



# Ralph Connor Memorial United Church Community of Faith



## COMMUNITY OF FAITH PROFILE

June 2024

### Who We Are Now

As we in [Ralph Connor](#) experience life, we have come to know that we are not alone. We live in God's world - an extraordinary world which is changing and evolving in unsettling ways. We wonder, as a community of faith, what it will require of us to live into a vision so wide and deep, so inclusive and loving, that, in Martin Luther King Jr.'s words: *"will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age...overflowing love, which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless and creative...love seeking to preserve and create community."*

We are now a single-charge United Church community of faith seeking to learn to serve the upper Bow Valley in Alberta from Exshaw in the east to Lake Louise in the west. As we do so, we openly acknowledge that the Bow Valley is part of the traditional lands of our neighbours, the Iyârhe Nakoda, and that we are settlers and a Treaty people.

The long established Banff and Canmore congregations were officially united January 1, 2023. We had been learning to work together since 2021. Our amalgamation, we were told, was exemplary. We now have the resources of church buildings on the main streets of both Canmore and Banff.

To us, worship is life giving—it is bread for the journey. Given our size, 100+ members, the 10 a.m. [worship service](#) is well-attended. We also post it on [You Tube](#). We are a singing congregation. Music is an essential dimension of our life. We have a choir that practices every week under the direction of an accredited Music Director and sings every Sunday between September and June. Our Evensong is a lay-led contemplative service on Wednesday's at 7:15 p.m. from October to May. It alternates between in-person and Zoom. It attracts some whom we seldom see on a Sunday.

We are learning to practice a more radical hospitality. We welcome all who will worship with us, work with us or need us. Our commitment to living in Right Relationships is manifest in our support of the Christmas Feast of the Iyârhe Nakoda in Mînhî Thnî. Both congregations were certified as Affirming communities by Affirm United before we amalgamated. Our Bow Valley Wedding Ministry is especially appreciated by the 2SLGBTQAI+ community. We recently completed a \$320,000 renovation to make Gordon Hall in Canmore one of the few fully accessible meeting spaces in town. The Thrift Shop in the basement of Rundle Memorial in Banff recently had a small fire. The impact has been large on us as a community of faith and on those in Banff who rely on ready access to low-cost household goods and clothing. We have committed to reimagining and redesigning the Thrift Shop in the basement of the Banff church in order to make it an even more effective space.

We are [engaged in and with both towns](#) in a host of ways. Some are as expected, others more innovative. Our style is to undertake initiatives that for us are a ministry and share them in ways that they become projects of the wider community. For example, the [Canmore Young Adult Network](#), [Bow Valley Refugee Project](#), Ecumenical Prayer Shawl Knitters, [Green Exodus](#) and the [Alpine Voices Threshold Choir](#). The Banff site has hosted that town's only [playschool](#) for over 40 years.

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## Our Context

The upper Bow Valley is our service area. It includes Exshaw, Lac Des Arcs, Dead Man's Flats, Canmore, Harvie Heights, Banff and Lake Louise. It is a mecca for residents and tourists with a strong affinity for nature and environmental stewardship—persons who wish to recreate in and be restored by being immersed in this mountain environment. Accordingly, the Bow Valley includes a higher than average share of young adults, artists, professional athletes, semi-retired and retired professionals and owners of 2<sup>nd</sup> homes.

The physical footprint of the Town of Banff is unable to expand due to federal legislation, however the population of the town continues to grow at a slow pace. Canmore is experiencing enormous population growth. This creates tensions between development interests and the preservation of both a sense of community and the natural habitat. Given the limited amount of land and the number of truly wealthy persons seeking solace, affordability is an increasingly pressing issue.

Of course, the Bow Valley is more than glorious mountains and the animals who inhabit them. We are served by three school boards, both Public, Catholic and Francophone and better than average medical care for towns of our size. We have strong Pride organizations and impressive Pride Festivals in the fall. The Banff Centre, internationally recognized as a centre of excellence for the arts, offers us year-round programming. Canmore has a full complement of groups devoted to making music, the visual arts, producing plays, and organizing a range of weekend festivals, summer and winter. A plethora of opportunities to participate in all manner of sports, indoors and out, is also available.

## Who Is God Calling Us To Be?

This much we know with confidence:

We sing of a church...

called to be a blessing to the earth  
to point to the presence of the holy in the world  
yearning for the fulfillment that is life in God.

In and with God...

We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.  
*(words drawn from the United Church of Canada Song of Faith)*

We already know that the next phase of our journey will include worship, music, the Thrift Shop and being generative in our communities.

And we know that we face a truly new adventure as we seek to blossom as a single community of faith in the upper Bow Valley - a community that comes to be known for its insight and courage. As we reimagine our ministry, we know that our life and work will not look like what it did in the past.

We have many images of what we might become and do. We know we cannot fulfill them all. We do not yet know which to choose, or which will choose us. For example, we see a need not just to strengthen our spirituality, but to reimagine it and re-ground it in the Earth and all of God's creation. How might we re-enliven contemplative practice and eco-spirituality? Given the increasing pressures of our times, we see a need to re-imagine and engage in pastoral care. How might we offer pastoral care to the wider community in ways that they respond to our work with thanksgiving?

We yearn to become a community which utterly trusts the reality of grace, love, forgiveness and beauty.