

Cooke's-Portsmouth United Church is located in Calvin Park, a residential sub division in the city of Kingston. We are not located at an intersection, which is both a strength and a liability. Some members live close enough and can walk to church and we are also on a bus route. However, not being situated at a busier intersection means that there are those who may not know of our existence. We lack the visibility of those churches situated at busier crossroads and corners. Nonetheless, Cooke's-Portsmouth has been a viable, warm and welcoming congregation for over fifty years.

The church is debt free and is currently in a favourable financial situation. We have also been the gracious recipient of legacy money after the passing of two well loved and respected members and are investigating, as a congregation, the best use of this gracious gift. The building is not currently completely accessible, and this hopes to be addressed as a project with the use of some of the funds.

The congregation also has an excellent reputation in the wider community as supporter of local missions. The weekly envelope includes a box for local mission and proceeds gathered throughout the year are contributed to schools and agencies in the wider community of Kingston. Three schools, food programs, housing and clothing campaigns are among our mission partners. Food is collected weekly for the local food bank and a mitten tree also provides, warm clothing as well as socks and underwear to mission partners. A free community dinner in January affords us the opportunity to welcome guests from our partners to have a meal with members of the congregation.

There is no expectation that those non-affiliates, who come to the dinner, will be expected to participate further in our community. We do this as a way of sharing our good fortune with those of more limited means. Attendees can also help themselves to donations from the mitten tree and from donated hygiene products.

The church is made available to rental groups and currently we offer space to a community choir, a Girl Guide group, and a collective of Syrian women crafters who are establishing a business. Their hope is to be self- sufficient within two years. In addition to this, a community garden was established on the property in 2013 and proceeds from the garden are also made available to food sharing programs in the city.

Cooke's-Portsmouth also has a fully equipped kitchen that has passed a public health inspection. Members of the congregation will soon participate in a food handling course which may make the kitchen available for further uses not yet established.

The sanctuary is particularly beautiful with a large, sloped roof and pine interior. It resembles the hull of a ship. The sanctuary is equipped with an organ, a baby grand piano, modern sound system, projector and screen, wash lights and spots lights. The wash lights are used weekly to set a mood for worship and are available for rent by musical groups renting the sanctuary. An operator is available for renters who may need assistance in operating the equipment. This equipment is not made available for use outside of the building.

Cooke's-Portsmouth church is moderate in its theology. Congregants appreciate traditional worship and preaching that is biblically based. However, members are open to experiencing the contemporary and the different. The current minister has used reflective readings and music to illustrate a text as well monologues in addition to expository sermons. Special services honour Remembrance Day, Christian Family Sunday, Good Friday, Easter and Christmas. The passing of the peace is exchanged weekly with attendees given the option to participate within their comfort level. There are also several members of Community Living who worship with us and are viewed with no distinction from any other attendee. There is much laughter and genuine affection shared throughout this time and the current minister allows the exchange to go on until people are mostly seated. Worship begins more formally with the lighting of the Christ candle and re centering for more formal worship.

We have a choir that sings twice a month and for special services and we also use featured musicians from the wider community that have included, vocalists, pianists, brass, strings, flute and bag pipes. These musical guests are appreciated and always applauded by the congregation.

There is genuine respect and affection for members, adherents and visitors. The congregation is conflict free and careful when there are contentious issues that need discussing. Disagreements do not usually result in persons disassociating although no congregation is entirely free

from some unhappy endings. All effort to address and correct a situation are taken by the minister and/or the laity.

If there was a scripture that could be chosen to theologically ground us as a congregation it may come from Matthew 25. In so far as it is possible, and, in accordance with our understanding of the gospel, we try to feed the hungry, provide clothing, visit the sick and lonely and to do so to the glory of God and in service to Christ.