worship, work and socialize with people who are committed to serving and helping to make a difference in the church, the local community and, through Mission and Service, the wider community.

Bob Roden

I came to Rideau Park because my previous church was falling apart and I was tired of trying to sew it back up. My husband, Steve, figured there was a lot happening at Rideau Park and suggested it be my destination that first, sad Sunday I found myself without a church. I came here, heard the beautiful music, felt the energy, and stayed.

I have especially enjoyed participating in the music programs, the retreats, numerous special events, VBS, and Hearsay for the Family, which at our house, we call "Church Supper." I have met many people whose company I enjoy, as have Graeme and Kieran. Many of you have probably encountered my children, too, most likely as they were running past on their way to "everywhere." Certainly, the variety and depth of experiences offered at Rideau Park is hard to beat and we are both grateful to be tolerated and pleased to belong!

So, I guess you could thank Richard for taking a chance by letting me join the choir that day, nearly five years ago, and only **three weeks** before the Christmas service. Imagine what Christmas would have been like without a church home?! No, imagine what life would be like without a church home! I am indeed thankful to be part of Rideau Park.

Nadine Dawson

(most often found either singing or endlessly looking for Graeme and Kieran!)

Why do I belong to Rideau Park United Church? Because for me it is like coming home every time I enter the physical space; because for me the people at Rideau Park are my extended family; because for me Rideau Park is the Oasis in the voyage of my life spiritually and physically.

I grew up in rural eastern Ontario where church was an important part of my family's life. Every one of my family was involved in our small church. When I came to Ottawa I tried several United Churches never quite finding the right one. When children came into our lives the need to be committed to a church became a priority and so I searched for a church with a 9:30 service; I found Rideau Park, close to home and now it is both my spiritual home and my neighbourhood community.

We were tentative, back pew occupants with our new baby but we were noticed and welcomed by Alice Campbell who soon called on us. Then, Georgina Fitzgerald who was working at Rideau Park came to visit – that resulted in a doll named Georgina at our house, not quite sure why. Vince Perry came to visit – he was our Elder, so he told us, and he was from the Maritimes, a key connection to many at Rideau Park. Soon we were leaving our daughter with Mrs. Sager in the toddler room and John and I were volunteering to help out in Sunday school. I guess I felt that if I wanted the Sunday school program, Cherubs etc., then I had a responsibility to help out where I could. It was a wonderful way to get involved.

Twenty plus years have passed and our family has made many friends at Rideau Park. I know many people here better than most of the neighbours on our street and that is important to me to have those close connections. While we may not openly speak of our faith and belief in the Christian life to one another, I know we share those things in common because we share time together at Rideau Park. That knowledge gives me strength each day; I know I am not alone in this place. The friends at Rideau Park really care about me and our family; I feel their love and through them the love of God every time we meet whether it is in the grocery store, a restaurant or sitting beside one another other in the "not so far back pew" now.

It is that silent, but very much felt, unspoken connection of love and faith that binds me to the Rideau Park community. How can I explain something that is indescribable? It is just that I need to come to this place each week, to come to where I belong.

Nancy Begg-Durkee



We came to Rideau Park in 1965 shortly after arriving in Ottawa. We chose Rideau Park on the recommendation of a friend who assured us that we would like the church and Minister. The next year we moved to Alta Vista Drive in the same block as the church and it soon became a very important part of our lives.

Our church-going up until then was very much like Pierre Berton's description of "the Comfortable Pew". Rideau Park was different. There was a huge Sunday School at that time where our young children were made welcome. Before long, I began teaching Sunday School. There was always something happening and so many ways we could get involved. U.C.W., Stewards, Brownies, Messengers, youth groups for teens, Session, pastoral care, music programs and always there was an emphasis on looking outward and not only focusing on our own needs.

Several years ago we used a program at Pastoral Care about creating a "Caring Community" and, while it is always a work in progress, I believe it is a good description of Rideau Park. I see people caring for others in difficult times, rejoicing in happy times, praying and worshipping together.

God is Love and I see God in the wonderful people at Rideau Park. Our family has been truly blessed to be a part of this congregation for all these years.

Mabel Bannerman

My family and I (husband Mark and children Lisa-Marie and Derek) had just moved back into Ottawa from Kanata in 1981 when we decided to attend Rideau Park United Church where my in-laws worshipped. Our children were very young and the Sunday School was very attractive to me. The first day we arrived, we were greeted by Jim Brackenridge who was so helpful, kind, and welcoming that we knew right there and then that we had made the right decision. We were married and our children were baptized at Bell Street United Church but we wanted a church closer to home. It has now been 28 years and a lot of changes have occurred but Rideau Park has been a central part of all those changes including the confirmations of our children, the marriage of our daughter, and the christening of our granddaughter.

I have always felt that I should give back to the church that was so nurturing and caring and because of that I decided to teach Sunday School, which I did for five years. Our children have very fond memories of Vacation Bible School (I helped out in the program for many years) and the Cherub Choir. We have helped with the Church Bazaar for over 15 years and look forward to it every fall. My journey took me to being an Elder, which I have been for over eight years now, and I intend to do more as I approach retirement. Rideau Park has been, is, and will continue to be an integral part of the life of our family, and we are truly grateful for all the Rideau Park friends we have made along the way.

We truly feel we belong to Rideau Park and are proud to be counted among its members.

Shanti Inman

I am truly blessed to have been given the gift of a new life by the grace from God. Many of us have experienced our darkest hours. My life is whole and new because God gave me another chance with life. When I wonder why my life was spared I am in awe and marvel at the mystery of life and death. I wonder if God has given me a new life to discover that God has something else for me to do. The hard part is to figure out what that may be. Perhaps it is just to realize that our lives should be filled with the Glory of God as the waters cover the sea. How vast and broad are the works of the Lord. God gives and takes away in his own time and God's time is always the best time. This holy week as we reflect on how patiently, how very patiently He hung on the cross, so shall our lives be patient.

Anonymous

My early years in a fundamentalist home environment of a “jealous” wrathful, terrifying god of vengeance and violence were times of great anxiety and fear for me. I heard much of sin and judgement and very little of forgiveness or mercy.

I was a thoughtful child and read my Bible, trying to figure out the contradictions which were even then evident to me, going to Sunday School faithfully and to church twice on Sundays and often through the week if there was a revival campaign going on. I was well aware of my many sins and tried to get “saved” on several occasions.....the trouble was I did not feel any different and nothing I tried to do made any difference in a very tumultuous home atmosphere.

I came to the realization during one trip to the altar to be saved that it could not just depend on how one felt but on a conscious choice to try to follow God’s will. However, I was very confused as to what that was as I had been taught that only what our church said and did was right and everyone else such as Catholics, Jews, United Church and Anglican folks were pretty much on the road to perdition...and as for the folks in China and Africa...too bad. Our god did not have any interest in them because they had not attended our church or accepted our absolute truths.

My confusion lasted through high school and into University and I had some huge battles with my mother over the contradictions I saw in my home, in the Bible and in my church.

I was told “who are you to challenge Almighty God?”

And I would reply, “Well God made my brain and I can’t help it if it thinks.”

I spent my 20<sup>th</sup> summer at a Student Christian Movement summer camp and met up with amazing young people who, in our discussions pretty well finished off any of my early fundamentalist beliefs.

I returned to university in a very distressed state of mind with so many conflicting ideas racing through my mind.

I still went to the SCM meetings and had some fears resolved but not all.

My first teaching job was at RCAF STATION Claresholm, Alberta and it was my good fortune or maybe God’s plan that I met my first friend there – Alda Lewis. She was an amazingly kind and loving person who met everyone with joy and acceptance. She was a fabulous teacher, a great friend and..... a staunch Christian.

I still wanted to go to church because I had never lost my desire to know more about God. She, amazingly enough, was a United Church member and so I decided to go with her and see if all those UC folks were as bad as I had been taught or if, perhaps they were like my friend, Alda, who was the first person to demonstrate to me, through her life, that God is Love.

Wherever I went after that, I sought out the United Church in every community in which we lived...Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, and back to Ottawa.

I found so many seekers like myself who were not “know-it-all”s but who were searching out the pilgrim path as was I and who welcomed me with such open arms and with such love. I found acceptance, just as I was, and friends who helped me by listening to my doubts, difficulties and fears – and this has never changed.

I saw ordinary people who were concerned for the poor, the outsiders, the ostracized or those experiencing injustice. I saw a small community concerned for the larger community and the world. I saw a national church community who challenged the status quo and spoke truth to power.

I found ministers who challenged me intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.

I saw committee chairs and members who put as much time and effort into their church work as into their everyday jobs and accomplished so much with their diligence.

I found opportunities to try to put my faith into practice....and most of all I found God... that ineffable, infinitely transcendent mystery who chose to reveal to mankind as much as we could bear of Him, in the life and person of Jesus Christ.

I realized that He was not a God who judges and condemns us, but one who welcomes us with open arms just as we are and where we are.

When my friend, Alda, passed away, I wrote her family and told them that because of the way her faith infused her life, I had joined the United Church, October 3, 1961 and have had the joy of making the best friends one could ever have, seeing my children baptized, confirmed and married in my church and now seeing some of my grandchildren being part of it. My husband and other family members have been succored in their last days on earth through ministers and friends in the United Church. In joy and in sorrow, I have found a community of like minds to help me, through their faith and devotion, to see the greater meaning in our lives on earth.

I belong to the United Church.

Hyacinthe Wade

Barry and I first started coming to Rideau Park United Church because it was the church in the area of Ottawa where we settled after our marriage at Parkdale United Church (where we both grew up). We found a very warm welcome at Rideau Park, especially from Don and Betty Simpson who welcomed us on our first Sunday here and immediately made us feel at home in a church where we didn't know anyone, and this warmth is one of the most important things about Rideau Park

We have found wonderful friendships in this faith community and real compassion and support during difficult times. Rideau Park has been the church home for our family including our son Gordon and my parents after they moved into this part of Ottawa, and it has played a very important part in our lives.

I remember with fondness the great ministers we have been fortunate enough to have beginning with Dr. McKennitt and continuing to the present time and the inspirational preaching which we here at Rideau Park have been blessed to hear week by week. I also appreciate all the opportunities we have to grow spiritually, e.g. the Wed. evening services during Advent and Lent and the retreats at Galilee to name a couple, but for me, the most important and meaningful experience has been musical through my involvement with the Touch of Brass handbell choir. This has opened up a unique way to make music and has provided me with wonderful friends and musical opportunities and challenges as well as the chance to perform at many different churches. Visiting other churches makes me appreciate all that we have here at Rideau Park. I pray that all who come to Rideau Park find the same sense of home and belonging that I have over the last 40-plus years.

Joan Dewis

I have been a member of Rideau Park United Church for many years, first coming just because I wanted to go to a church service but really didn't know what I was looking for. I was new to Ottawa and had dropped out of church for a few years. I became a member and was persuaded to be a Sunday School teacher. I remember feeling totally unprepared, but curriculum material was provided and it wasn't too difficult. I taught Sunday School from September 1958 until September 1991. Helen and I became more involved at Rideau Park when our two daughters joined some midweek activities and Helen joined the UCW.

In 1972 Rev. Jamie Gosse came as Assistant Minister and he organized a Youth Council just at the time that our two daughters were becoming teenagers. They remained with the Youth Council until they outgrew it. Jamie was an amazing person – full of energy, ideas and music. There was always much to do and we were usually part of it. We liked it that way.

Church culture has always been a fascinating study for me: why do some people participate so frequently and willingly while others seem to set limits on what they can or will do? Why is there usually so little interest in Bible study, book studies and discussion groups? My own interest has been to participate in, develop and to organize as many of these events as possible.

One of the more interesting projects is the Wednesday evening services which occur during Advent, Lent and the summer months. Their purpose is to encourage laity to become comfortable with conducting short worship services, and to demonstrate how easy and interesting it is. Many people still seem to believe that only clergy should do these services; however, each year the number of lay participants increases. We also always appreciate the time and talents of the pianists who volunteer for these services.

The church is now involved in the Emerging Spirit project, and we don't yet know whether there has been any success. Statistics and changing demographics suggest that declining church attendance and participation will continue, although there have been some encouraging signs; we are always optimistic.

We have always had a large number of volunteers, and these have made the church what it is. The sum and substance of the Christian faith and its traditions is based on the contribution of its followers.

Rideau Park United Church is a community of dedicated and involved people – from the very young to advanced seniors; all at work to develop, sustain and encourage each other in our faith traditions, and always open and inviting to the outside neighbourhoods; a welcoming and inclusive community.

Our scriptures define the challenges and struggles of many who preceded us; one of them was an anonymous, obscure evangelist who wrote some of his observations and opinions on paper. In the letter to the Hebrews, he said *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."* The race with all of its challenges, surprises and choices comforts us as we participate in it.

Bas Groeneweg

I remember very distinctly the reason why I decided, with my husband (fiancé at the time), to make Rideau Park United Church our home church...

...let's rewind a few years now...

My introduction to RPUC happened on a fall day. I grew up in Orleans and went to the same Pentecostal church for my whole life. However, when I moved to Ottawa South it became very important for me to go to a church that was in the same community that I lived. While driving down Alta Vista Drive one day, exploring my new neighbourhood, I saw Rideau Park United Church – it was striking, beautiful. I thought to myself “one day I am going to have to visit that church”. I ended up going to another Pentecostal church by my home base but I never forgot about RPUC...

...fast forward a few years...

When my husband and I were first engaged, we went to different churches and we felt it would be important during our engagement to go to the same church. So, we started a “tour” of churches in Ottawa South. My previous memory of Rideau Park came back to me and I decided to add it on my list of churches to visit.

The day of my tour, I had visited two churches already before heading to RPUC for the 11:15 a.m. service. I immediately noticed this very important difference - when I walked towards the church I was met by another lady heading towards the door - she smiled and said "Hello!" I shouldn't have been, but I was surprised – I hadn't heard a "hello" from anyone at the previous churches I visited.

But what had left me with the greatest impression of RPUC was a lady, Lorraine Presley, who introduced herself to me after the service as I sat alone in the pew. This warm conversation and genuine interest in ensuring that I had a welcoming visit to her church was something I didn't experience at any of the other churches I visited prior and after my tour.

I have gone to church all my life and know that it is very easy for people to come and go unnoticed. What had attracted me to attend RPUC, was the simple gesture of a warm, genuine welcome and kind smiles and "hellos".

Since then, my husband and I were married at RPUC and we have become happily involved in the community of RPUC – Sunday School, Ushering, and Stewards. This is just an example of how a simple "hello" and warm welcome can have a resounding impact on the people who step in for a visit.  
Gaveen Cadotte

I decided to come to Rideau Park when I became a parent, and began to think about the way I wanted to raise my child.

In this complex and confusing multi-cultural, secular society how could I teach my child good values, equip her with the means to find the strength to cope with the many problems and sorrows she will undoubtedly encounter throughout life? How could I show her good choices in a world where so many bad choices are so easily available, and so superficially attractive? How could she learn to build the foundations of her life on rock, not sand?

Popular culture promotes shallow materialism. The media, including television, promotes self centred, self serving, and rather cruel behaviour presented as humorous or 'cool', let alone the issue of gratuitous violence and sexuality. School is, of necessity in our multi-cultural society, secular, and focuses on competition, becoming a 'winner', and gaining the approval of the powerful however possible. I did not feel that these influences would provide adequate models for the kind of inner strength she will need.

So I returned to the church of my childhood, and found it not so very much changed. The pageantry of the seasons, Christmas concerts and Palm Sunday, Sunday School classes, the story of Jesus, and sweet children's songs, pot luck suppers and bazaars, and the solid foundation of Christian values are giving my girl a sense of security, continuity and community. The messages of service, kindness, respect and tolerance mediated through the example of Christ give her a powerful, time-tested value system to which she can turn throughout life.

Lynn Sherwood

What drew us to Rideau Park in the first place?

Janet and I first came to Rideau Park in early 1987 when we enrolled our son, Eric, in a nursery school program that rented space from the church during the day. Through the nursery school, we came to know a number of parents with young families who were members at Rideau Park and who spoke highly of the church, particularly of its Sunday school and of the range of activities for families. In the fall of 1988, we became members at Rideau Park and enrolled Eric, and later Lindsay, in Sunday school. We were impressed with the size of the Sunday school, the curriculum, and the dedication and caring attitude of the teachers. It wasn't too long before Janet and I became assistants and then teachers in the Sunday school, first with the six year olds, and then with the seven and eight year olds - a rewarding activity that we continued for a dozen years. Meanwhile, Eric and Lindsay progressed through the Sunday school program, Bible class and Confirmation class and we all experienced and enjoyed the many family activities at the church such as Cherub Choir, Advent Happening, the Christmas Pageant and the congregational picnic.

What keeps us coming to Rideau Park?

We have felt welcome at Rideau Park and developed many long-term friendships at the church. Our spiritual journey has been supported through the Sunday worship services, thought-provoking sermons, the music, reflections while preparing Sunday school lessons, and other faith experiences. Over the years, I have been afforded the opportunity to support the work of the church at Rideau Park through such activities as Elder visitations, the Affirmation project, serving on Council and leading the Ministry and Personnel Committee, which also benefited my personal growth and sense of contribution to the "greater good." Rideau Park has also provided us with the opportunity to contribute to the broader community through events such as Christmas Cheer packing, the Carleton Pause Table and helping at the bazaar. Opportunities to socialize at coffee hour, various dinners, curling, and other activities have reinforced the sense of belonging. In summary, the shared faith journey, the friendships made, and the opportunities to support the work of the church within the community in a meaningful way are key in keeping us coming to Rideau Park.

Wayne Bond

I never end up attending as many mid-week services in Advent, Lent and Summer as I hope. But when I do attend, I feel like my heart sings. Maybe it's the intimacy of the small gathering. Maybe it's the fact that the lay leaders and ministers leading the service or communion are willing to give this extra bit of themselves and their time for the community. Maybe it's because, when I look at the people gathered there, I see Rideau Park's treasures. Such as the elderly woman who quietly yet steadfastly attends every service as she is able; the couple who are themselves getting on in years yet remain deeply committed to the care and visiting of those who are not able to come to Rideau Park gatherings anymore; the somewhat younger couple who are part of the material and spiritual backbone of Rideau Park; the women who have long served in a pastoral care capacity and who always know when a member of the community is in need of care, comfort or celebration. I am honoured to be with them and to learn what it means to be a part of a faith community from them.

The mid-week services have a special character that sets them apart from Sunday worship. The awkwardness of processing for communion in the tight space of the chapel is smoothed over by the softly repeated words of the ministers as each person takes a piece of bread and dips it into the grape juice. Moments of smiles and laughter will break through the solemnity, so the atmosphere is very relaxed. The lay leaders are always thanked after the service for their thoughtful planning, their carefully chosen words and their message.

And there is God, who is ever present....in the people, in the words, in the bread and juice, in the light of the candles, in the song, in the echoes of teachings given to us thousands of years ago, in the remembrance of Jesus and in the enjoyment of each other's company. God is always there in the mid-week Wednesday evening services.

Alyce Dunnewold

In 1986, we unofficially "adopted" a sixteen-year-old boy named Eric. Back then, I was attending a Lutheran church, and my wife Chris was at Rideau Park. Eric's family background was Roman Catholic, but he'd rarely been to church since his baptism. We told Eric, "we have some good news and some bad news for you: you have joined a church-going family, so the bad news (if you want to call it that) is that you will be going to church; the good news is that you get a choice of which church to attend – either the Lutheran church or Rideau Park." So I took Eric to both churches, and he preferred Rideau Park; he seemed to quite like Don Frame. But our kids were in Sunday School and Chris was in the choir, which meant that Eric would have had to sit alone in the service, and I thought this might not be too good, since church was a new experience for him. So I ended up coming to Rideau Park to be with him on Sunday mornings. One day, a notice appeared in the bulletin asking for someone to fill in for six weeks as a teacher for the high-school Sunday School class. Eric said to me, "you should do this." I thought about it for a minute, and replied, "OK, I'll do it if you'll be in the class." So we agreed, and I started on my six-week stint. Somehow, twenty-three years later, I'm still teaching Sunday School. It's been the longest six weeks of my life.

Many people have supported me in my role as a Sunday School teacher. I think of Alice Campbell, Marilyn MacLaurin and Carolyn Scollick: leaders in the Sunday School in my early years here. Many parents gave me encouragement and assistance. But the greatest inspiration (apart from God, of course) came from my students. The young people of this congregation have been a constant joy to teach, work with, and learn from. Some of them have turned into long-term friends. I came here in 1986 hoping to find a church that would be good for Eric; I found that, and much more: I found a ministry. I am grateful to Rideau Park for the privilege of carrying out that ministry among its young people.

Sometimes when I'm in the church alone on a Sunday night getting ready for Bible Study, or putting things away after all the young people have gone home, I think about how much I feel at home in this place. Thank you, Rideau Park, for being a "second home" to me.

Scott Inrig

Rideau Park is like home. I have been going to Rideau Park since I was an infant. My parents (Lily and Leslie Cross) and my sister Heather moved to the Alta Vista area in 1950 and soon after they moved into their new home they received a visit from Audrey Foster. Mrs. Foster was calling on people who were new to the area to invite them to join in setting up a new United Church congregation in the Alta Vista area. My parents attended First United at the time. They decided to join the Rideau Park congregation and were among the members who attended services in Alta Vista Public School. When I came along I was baptized at Alta Vista School. Some of my earliest memories are connected with Rideau Park. I remember waiting in line in the upstairs hall, to see Dr. Beecroft at the farewell event when he retired – I was pretty young and I couldn't understand why our Minister was leaving us, I thought he stayed for life, like family. I remember Sunday School in various rooms, prior to their current uses; the audio-visual room and the Secretary's office used to be Sunday School classrooms.

So Rideau Park was an important part of our family's life and although I went to some other youth Bible study groups and services at other churches from time to time during my late teens and early twenties, I always returned to Rideau Park. Through the years I always saw the importance Rideau Park played in my parents' lives. They made some good friends there and were always interested in church events and changes. I know how much the women in Mom's UCW Unit helped her get through the tough times after my Father passed away. The strength and support of the ladies in the UCW is very remarkable and continues on today. I also can remember those days when I came home from school to find baking in the kitchen and the disappointment of hearing that it wasn't for us, it was for the church.

Why have I stayed at Rideau Park? There are many reasons. The most important one is the caring community that exists at Rideau Park. There are many people who set such good examples of thoughtful, joyful living, following in Christ's path. Also, we have been blessed with wonderful leadership, Ministers who want to share their knowledge and faith with all who are interested. Each time a Minister has moved on to other work I have wondered how we would find someone new, and each time we have found a new Minister with a new perspective and new enthusiasm to reach out and inspire each of us.

I stay at Rideau Park for the message of God's love, of Christ's example and the Holy Spirit that fills our church. I stay for the services, the sermons, the music, the book studies, the retreats, the Bazaar, Bible study, quilting and, in everything, the community of friends.

Doreen Hamilton



I always knew there was a God but, given some of the things that had happened to me as a child, I never believed He had the least bit of interest in me, despite the fact that I had grown up attending church every Sunday. Nevertheless, I do remember as a university student going into a church to cry, pray and wonder if anyone up there was listening. As it turned out, one of my greatest misfortunes in life turned into my greatest asset, when from the depths of despair, pitifully demoralized, I felt that God actually did reach out and touch me, so that I was restored and put back on the road to mental health. However, I still had no use for organized religion.

By the time I arrived at Rideau Park as a failed Catholic, I had been "dragged", figuratively speaking, through several churches, including a Ukrainian Orthodox one and another United Church which I left in the middle of the gay ordination debate which sparked so much acrimony. The United Church of Canada had been my husband's choice, as his grandfather had been one of its founding members.

Fortunately, we moved to Alta Vista when our daughter was six years old, and my husband started to go to Rideau Park and take her with him. I agreed because, I thought, later she would have something to reject. Occasionally, I would go with them and found that they had a wonderful music program--one of the best. I also regularly attended meetings unrelated to the Church in its meeting spaces, when I started to notice all the comings and goings at Rideau Park. At that time, the Church had clothing and food cupboards and an amazing outreach worker by the name of Alice Campbell. All kinds of people were being welcomed and helped, and the help was offered without preaching or conditions. And the music was wonderful!

At first I could not believe that so many people could offer so much to others without asking for anything in return. But I watched and listened to the music and everything else. Little by little, I began to see that Rideau Park people put their money where their mouths are. The Church was and continues to be rich in service to its members and to the community at large. I believe that God is definitely present at Rideau Park. Its ministers go way beyond the call of duty to do what they can to help everyone. And the music continues to be the best!

Nadia Senyk



*It is clear when reading all of these wonderful personal reflections, that God brings us to this place, nurtures our spiritual understanding and puts a holy mark on our family's relationships. Over many years, gentle Christians have sat in our pews, ministered to each other, and been faithful to their understanding of God. May we continue to be so moved and so led in the years ahead. Thanks be to God, the author of our lives.*

*What does belonging to Rideau Park mean to you?*