



SEASON OF ADVENT - DEC 2024

## ST. JOHN'S, IDA

A COMMUNITY CHURCH IN THE ANGLICAN TRADITION



### Advent 1

Sunday, December 1<sup>st</sup>

Service of Holy Communion at 10am

### Advent 2

Sunday, December 8<sup>th</sup>

Service of Morning Prayer at 10am

### Advent 3

Sunday, December 15<sup>th</sup>

Christmas in Story and Song at 10am

### Advent 4

Sunday, December 22<sup>nd</sup>

Service of Morning Prayer at 10am

### Christmas Eve Service

Tuesday, December 24<sup>th</sup> at 7pm

### Christmas Morning Service

Wednesday, December 25<sup>th</sup> at 10am

### First Sunday in Christmas

Sunday, December 29<sup>th</sup> at 10am

### Epiphany

Sunday, January 5<sup>th</sup> at 10am



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# A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR



Dear Beloved friends,

As I write this, I have been the priest-in-charge of the parish for just over 3 months. The advent of a new priest in the parish comes with adjustments for everyone. Thank you for your welcome, your kindness, and your support. Thank you for stopping by the office, introducing yourselves, telling me your stories, and for your patience as I learn not only your names, but the St. John's story. I am very glad to be here, and I am inspired by your deep faith, amazing dedication to your various ministries, and tender care of one another as loving church family.

I am looking forward to our first Advent together. I love this time in the church year as we wait and prepare for God's coming among us at Christmas. Advent is a season of expectation. Our sacred story reminds us that God is always coming into the world, and into our lives. I wonder how God will come to us this Christmas. What will be the signs? What will surprise us, move us, challenge us?

It has been a joy to sit with Linda and prepare for our liturgies and to reflect on how we will tell the story – for that is what we do as church. We are storytellers who are sent into this world to share the story of the God who looks at each of us and sees someone worth loving, worth saving, worth dying for. A story of the God who knows what it is to be human. The God who heals, forgives and welcomes us all. It's a good story!

The stories of advent are filled with people who share the same hopes and fears as we do. Zechariah and Elizabeth, beyond the point where they thought anything new might happen in their settled lives, suddenly preparing to welcome the child of newness. Mary saying yes to God's audacious plan, trusting that "For God, nothing will be impossible." Joseph choosing the more risky and complicated life path of being the husband of Mary and the earthly father of Jesus. The shepherds gobsmacked in a dark night to find that God knows them and comes for them. These people listened to scripture, paid attention to their dreams, and to the voice of God deep within them.

cont...





I know that you have stories too – stories of how you met Jesus, how God brought healing or newness to your lives, how God saw you through the most difficult days of your life, how God called you and equips you every day to bring God's love and healing to the world.

This is our challenge: we live in a society where we can no longer assume that people know the story. It's been a generation or two since most people went to church. How can we tell the story in ways that connect with children and families, with those who have let go of church, and those who have never been? I ask you to pray with me this advent and Christmas, that God will inspire and equip us to share the story in creative and compelling ways so that it touches the hearts of the people who live in the homes and villages that surround our church.

May our hearts be open to God's coming among us, may the light of Christ shine in us all, and may God's blessing be upon you and those you love this Advent and Christmas.

Yours in Christ,  
Susan +



# Advent in the Parish of St. John's, Ida



## Moving toward the Light



Wednesday December 4<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> at 7pm on Zoom for about 30 minutes. A quiet service of prayer, a brief meditation and Night Prayers. Come and light a candle, and join with others in a time of prayer for the needs of the world and others as we journey together toward the coming of Christ. The Zoom link will be sent out the day before to the parish email list. All are welcome.





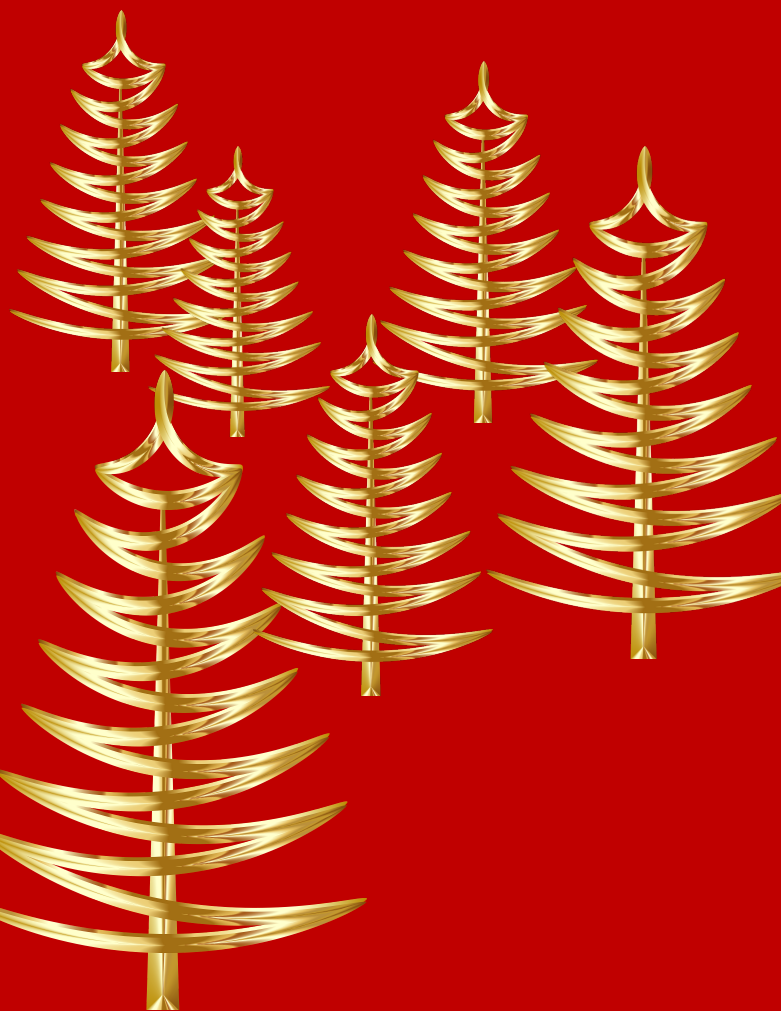
St. John's, Ida

# Christmas in Story and Song

December 15<sup>th</sup>

(The Third Sunday in Advent)

This wonderful service will be filled with carols and storytelling as we open our hearts to the wonder and hope of Christmas. This will be a great service to share with family and friends.



## Advent Hiking Church December 21<sup>st</sup> at 2pm

Join Rev. Susan Spicer and Matt Kydd for an Advent outdoor worship experience at the time of the solstice. It will take place at 2pm on Saturday, December 21<sup>st</sup>. We will gather at the Monaghan Rd. and Parkhill Rd. entrance to the park. If you are planning to attend, please email Rev. Susan at [sspicer12@gmail.com](mailto:sspicer12@gmail.com)

# Advent for Everyone: A teaching series from our Bishops

St. John's, Ida



The bishops of the diocese are inviting Anglicans to join them online this Advent for four evenings of prayer and reflection.

The four-part series, called *Advent for Everyone*, will be held on Zoom on Tuesdays at 7:30pm, starting Nov. 26<sup>th</sup>. Led by the bishops, the gatherings will give Anglicans a chance to pause, connect and deepen their spiritual journey during this holy season.

"These evenings give us an opportunity to focus on what Advent and Christmas are all about," says Canon Mary Conliffe, the diocesan executive assistant.

Each gathering will be an hour long and will feature a reflection by the bishop, discussion in breakout groups and conclude with a short service of Compline. The evenings will be live and interactive.

You need to register to attend this event and to receive the zoom link. Please include the name of our parish if you wish to be together with other St. John's parishioners during the discussion breaks.

To register: Go to <https://www.toronto.anglican.ca/events/advent-for-everyone/> and click the register button.

(We will send this link out to you so that you can click it directly from your email.)

**Advent for Everyone**  
A teaching series from our bishops

**Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. on Zoom**

**Nov. 26** with Bishop Andrew

**Dec. 3** with Bishop Kevin

**Dec. 10** with Bishop Riscylla

**Dec. 17** with Bishop Andrew

Scan the QR codes to sign up or visit  
[toronto.anglican.ca/spiritualrenewal](https://toronto.anglican.ca/spiritualrenewal)

SEASON OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

# Advent Conspiracy

**A Gift of Water**



a gift of dignity and hope  
for a Canadian community  
in need

## It's That Time Again -----

It's that time again for --- Christmas shopping, Christmas busyness, Christmas insanity.

## WELL -----

**Advent Conspiracy** has a way to ease the busyness and help give to improved water supplies for Indigenous communities in Mishamikoweesh. Where's that??

## **Advent Conspiracy works in these five easy steps-----**

1. Ask yourself what you would normally spend on a Christmas gift for someone you love
2. Don't buy "stuff" this year; give the gift of water.
3. Make a donation through St. John's to the Advent Conspiracy. Just make sure all donations are designated for the Advent Conspiracy
4. Take a Gift of Water card found at both the front and rear entrances to the church.
5. Give the Gift card to your loved one(s) this Christmas to tell them how much you love them

**Advent Conspiracy** – a way to show that Christmas can still change the world if we **Worship fully...**

**Spend less...**

**Give more...**

**Love all.**

**Mishamikoweesh??** It's the Spiritual District of Indigenous congregations in communities in the far northwestern part of Ontario and Manitoba. Read what has been done there in the **special Advent Conspiracy bulletin insert.**

**The Outreach Committee thanks you for all the great support for requests for help in the past year, and wishes you all peace, joy, and love this Advent and Christmas season.**

- Submitted by your Outreach Committee



There is no home like St. John's, Ida... anywhere!  
Sending this poem with gratitude from all my heart.



Again, we are awakened  
to the wintry hills of longing  
into... what?

Is it the lighted, lattice window through the cold?  
a moor of snow-thatched twinklings  
into dusk?...

Or very edge of Quietness and even Beyond ---  
where wild and bright Surprise  
will Lift us  
into Seeing  
as we have never known.

We Fall  
into the farmhouse memories  
of wind on Christmas Eve and feeling oh so  
Safe.

We sink forever into this  
Relief ----  
of every Christmas that He Brings  
into our very bones and pores  
as only He can do...

for each of us.  
Forever.

- catherine hawley





*Hope*  
*Peace*  
*Joy*  
*&*  
*Love*

### **LOVE STORY...**

She waits while over there he knocks. Again refused. Nor is there a place throughout the town. Be strong as steel lest Joseph sense the pain you feel. "There's nowhere else to go tonight," He said. She fought the burning in her eyes- Rebuked her tears before they fell. Starlight crowned the cold, small town with fiery skies. He took her in his arms and that embrace dissolved the desperation that they faced. "I paid the stable rent," he said with shame. "Your son will come tonight," she said. He gave a kiss. Joy hushed the night! Salvation came- An infant whimper from the shepherd's cave.

- Calvin Miller



I have a Doorways to Devotion from 1948 that belonged to Ben's mother. There are many wonderful poems in this book. This is one of my favourites.

I think that God will never send  
A gift so precious as a friend;  
A friend who always understands  
And fills each need as it demands.

Whose loyalty will stand the test,  
When skies are bright or overcast;  
Who sees the faults that merit blame.  
But keeps on loving just the same;  
Who does far more than creeds could  
do,  
To make us good, to make us true.  
Earth's gifts a sweet enjoyment lend,  
But only God can give a friend.

We both cherish our friends.

Love and blessings,  
SharronAnn and Ben Dickinson





# Kawartha

Among the shimmering ice clad trees, dance the visions of my mind so free;  
The air it nips at my face so fresh, I feel a blanket of cold upon my flesh.  
The Blue Jay darts from tree to tree, flitting as a spring fed bee;  
A chipmunk scurries to his home buried deep, to hurry from the cold and return to sleep.  
An ice fed stream trickles over rock and fallen tree, on its tumbling journey to a far off sea;  
Standing on a hill on high, I look up to a sapphire blue sky;  
A flurry of snow- flakes begin their journey down, falling on a distant snugly nestled valley town;  
Ah, Yes! The scene I survey, a tranquil oasis of contentment, to me portrayed.

- Ray LaMarche







## A Christmas Story

The father and mother had five children, three boys and two girls. They left the Netherlands in September of 1952 and arrived in Halifax that same month. A train took them to Montreal, where the father had a job interview. Although he had been promised a position as liaison officer to help Dutch immigrants find jobs and housing, there was no such job there for him.

Totally dejected, the family travelled on to stay with the mother's brother. He and his wife had seven children and lived in a two-bedroom house. The new family was welcomed with open arms, and now there were four adults and twelve children in that small house. The father of the new family was well educated; he had a degree in Classics from the University of Utrecht. He had also earned a divinity degree and was an ordained minister in the Dutch Reformed Church.

In the fall of 1952, the father tried to find work without success. The only jobs he could find were raking leaves and shovelling snow. These jobs did not pay enough to support a family of seven. Even though they had studied English before leaving the Netherlands, it was not good enough to find work requiring more advanced English skills.

There was a rumour among Dutch immigrants that there were jobs in northern Ontario cutting pulp wood for the government. The father set off to find a house and settle a job for himself.

cont...



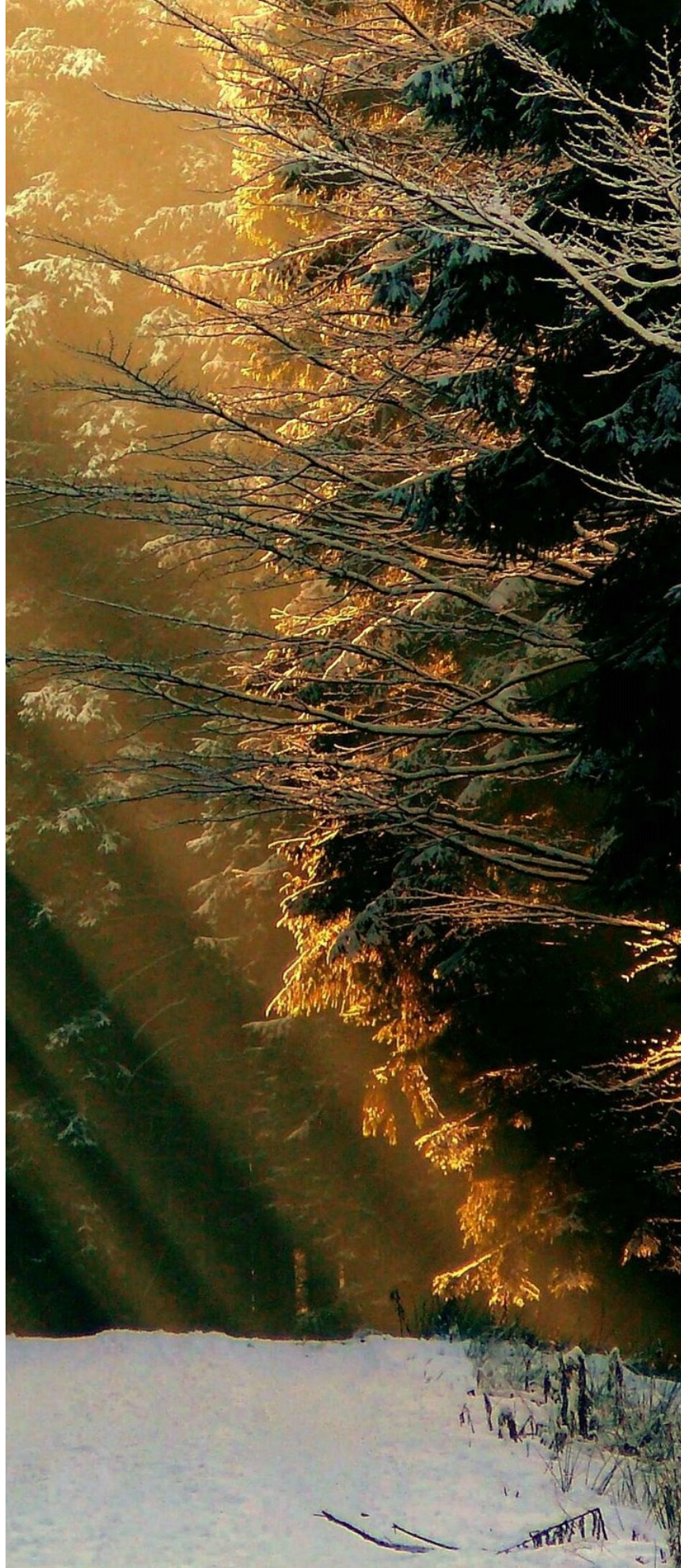
The mother and children followed. What those parents did not understand was that the government only paid the workers in the springtime, when the pulp wood had been hauled out of the forest.

So, for the whole winter (November, December, and the beginning of January) the family had no money. They lived on credit from the local grocery store. Their house was a summer cottage on Silver Queen Lake with no running water or electricity. In the Netherlands, the family had lived in a large rectory with three floors and maids to help with the housework and the children. The parents sat, wept, and asked each other "Shall we go back?" They decided no; they did not want to hear their friends say, "I told you so."

There were no gifts for that Christmas. The parents wrapped up a few little things as gifts.

On Christmas Eve there came a knock at the door, and **there, there were two bushel-baskets** – one with food, and one with toys for children aged from 10 to 4. Just the correct ages! **The joy of Christmas did not pass the family by! A blessing from the Lord!**

- Submitted by Sylvia Amesbury







# “O Christmas Tree”

My memories of Christmas celebrations go back to the late nineteen-forties and early nineteen-fifties when Bert Foster would trek out into the semi-swampy forested area of his farm to cut two fine specimens of black spruce, one to go into the Sanctuary and the other to decorate the hall across the road for the Christmas concert. My interest at the time was focused more on the latter site since Santa always showed up there and brought presents. Bert was Murray's father and Jordan's grandfather. Bert said he always checked out the younger, smaller trees to keep track of ones that would be suitable for future years. Following the destruction of the old hall from the tornado of 1985 and the rebuilding of our historic church with the addition of a new assembly hall and choir and Sunday School facilities, we began to put up one Christmas tree only in the Church. Bert continued, by the grace of God, to supply that beautiful spruce well into his senior years.

Sometimes later we benefited from the generosity of Rod Mens, who allowed us to cut a blue spruce from a plantation he and his wife Lois had established on their farm on the fourteenth line of Cavan. I'm not sure how many years had passed before these trees began to be too large for the purpose.

Then, once again by the Grace of God, Reid Watson got to know Stan White, one of two brothers who owned White's Store in Lindsay. It turned out that Stan owned some land along Fleetwood Road north of Bethany, part of which had been a Christmas tree farm. He assured Reid that St. John's, Ida, would be welcome to cut a tree from that property for Christmas celebration. With succession growth coming along from the plantation there would be a supply for years to come. Each year early in December a small "seek and cut and bring back" party would venture out westward on Fleetwood Road to Stan's property. We always had fun finding "the tree" but one year in particular stands out. In preparation for that quest, Reid had scouted the farm earlier and tied ribbons to some trees he considered to be good prospects. That year a light snowfall had come onto the tree foliage just prior to our expedition. Can you guess what colour ribbons Reid had tied to the trees he liked? You guessed it, white ribbons. We still found a nice spruce as always. Each year some of us would drop by Stan's store in Lindsay with a card, possibly a photo, a small jar of honey and a bottle of syrup to thank him.

cont...



Finally, there came news that Stan White had sold his property on Fleetwood Road although he still operates the store in Lindsay. We were not able to get in touch with the new owner in time for Christmas so with gratitude we accept the donation of a fine spruce tree from the farm of George and Arlene Wilson. George cut and delivered the tree and helped us to put it up in the church. We heard from a lawyer acting on behalf of the new owner of the property that he would be willing to let us cut a tree each year for our church. However, the property was quickly sold again, and a new house built so we could only look back with gratitude for the years God blessed us with a beautiful tree and fond memories from Fleetwood Road in Manvers.

#### Postscript:

To complete this narrative as we look back on the year 2022, St. John's still needed a Christmas tree, so we received permission from Norman Lamoth, owner and manager of Woodleigh Farms to look through a plantation he had begun some fifteen years earlier. We were grateful to find a lovely twelve-foot-tall spruce for Christmas 2022 and were able to find another one a little larger for 2023. I have surveyed the plantation and am confident we will be able to find another beautiful spruce for this year. Eventually, as will all plantations the trees will all grow to be too large for our needs. When that happens, we will again rely on God's generous provision to guide us to another source. For these last three years the trees have generously been given free of charge by Woodleigh Farms following a tradition which has been in place now for more than eighty years.

The Parish Tree Hunters, past and present

Don, Chad, Jim, Adrian, Kelly, Ted, Paul, & Reid





# Celestial Choir

Last March we bought a 50-acre farm just outside of Lindsay. The old brick house was built in 2010, but it looked pretty good from all angles. The only caveat was that we were told by the agent that someone had died in the house. A close friend who is a Judge told me that a child died by suicide some time back, but the files were sealed, and she couldn't get into them to give me any specifics, however one of the occupants was a police officer and if I checked with the OPP, I may be able to find out some anecdotal information. I found out that a young 12-year-old boy shot himself in one of the bedrooms. This was very concerning to me. I asked Rev. Peter to bless the house before any of our things were moved in, and he and Trish came out for the morning. It still did not feel right to me, and in April I was there alone for a month, so the dogs and I slept at a friend's farm at night, and I went back during the day to unpack. It was cold and dismal. I didn't feel good being there. I kept listening for unusual sounds. A friend suggested I pray for the boy, that it may make a difference and so after I started sleeping there, I began to pray that his spirit would go toward the light into Jesus' loving arms. On about the second or third night I woke up at 2 a.m. to the most beautiful choir. It sounded like there were many voices singing a beautiful mesmerizing melody. At first, I thought I was dreaming but I sat up and listened intently. It lasted for about 20 minutes then stopped, all was quiet. The singing was so beautiful, it filled me with such a wonderful feeling of love and peace. In the morning I went upstairs to see if there was a radio that had gone off in the night but there was nothing, only boxes of books to be unpacked, and now they are all unpacked there wasn't a radio or electronic device packed in any of them. The next night the same thing happened. I woke up in the middle of the night to this beautiful choir, singing a hymn that I had never heard but it filled me with such love and joy. This time it only lasted a few minutes. There has been nothing since. I have been alone here for the past month and the house has taken on a completely new "feel". There is no vestige of darkness or heaviness or coldness. It feels like it is full of light and peace. I feel that the singing was God's choir welcoming this young lad's spirit home. I am no longer afraid; I feel at peace.

- Submitted by Maureen Harjula

## THIS IS MY PRAYER

Help me, O Lord, to live one day  
at a time, one step at a time;  
To have the strength & the will to  
Keep on, keeping on:  
Help me to have the wisdom to hand  
the affairs of my life, to make  
right and good decisions.

Help me, O Lord, to have the courage  
to let the past go, to forge ahead  
resolutely;  
to have the grace to meet each  
experience expectantly, happily,  
Trusting in you.

Help me, O Lord to have the vision  
to see the good in all things;  
To see Jesus Christ in everyone  
I meet;  
And to know that "underneath are  
The Everlasting Arms of God" (Deut. 33:27)  
to support & protect me at all  
times throughout my life; This is  
my prayer, O Lord.

AMEN

- Jean Lush





# Prayer Ministry

## **Our Prayer Chain:**

If you have a concern for yourself, your family or someone you know, the people on our prayer chain would like to pray for you.

The requests are confidential and prayed for regularly. The requests can go to Marilyn Marshall, Jean Lush or Nancy Hodgkinson. Once a request is made "the chain" is put into action usually via email.

At present, we have nine people on our ministry team. If you feel called to this ministry, please speak to Jean.

## **Our Prayer Team:**

Each Communion Sunday, when the bread and the wine are being administered, a team of two prayers is at the back of the church praying. You are invited to join them with your prayer concerns. When comforting words seem difficult, we are assured that the Holy Spirit is always interceding for us. Again, your prayers are confidential unless you indicate you would like it them to be passed on to our priest and pastor, Rev. Susan.

# Pastoral Care & Hospitality

Pastoral Care is an umbrella heading for any ministries in the church that foster caring, listening, nurturing, and serving each other in the church and those in the community.

On Sunday mornings, Ben Dickinson and the sidespersons welcome all to worship. Visitors and newcomers are given a 'Welcome Bag' prepared by Jacquie and Val.

Coffee Hour each week has provided an opportunity for everyone to greet each other in the hall for refreshments provided by someone who offers to host for a Sunday. On the fourth Sunday of the month, we have enjoyed 'Soup and Sandwiches' after worship. A heartfelt "Thank You" goes out to our wonderful soup providers.

Marilyn Marshall continues to take your prayer requests to be sent out to the Prayer Chain.

Hospitality is extended the first Wednesday of the month when Rural Connection Team offers lunch and a speaker to the whole community.

The Men's Breakfast, the second Saturday of each month, has been offering a tasty breakfast and stimulating discussion for the men of the church.

You may recognize that you have gifts that could be helpful to the ministries and activities above and would like to take part. If so, just speak to Rev. Susan Nancy Hodgkinson or Jason or Danielle.



# Bible Studies



"All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that [the people] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

These words of the apostle Paul to the young missionary Timothy are as true today as they were when they were written almost 2000 years ago. This is why scripture plays such a prominent role in our worship. Scripture is read from the Old Testament and from the Gospels and Letters in the New Testament. A psalm is said or sung. The sermon is an exposition of the scripture. The lyrics of the hymns are inspired by scripture. The liturgy is based on scripture, in some cases even quoting it.

Throughout our Sunday service, we experience "the breath of God" on us and in us. For the other six days of the week however, we can very easily become caught up in the demands of the world around us and the worries of life. God drifts into the background. We can feel alone. But we are not. Jesus promises, "I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." (Mt 28:20b) So to make us aware of Jesus' presence with us, to keep us connected to the Source of Life, St. John's offers two weekly Bible Studies.

There is a Monday evening study for women. This takes place in the church hall at 7pm and lasts about an hour or so. The group at present is working their way through the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah. During Advent the women will study the hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" with the help of a guidebook by Henri Nouwen. The Monday evening study is not only an opportunity to grow in faith but also a good way to get to know other women in our congregation.

cont...



The Tuesday morning study meets at 10:30am in the home of Betty Holder on the Sharpe Line near Springville. Meetings last about one hour. They are working their way through the Gospel of John using the guide "More Than We Can Ask or Imagine" by the late Bishop Hunt. The Gospel of John presents us with many of Jesus' most profound teachings. It is amazing how much we learn together- us, the Gospel of John, and the Holy Spirit.

You do not have to be a Bible Scholar to take part in either of these studies. Remember, "scripture is God-breathed" and Jesus promises, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." (Mt 18:20)

To learn more about our study groups talk to Sylvia Amesbury about the Women's group and Ted Hodgkinson about the one Tuesday mornings.





# Anglican Church Women

The ministry of the church women at St. John's is to encourage each other on our faith journey through service to those in the church and in the community.

Since September, we have served the first of our three dinners for the Millbrook and District Lion's Club. The retired OPP in this area so enjoyed the lunch we served them in October that they asked if we would host their Christmas Dinner on Nov. 28<sup>th</sup>. We look forward to seeing them then.

One of our other preparations and hosting is funeral receptions. This Fall we were able to honour three of our Lord's saints as they were called home to Glory.

At our meeting this month we were able to send donations to Street Hope Peterborough, One City, Cameron House, The New Canadian Center, and the Millbrook and Omemee Food share programs, as well as giving Rev. Susan money for her Discretionary Fund.


We hope to have a new upright freezer in the new year and will continue in purchasing any items needed for the kitchen.

We thank God for all those who help and support us, both women and men.





# Rural Connections



This is the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Rural Connections Lunches. It has been a wonderful faith-led outreach program, reaching people in a widespread area of our community.

People coming together to break bread and spending a few hours of fellowship at St. John's; people who have become great friends through the years.

From October to June (except January) the lunches are the first Wednesday of the month, with occasional speakers. This December 4<sup>th</sup>, come and join us to be entertained by Phil and Ted.

The Lord has blessed us with wonderful volunteers, who faithfully give of their time, and we are so grateful and give thanks for their hard work. Praise the Lord.

Sharon D, Susan C, Juanita M, Marilyn L,  
Susan W, Rachel R, Nancy H, Ola, Bev M.

May God's peace be with you this blessed Christmas.

- Jean Lush

# Upcoming Projects



## Adopt-A-Road

Our congregation has been part of the Peterborough County Adopt-A-Road Program for 12 years. We are responsible for cleaning debris from the sides of County Rd 10 between Cavan and Ida.

Typically, we do this twice a year: spring and fall. We were unable to do this during the pandemic years but are now back into our twice a year routine.

We carried out our autumn clean-up on October 20<sup>th</sup> after our worship service. Fifteen people filled seven bags of recycle and six bags of garbage. Several pieces of scrap metal were also recovered.

After the collection we gathered in the hall for a gourmet meal of hot dogs and enjoyable conversation.

Our next Adopt-A-Road Day will be in the spring after the snow melts. Hope you will be able to join us!



## Sleeping Children Around the World

Cam and Carol Oldfield have been collecting your soft drink cans throughout the year and getting them recycled for the aluminum. This year they were able to buy 8 bed kits for a charitable organization called, "Sleeping Children Around the World".

Each bed kit costs \$40 and consists of a mattress and bedding, and a mosquito net to prevent malaria.

"Sleeping Children Around the World" has helped more than 1.8 million children in 36 countries experience healthy sleep through the gift of a bed kit.

Soft drink cans at the present time are recycled at 83 cents a pound, so please keep dropping off your cans around the back of the Church.



# Matt's Message for Advent: A Good Time to Become a Student Again



The first time I got the thrill was in grade eleven. It was in Mr. Tom Smith's "Ancient Civilizations" class in the history wing at Thomas A. Stewart in Peterborough. The room was dark because we were watching a "film strip." Some of you younger people may not know what a "film strip" is. A film strip is a series of pictures that are projected on a screen. These pictures are accompanied by an audio cassette tape. The teacher would press play on the tape and then turn the film strip at the appropriate times so the pictures were brought to life with sound effects or dramatic dialogues or commentary. When it was time for the teacher to turn to the next picture, the tape would make a loud: "BOOOP!"

On this afternoon, Mr. Smith was showing us a film strip about the Middle Ages: that mysterious, dark, magical, violent period of time from roughly 500 AD to 1500 AD. One particular slide changed my life and sent me on the spiritual path. It gave me the thrill of learning; the thrill of being a student and understanding new things; the thrill of a new world opening up.

For this slide, the audio tape started playing a deep, mysterious, thrilling sound: Gregorian Chant. Gregorian Chant is the music made by monks or nuns chanting in echoing, candle-lit, stone churches, with no musical accompaniment except just a few sparse notes on a quiet organ. I felt something new and deep, like a sleeping dragon, awakening somewhere deep inside me. It was SO COMPLETELY UNLIKE anything I had ever seen in the busy, materialistic, technological society around me. And that's exactly what 16 year-old Matt Kydd wanted. Actually I'm listening to Gregorian Chant right now as I write.

But the picture that was shown while the monks were chanting is what really knocked my socks off. Sometimes it is called "St. Francis in Ecstasy". Sometimes it's called "St. Francis in the Desert." It's by Giovanni Bellini, painted in 1480. Even just looking at it for the purposes of this article, I just got shivers.



cont...



Francis wasn't satisfied at all with the way the Church was. He wanted to get out there in the real world, where the pain and poverty and sadness are. He caused a lot of controversy, rebelling against his father and running away from home, and actually living a life of poverty. As priests and bishops were enjoying their comfy, wealthy lives, Francis was sleeping by the side of the road, praying in the wilderness, and above all, spending time with the poor and sick.

This painting shows him when he was on one of his wilderness retreats, when he would go out into the mountains for days on his own to pray, much like Jesus did. He seems to be having a sudden thought or realization as he looks slightly upwards. I love how the city is off in the distance. This probably reminded me of myself when I would go for solitary hikes on the hills around Keene. I would sit down on a cedar rail fence and contemplate the town off in the distance and would feel very free and relaxed, being away from everything.

So as I sat in that dark classroom, I don't know what exactly happened inside me, but...I was learning. I was really, really learning something new. I was learning and changing. And it was a real thrill. Learning was exciting. Learning was transformational.

I remember getting that "learning thrill" again in grade thirteen. My teacher then was Mr. Don Quarrie, my English teacher. It was during the poetry unit. Of course most of the kids were extremely bored and I don't blame them. Students had to choose a poem from a list of options and then explain its meaning to the class. I chose Matthew Arnold's Dover Beach. But one poem on the list was not chosen by anyone: T.S. Eliot's The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock. Mr. Quarrie knew how important this poem was, so he didn't just leave it out. He himself read the whole five and a half page poem out loud and then slowly, line by line, he carefully explained its meaning.

And that's the exact moment when I fell in love with T.S. Eliot. Since that day, Eliot has been walking with me as a guide. But in a way, Mr. Quarrie has also been with me too. When you get that learning thrill, you never forget the teacher who was the magician who helped that moment happen.

cont...





Those moments in high school when I really felt the thrill of learning inspired me to want to learn more. So I went to the University of Toronto. And there a whole new level of learning thrills were supplied by Professor Joe Goering.

As I'm writing this, I googled him to see what he's doing these days. I found out that he just passed away last year. I'm just learning about this at this moment. It's really sad, finding this out. I'm reading obituaries in his memory. These lines sum him up well.

*"His undergraduate teaching was punctuated by poems and references to his summers doing agricultural work in the mid-West – without specifying to his Canadian students he was referring to his much-loved Kansas. He would intrigue his audience, charm his students into desiring more knowledge and to avoid simplistic readings, enticing them at times with beauty: his presentation of the Cathedral de Chartres based on old B&W pictures was a real treat. His graduate teaching was so impressive, by his quantity (more than 40 PhD students) and quality, he won the prestigious CARA Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2015."*

In September 1997, as an 18 year-old, I walked into his great course: The Medieval World of Knowledge. It turned my world upside down. I came to the U of T with a very naive view of history; I thought that we studied history just to avoid the mistakes of the past. I thought that the modern human was the peak of human development. I thought the past was like childhood: interesting and beautiful, but ultimately something to move beyond. Professor Goering quickly showed me that we were in that classroom not to congratulate ourselves on being better than the people of the past, but to learn from them.

One moment in an early class summed up this idea. Goering was talking about Matthew, the author of the first Gospel, when a cocky, know-it-all student said, "Um, don't we know now that Matthew probably didn't write the Gospel of Matthew?" Goering sighed and said, "Why don't we just say Matthew wrote Matthew, okay? Sometimes the old story is the good story." Goering wasn't interested in getting lost in a bunch of modern technical questions, but wanted to let the meaning of the ancient stories come alive. Questions of authorship are interesting, but too often they distract from the power of the text.

cont...





I have a 27 year-old, hardcover notebook with all the notes I took during his wonderfully bewildering lectures back in 1997-98. On this page I'm looking at now, he starts off a lecture saying, "Have you ever plowed a field before? It's a wonderfully philosophical exercise." I'll treasure this notebook even more, now that I know he's passed on.



This photograph of the great professor is taken from his memorial website. He has obviously just been to an Ash Wednesday service.

Anyways, my point is simply that the thrill of learning, the thrill of having a good teacher was...thrilling.

And these learning thrills didn't just happen in my youth. They still happen!

Just one example from the recent past.

In October 2016, there was a big event at Trent University, in the Chanie Wenjack Theatre. Gord Downie's new album, *The Secret Path*, was not just a music album, but was also an animated film, showing the tragic story of Chanie Wenjack. Wenjack was a young Indigenous boy who died in 1967 while escaping from a Residential School.

On this night at Trent in 2016, the film was being shown for the first time, but before the film, a panel was going to be discussing Wenjack's story. On the panel were Shirley Williams (Trent Professor and Residential School survivor) and John Milloy, author of the most thorough history book on the Residential Schools, *National Crime*. The story of Shirley Williams was particularly powerful, as she gave us all a first-hand glimpse into what life was like for a child whose culture and language and name were taken away.



cont...



What an honour it was to be there with those people on that night...in a building that had been named after Wenjack when it was built back in 1973. Downie's words "We are not the country we thought we were," have always stayed with me.

I had managed to get through a three year Master of Divinity without learning almost anything about the Residential Schools, but this one evening at Trent woke me up and inspired me to try to learn more about the subject.

Now this learning was painful. I wouldn't say it was a "thrill". But the fact that I went out on that October night changed my life. Learning painful things is a good thing.

That was eight years ago. But even now, as I move into the second half of my forties, I'm still seeking out new ways to have learning moments. I still want to be a student. In a very real sense, I still feel like I know nothing. Who knows? In the next few minutes, something could happen that will overturn everything I've learned so far. The next book I take off the shelf at the Omemee library might open up another new world for me. Honestly, I feel silly when I think about some of the things I thought back in 2023. Tomorrow, one of my daughters might ask yet another question that forces me to re-evaluate everything. (A few days ago, one of them asked, "Is nothing something?")

Very soon, another Church year will begin, with the beginning of Advent, which is a four week journey leading up to Christmas. Advent is a good time to become a student again. It's a time for starting a new journey. Maybe there are some obstructions and prejudices we can leave behind on this journey. Maybe our old selves themselves have to be cast off so that we can learn what we are supposed to learn. Like old Scrooge, maybe we too can wake up on Christmas morning as a new person, having learned new things about ourselves.

Advent is about preparing ourselves for THE BIG EVENT: incarnation. The only way to get ready for something as big as the Word made flesh is to go back to school, to admit that none of us has grasped the full meaning of this huge, huge mystery. Every year we have to become students again. And to be a student is to admit that we don't know it all.

cont...





Who wants to be a “know-it-all?” Nobody likes them. And how could we even hope to “know it all”? The reality we’re thinking about during Advent defies all human knowing. The Eternal Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, became human while keeping his Divine nature. In this baby whose birth we’re celebrating, humanity and divinity became one, the physical human world is lifted up into the divine spiritual realm. The birth of this poor, Jewish child in a family of distressed migrants was marked by a new star in the heavens and by a night sky full of angels. These are astonishing things, shocking, strange, and even upsetting.

And his whole life was astonishing and upsetting. Even his closest friends, the twelve disciples, basically never understood him. But they kept following him, trying to figure out what was going on, saying to each other, “Do you know what he’s talking about?” “No, ask him!” “No, you ask him!”

Sometimes I wish we didn’t use the old Greek word “disciples” for them. I wish we called them “the Twelve Students.” All they did was leave everything and try to understand him. They became students.

I’ve been so fortunate in my teachers. Mr. Smith. Mr. Quarrie. Professor Goering. Gord Downie. Rev. Wendy Moore. Rev. Peter Mills. Rev. Bill Montgomery. Rev. Susan Spicer. They’ve all helped me get that thrill: the thrill of learning something new.

Every year I get older. It keeps on happening. The only way to stay young is to keep learning new things. When I’m learning, I’m always that kid moving away from home for the first time, going to University, to hear a man from Kansas lecture on the Middle Ages.

What will I learn next? I don’t know!

This Advent, let’s become students again.

cont...



And don't worry. Being a perpetual learner doesn't mean you never really know anything for sure. I'm not advising you to forget everything and always start over again. All I'm saying is...well...I'll just quote one of my teachers:

"We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all of our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time."  
– T.S. Eliot

Thanks for teaching me, Mr. Eliot! Learning from you has been a thrilling, exciting ride!



*May God bless you richly this season of anticipation, and may your longings be, somehow, miraculously, surprisingly, thrillingly, fulfilled in the coming of the Christ Child.*

*Merry Christmas!*