Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
North Pelham's 198th Anniversary Sunday
October 18, 2026
Worship at Home

Email: **northpelham.rockwaypc@**gmail.com Website: https://northpelhamrockwaypresbyterian.ca

CALL TO WORSHIP

L: "For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." (Psalm 100:5)
P: We gather with thankful hearts to celebrate God's faithfulness.
L: We remember those who planted and nurtured this church in faith.
P: Encouraged by their witness, we follow Jesus and serve our neighbours.
L: "…let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)
All: May Christ's love shine through us. Let us worship God together!

Hymn 350 **To God be the glory**

Prayers of Approach and Confession

THE LORD'S PRAYER
"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever." Amen.

Sharing the Peace of Christ
L: May the Peace of Christ be with you all.
P: And also with you. *(congregational response)*

Vocal solo **As water to the thirsty** Keith Rubel

Hymn 773 **Jesus bids us shine**

Prayer of Understanding
Loving God,
open our hearts to your Word. As we remember the faith of those before us, help us hear your call to follow Jesus and share his love in our community today. Amen.

Scripture Passages **Responsive Psalm 100**
Hebrews 12:1–3; Matthew 5:14–16

Sermon **A Church for a Community:**
Proclaiming the Gospel and Serving God in North Pelham

Dr. Michelle Vosburgh

As most of you know, my specialisation in history is in the early settlement of Upper Canada. This, of course, includes when our church was established, so much of what I have to say today is about the first few decades of our congregation's history. I've always been fascinated by this period – I love to imagine what it was like to live here, to understand why people decided to move here, and to start over, often with very little. In the early years of settlement in Pelham Township, which began in the late 1780s, on average, a man could expect to clear about 5-10 acres per year: the trees were cut down, but the stumps left to rot, with crops planted around them. While most settlers were, to some extent, farming for their own needs, planting gardens, orchards, oats and barley for the family's use, along with livestock, even the earliest farms were also cash cropping wheat. (The British would come to depend on Upper Canadian wheat in the 1830s – often referring to the colony as the breadbasket of the empire.) Risks of fire, too much rain, too little rain, illness, and accidents were high, yet they persevered. Even with all the work, though, the settlers found time for fun, for socialising. There were also those who made time for building a faith community here, steadfast in their commitment to ensuring there was a place where the Gospel was preached, and people's spiritual lives were looked after.

By 1800, there were just a handful of churches in Niagara - most believers depended upon itinerant preachers for any clerical leadership. Niagara was blessed to have easy access to New York State, which was known in the late 1700s as the "burned over district" – a reference to the evangelical revivals which swept across the state, and often into Upper Canada after 1784. These revivals were part of the larger Second Great Awakening a period of heightened evangelicalism in Great Britain and North America. Since Niagara was so close, many who had been saved and called to ministry in the revivals in New York felt led to extend their ministries into Upper Canada after the American Revolution.

One of those ministers was none other than Rev. Daniel Ward Eastman. He was born in 1778 in New York state, and at age of 14 during an evangelical meeting, he had a "profound religious experience." Not only was he saved, but God called him into ministry. After his education and training, he was licensed to preach by the Morris County Associated Presbytery in New Jersey around March 1800.

Rev. Eastman and his wife moved to Niagara with a large group led by his father-in-law, Capt. Hopkins. They arrived at Beaverdams in June 1801 where Rev Eastman first preached. He then went to preach in Stamford, where there was already a church, for a year. He bought land near Beaverdams and built a log home, and seems to have also farmed in a small way throughout his life to supplement his income and provide for his growing family – even part-time farming would have helped him understand the hardships of the people to whom he was ministering.

Eastman was one of 5 Presbyterian ministers in all of Upper Canada when he arrived in 1801, and for about 3 or 4 years the only one in Niagara, so he would have been working alone, without much support from any Presbyterian organisations.

This meant in order to be ordained he had to go back to New York state. He was ordained at Palmyra NY, in June 1802. Ordination was required for full ministry including the licence to marry. Upper Canada's first lieutenant-governor, John Graves Simcoe, had been very keen to ensure that the Church of England dominated spiritual life and authority in Upper Canada, and his first government had only authorized Anglican priests to perform marriages. That represented a huge problem for engaged couples because there were very few Anglican clergy in Upper Canada. More than a decade later, the colonial government, under pressure, relented and allowed Presbyterian ministers to marry couples. The Church of Scotland was, at least, an established church in the United Kingdom, like the Church of England. Eastman performed around 3000 marriages during his career.

Eastman spent much time as an itinerant preacher, mostly in Niagara. He was said to have been a good preacher, sharing the Gospel with all who listened, and had a powerful and appealing singing voice as well. Eastman was noted for his use of hymns during his worship services, which made them even more compelling. The evangelicalism of Eastman's own background promoted the powerful place of music in worship and in saving souls. Eastman's early worship services were more often in homes, barns, schools, and even outdoors when weather permitted. Eastman believed that his travels were building foundations – that God was using him to help local communities of the faithful to establish permanent congregations, one of the earliest of Eastman's congregations was of course, our sister church, Rockway, or as it was then known, Louth, in 1809. By then, there two other Presbyterian ministers in Niagara helping to share the load, but Eastman was still travelling and preaching from Fort Erie to Ancaster.

The same year Eastman helped to organize Louth, 1809, he did the same for a congregation at St. Ann's. While we have no direct evidence, I find it likely that people from this area would probably have made the effort to travel on "preaching" Sundays to those churches, until they could gather together enough community members to organize some sort of regular services closer to their homes here in Pelham.

The first evidence for regular preaching in North Pelham is a subscription list dated 24 Feb 1823. Signed by 21 people, it was an agreement to pay Rev. Eastman 40 bushels of marketable wheat to preach the Gospel once a month for a year; the wheat was to be delivered at John B. Comfort's house. Interestingly, 20 men and 1 woman signed the list – probably representing heads of households.

I was curious to know how much money that represented compared to today. The first problem I had was that in the 1820s wheat prices were very volatile. However, in 1830, the closest year I could find, the average wheat price in Upper Canada was 5 shillings per bushel, or about $1.80. In today's money, the purchasing power of $1.80 would be $67.00, but the compensation value of $1.80 would be about $1550.00. If we multiply that by 40, the purchasing power would be $2680, but in terms of compensation Eastman was paid the equivalent of $62,000 roughly.

Of course, the monetary value does not accurately reflect the amount of physical labour which went into producing that bushel of wheat. Moreover, we also know that by the 1820s, yields in places like Niagara were dropping rapidly. Farmers since the first settlement had relied on selling wheat for cash income and had followed a system of a two-year field rotation – wheat one year, then fallow, then wheat. The problem was the land, which had been very productive in the years immediately following clearing of the trees, was rapidly depleted of nutrients. Farms which had produced 100 bushels per acre faced in the early years were now seeing yields closer to 20-25 bushels per acre, even in ideal weather conditions. Depending on how much land and labour they had, farmers could compensate for this yield drop by simply clearing more acres, but at some point, they were going to run out of land. In more prosperous, longer settled areas like Niagara, farmers were recognizing that better farming methods were needed, and that they needed to learn how to better manage their land. The fact, however, that Eastman was paid in wheat, not cash, tells us just how important agriculture was in this economy. It also tells us that Eastman's work as a preacher and minister was valued by those who agreed to pay him.

We have no records for any preaching in 1824 or 1825, or in 1827, but they may have simply gone missing, so we can't know for sure if there was preaching those years or not. Nevertheless, on the 1st January 1826, a similar agreement was drawn up, this time for preaching every three weeks at "our school house" and for Eastman to "assist and instruct, to worship our Creator" during the year. This time, 21 names – all men – agreed to contribute to Eastman's compensation, and it could be paid in wheat or the cash equivalent. The original North Pelham school was a log building at the corner of Balfour and Metler.

You will also note that these two early documents were rather vague, merely specifying preaching the Gospel, and instruction to worship our Creator. There's nothing in them suggesting Presbyterianism, they are non-denominational. That was done by design – local people wanted some sort of preaching, but I think there were already doctrinal differences among the community members, so to get as many people involved as possible, they left it open. By the 1820s, the Methodists in particular were very active in this area, with itinerant preachers organizing very large evangelical gatherings.

We do not know why things changed by 1828 in North Pelham, but they had and those who considered themselves Presbyterians, probably persuaded by Rev. Eastman, decided to establish their own congregation.

So in 1828 – we have a very different document: "At a meeting held at the house of Moses Metler by the Presbyterians, for the purpose of inquiring into and organizing members for the same, which proceeded as follows, to inquire into the different points of doctrine of the Presbyterian faith, which was unanimously believed and agreed upon, to conform to, and be governed and ruled by the said church, in witness whereof we have subscribed our names." The first 15 names on that document, the first communicants, included men and women, with 5 more added to the bottom. It includes some of the same names as the earlier documents, but there some missing as well, likely because some of the names on the earlier subscription lists did not consider themselves Presbyterians.

The next year, 1829, more members joined the church. At this time, Rev. Eastman preached every third week, but by 1831, there was a desire for more regular worship services,

and pastoral care. Deacons and elders were appointed that year, and the congregation also established a Sabbath school which was held weekly. In October 1831, Rev. Eastman's churches experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, with many in the Pelham area converted, and making a public profession of their faith in Christ; they were added to the church's rolls. At the same time, Rev. Sessions began assisting Rev. Eastman and nearly every week services were held in North Pelham. We don't know where those early worship services were held – although it seems likely they used the school building, since that is also where the Sabbath School was held on Sunday afternoons

By June 1832 though, a new church building was ready. We know that June 1832 was a very special month for the congregation, not just because of the new building. That month, a "protracted evangelical meeting" was held in the vicinity and 27 more communicants were added to the church rolls. In addition, Rev Eastman ordained the congregation's first Elders: George Metler, John McGlashan Jr, and Moses Metler, and first Deacons: Robert Killman and John Scholfield.

On the 8th June 1832, the congregation met to dedicate their first church building, and another 12 people joined that day. That early church was frame, and local historical tradition says that when our present brick building was dedicated in 1873, the old building had been sold and moved to John Scholfield's farm (northwest corner of Tice and Balfour) to be used as a barn.

In 1834, a brief account of some of the Presbyterian churches in Niagara was published. With respect to the congregation at Pelham, there were 120 communicants – certainly quite a period of growth from 20 members in 1828! The booklet went on to describe other activities at the Pelham church: "An interesting female prayer meeting is maintained, with other weekly meetings." "A Sabbath school… is flourishing and exerting a precious influence, with 60 attending." "The monthly concert is observed." (I think this may have been a combination of performances and congregational singing – as the choir was not formally organized until 1841). The records certainly describe a vibrant and active congregation, which was having a wider impact on the community. Closely associated in membership with the church at North Pelham, and other local congregations was the Pelham Temperance Society.

Pelham Temperance Society was established in 1830. In the earliest surviving account of a meeting, which was in 1833, Mr. John Scholfield was president and spoke at their 3rd anniversary meeting 15 April 1833. At the meeting were 170 members. Although a separate organisation from the church, the two shared members and leaders, showing just how strong their faith was. People were concerned about the effects of alcohol abuse and alcoholism on individuals, families, and the community – often stepping in to support both those dealing w/ alcoholism and their families, for example, paying the debts of a drunk who ended up drowning, leaving a wife and small children.

The temperance society also promoted education and the need to advocate for the "temperate" use of alcohol. Although there's no evidence for it at North Pelham, many churches connected to the temperance movement would not receive or retain as members anyone who made, sold, or drank "ardent spirits". The Pelham Temperance Hall was built adjacent to the church in the early 1830s but was moved in 1890 to a location described as a half mile north of the church. The building burned down in 1918.

After the tremendous achievement of building a church, the rest of the 1830s were more of a struggle. By 1833-34, Rev. Eastman was only making occasional visits, and the church congregation showed themselves dedicated to keeping their faith strong in the absence of regular ministerial leadership. Adding to their troubles was the fact that the 1830s were a turbulent decade, especially in Niagara, with outbreaks of cholera in 1832 and 1833 beginning among the Welland Canal workers, and then the 1837-38 rebellions. The major centre of rebels in Upper Canada was just down the road in the Short Hills, and the local Presbyterian churches were suspect at first, since so many of the Presbyterian ministers were American, and some had spoken up in favour of the rebellions. Rev. Eastman, however, had held himself apart from any connection with the rebels, and so had no stigma attached to him, or the congregations he had helped to establish.

The need for a regular minister, I think, helped prompt the congregation to decide to build a parsonage house (as manses were called then) to attract a regular minister. In 1835, a parsonage house was built on Philip Metler's property on Lot 12 Conc 7, although the church never owned the property. (If you know where the McCarthy brick house is on Tice Rd, there's a barn there west of the house, very close to the road. The original parsonage house was apparently located where the barn is today.) The enticement of a parsonage house may have helped, since, in 1836, Rev. J.W. Goodell became pastor, but was only here for a little over a year. After he left, the church was again without a regular minister.

Interestingly, the first time Pelham and Louth (Rockway) shared a minister was in 1841, when the Elders and Deacons of both congregations agreed to hire a minister jointly. Rev. Dr. Blanchard, from Boston, Mass. was called for 2 years but ended up remaining for 5 years. After that the sharing of a minister ended, at least for the time being. During its existence, the parsonage house was only used by a minister 8 years in total, the rest of time it was rented out, until it burned down in 1862. Finding a regular minister was a challenge for many decades, but the congregation persevered in ministering to the community. There was, throughout the 1830s-1880s, much turmoil in Upper Canada as different branches of Presbyterianism formed, split, and joined together. This was one of the reasons many congregations struggled to find regular ministers. Dr. Eastman had continued to do his best to support local congregations, joined in ministry by one of his sons, but he retired due to failing eyesight in 1856, and died in 1865. He is buried in the St. Anns cemetery on Twenty Rd directly across from St. Anns Community Church.

A lot happened in 1862, as the church leaders in North Pelham worked to bring more regularity and certainty to the business of the church. Although John B. Comfort had offered the corner of his farm to build the first church building in 1832, it was not until 1862 that the lot on which the church stood was officially transferred to the congregation's ownership: 17th Jan 1862 John B. Comfort and his wife 1 rood (1/4 acre) lot to Martin Metler, Adam Killman, John B. McGlashan, Jr., Benjamin Beamer, Trustees of the First Presbyterian Church of Pelham, for $5.00. Then, in 1894, Dr. William M. Comfort, son of John B. Comfort, sold 3 roods (3/4 acre) to the Trustees for $5 – this is the lot on which the manse stands today, and on which the drive sheds were located.

In 1873, the congregation dedicated their new church building, built of brick from the Tice Brick Yard. It's a simple design, with a few classical influences like the palladium (or

arched) windows and doorway. The wide steps at the front made it possible for the wagons, buggies, and carriages to pull up and let the women and children off. The drive shed at the back provided shelter for the horses and open carriages in inclement weather.

I know a lot of you sitting here today are from the very first families who came together in the 1820s to worship together, and to ensure that the Gospel was preached in this community. It never fails to amaze me: their dedication, their faith, and the strong example and foundation they set for all the work which has been done for over two centuries now to proclaim the Gospel and to serve God in small, but profound ways in this community.

Violin Solo **Méditation from Thaïs** Joy Joung

Hymn 642 **O Master, let me walk with thee**

Invitation to the Offering
Doxology
Prayer of Dedication
Generous God,
with thankful hearts we bring our regular offerings and anniversary gifts for Brock Chaplaincy. As you have blessed us, use these gifts to bless others, sustain our church's ministry, and bring your love and hope to students. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and for the People

Faithful and loving God,
thank you for 198 years of worship, fellowship, and service at North Pelham. We remember with gratitude those whose faith and generosity nurtured this church. Thank you for Michelle's message and for everyone who shares in our ministry today.

On this joyful day, we also remember those whose hearts are heavy. Comfort those grieving loved ones, strengthen those facing illness, and draw near to those who feel lonely or forgotten. Help us care for them with tenderness and love.

Bless our neighbours and the students supported through Brock Chaplaincy. May they find friendship, encouragement, and hope.

As we look ahead, keep our eyes on Jesus. Renew our courage to welcome others, share your good news, and become Christ's heart, hands, and feet in our community. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Hymn 651 **Guide me, O thou great Redeemer**

BENEDICTION
May God's faithful love sustain you, Christ's light shine through you, and the Holy Spirit guide you to share God's love and serve our community. And all God's people said, AMEN.

Sung Response- Go Now In Peace
Postlude

We acknowledge that we meet on the traditional Territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe

ANNOUNCEMENTS

***Next Sunday Service, October 25, 10:00 am at Rockway**

***Thanksgiving Gratitude!** Thank you for your generous food donations! These blessings helped those in need as we reflect on God's abundant blessings for us all.

***North Pelham's 198th Anniversary!**: Today we joyfully celebrate God's steadfast love through the generations and warmly welcome our guest speaker, Dr. Michelle Vosburgh! Our special anniversary offering will support Brock Chaplaincy, helping students in need. Gifts made through the church are eligible for a charitable tax receipt. Let us celebrate God's faithfulness and share the blessings we have received!

***North Pelham Board of Managers Meeting**: The North Pelham Board of Managers will meet on Wednesday, October 21, at 7:00 p.m.

***Tai Chi – Every Monday:** Tai Chi classes continue every Monday as part of our church's community outreach ministry. Classes begin at 1:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m.

***Wednesday Bible Study:** Join us every Wednesday at 10:00 AM at North Pelham, led by our spiritual leader, Diane McMillan.

***Outreach - Thursday Walking:** Join us for the Wellness Walk and Coffee Chat! We gather at 9:30 a.m. at Canada Games Park to start our walk together. After the walk, we meet at Rockway for a joyful chat over hot and fresh coffee at 10:45 am.

***Prayer Requests and Pastoral Care:** If you or someone you know needs prayer or pastoral care, please contact your elder or Rev. Jacob at 289-213-2797 or jacoblee0501@gmail.com.