



# STAFF REPORTS

## **Larissa Amour**

This past year came with its own sets of challenges, naturally. Our youth group pivoted between gathering in person from January to mid-March and again from July to October. Students and volunteers were careful in respecting and adhering to new gathering protocols throughout these transitions. Overall, attendance by both students and volunteers held steady, whether we gathered physically or over Zoom. We welcomed a handful of incoming grade-7 students, and our older students have so kindly helped to shepherd and set the tone for our younger students. As always, our youth group has been loaded with fun activities and events, lively and thoughtful discussions about faith, sermon series and the issues affecting junior and high school students, and we even collaborated with different non-profit organizations in Calgary as a means to be active disciples in our city. This youth group continues to be a great source of connection, friendship building, and learning despite the many curve balls thrown at students this year.

Other formation groups met this year, as well. We re-launched a new book club in the fall. Books from our lending library focusing on authors with various live experiences and cultural background formed contemplative discussions twice a month. Finally, we launched a BIPOC Connection group. This group focused on our lived experiences existing at the intersection of being a visible minority and having a faith background. An emphasis on the ways we've deconstructed and reconstructed our faith and identity as racially marginalized communities has been a lovely source of comfort and support for individuals at Commons.

## **Kevin Borst**

Even though 2020 ended up being different than any other year we've had before, our creative team came together in incredible ways to make it amazing.

Within one week, our team setup our services experience to be online. Since then, our team has been working hard each week to make it a better experience for our church. For me, it's been pretty incredible to see our team come together so quickly to adapt our worship experience.

Since the beginning of the in-person services suspension our teams have been coming in Sundays and while it has been so different not having anyone in the seats, I have been reminding our team each week of how much of an impact they are making for people.

Everything about how our Sunday production happens has changed. From production gear like cameras and sound to what our service looks like, it has all changed. And yet through all that, our church has adapted what worship looks like. Knowing that gathering is not what is best for us right now, I feel lucky to be part of a church that can choose to worship under these circumstances. I am thankful how I see God continuing to shape our worship as a community.

We are so blessed to have over 80 people on our Creative Team, I am so thankful for each of them who pour so much into our Church, especially through 2020.

Looking ahead to the rest of 2021, my desire remains the same. That our church keeps growing into a mature worshipping community with a thriving creative team within it!

### **Yelena Pakhomova**

If I were to describe in two words how 2020 felt for me pastorally, I would say "openness and intentionality."

Our group leaders are my heroes. In the blink of an eye, they moved their groups to Zoom and stepped into online facilitation.

Since spring 2020, we've added 17 new leaders and 14 new groups. Nine of those groups are still going strong. Some of those groups had never met in person before they met on Zoom. Our new group in eastern Canada connects people across a few provinces.

Another way intentionality and openness manifested through groups was that people felt the need to shape safe spaces and new conversations: BIPOC, Yoga, Homeschooling, Parents Support, Contemplatives, etc.

I am so grateful to work alongside 56 incredible leaders who love our Commons community and keep creating room for connection at the time when it's most needed.

We deeply missed our large community events this year. Still, our leaders and volunteers kept leaning into possibility amidst the restrictions.

"My Little Plastic Jesus" play by Burnt Thicket Theatre

Dance Classes, 55 people (Feb) and 15 (Oct)

Three out of our five women's brunches were hosted online.

Smaller Mustard Seed Serve teams in summer and fall.

Personal highlights:

Since March, I've been regularly meeting with coaches and group facilitators who use Liberating Structures to design virtual meetings. Probably my best learning experience of the year, both personally and professionally.

Moderating Zoom lounge and facilitating the "Making More Room - Part Four" Zoom event in October

Creating a "Guide for Starting a New Group" for new leaders

Supporting our groups through monthly resources and Zoom check-ins.

I am looking forward to the creativity that will emerge over the next season and how the challenge to the familiar formats of how we gather will keep bringing out the essence of why we gather.

## **Ryan Petkau**

2020 was a year full of excitement and change for the Commons Kids team. I would like to start off by saying thank you to the staff, board, and congregation for the warm welcome and support that I've received since joining the team. I am so grateful for you all.

Though Kids Church has primarily been online this year, we have been able to see community, connection, and learning through our Instagram and Facebook accounts, Zoom hangouts, and YouTube playlists. The Kids Team has worked hard to create fun, meaningful content for families to help them grow together in faith and notice God in ordinary, every day moments.

Our Inglewood Kids Coordinator, Ashley Hill, adapted smoothly into creating amazing video content. Together, we have created over 150 videos over the past year! Ashley has been an absolute joy to work with and I have been blown away by her creativity and flexibility during this time.

A few highlights of 2020 were the many distanced visits to new parents during the warmer months. I am so thankful for the connections made with the families who welcomed babies into their homes this past year. Additionally, it was encouraging to see some of our wonderful kids walk through the doors during the re-opening of in-person services this summer. This would not have been possible without the dedication and flexibility of our volunteers—a huge thank you to them!

It has been a privilege to come alongside you in 2020 and I look forward to what's in store for the Commons Kids program in 2021.

### **Bobbi Salkeld**

To say that 2020 was a strange year to be a pastor is an understatement. However, there are moments to celebrate.

I celebrate the creative endeavours that mark a year of pandemic church life. We've found new ways to gather (Zoom, livestream) and deepened our experience of liturgy (from the sanctuary to the home).

Notably, I celebrate our team's daily prayer posts on social media. We shared sacred readings, centring words, visual prayers, affirmations, prayers for others, declarations, pandemic prayers, circling prayers, confessions, graces, movement prayers, new beginning prayers, professions, beauty prayers, pilgrimage prayers, sacred questions, epiphany, benedictions, and complines. Through these prayers, we found our voice in the pandemic.

We are still writing prayers every week. A book of our best prayers will be out in the spring. We're calling it *From a Season Like No Other*.

Looking ahead to 2021, I've been working to establish a branch of the nonprofit Modern Ministers here in Alberta (currently in BC). Modern Ministers supports and credentials Christian ministers and affords the freedom to participate in weddings ceremonies for all couples regardless of sexual identity. I look forward to the opportunities both personally and professionally.

There's no community I'd rather be with to ride out a pandemic than Commons Church. I'm grateful to the staff, board, and community – I feel so much support in my preaching and leadership.

### **Scott Wall**

I have a distinct memory of speaking at our last AGM about the coming year and all its plans - only to have the world grind to a halt just a few days later. Needless to say, so much of the previous year was unexpected and not what we'd hoped. BUT, there's still so much to celebrate — and I want to offer a couple highlights here. :)

First of all, I'm so humbled by the ways our whole community has responded during such unprecedented times. We've faced this challenge bravely in our Inglewood parish, where we haven't had any in-person gatherings in nearly a year. So many of you east-side friends drove across for summer church services, continuing to reach out, check-in, make meals, and stand together in all the normal life that keeps on happening. Watching you make the effort to connect and care for one another has been incredible! While we aren't meeting, it's been a delight to meet so many of you for walks and countless Zoom calls, and keep serving the Inglewood-Ramsay communities through our Collaborative and our successful Advent campaign (which allowed me to meet and connect and share with residents!!).

The other significant initiative I've been working on has been the online courses we've launched. And your support has been so incredible! We've seen great engagement with our Marriage/Relationship courses and our revised Backstory class. Looking ahead, I'm excited for the Prayer course happening during Lent, a "Theology of Work" course planned for the spring (helping us all find meaning in our vocation)...and there are more options to come. It's my great honour to serve in a learning and growing community - thank you Commons!