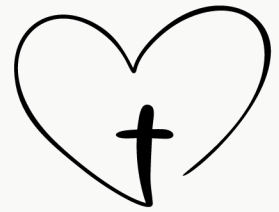


Christmas Newsletter

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

December
2024

Ministers Message



Words for the Beginning

As I sit to write, the annual Christmas Tree Lighting on Main Street was almost a week ago. The Tree outside of the Church glows through the evening, now. We served hot chocolate and offered hospitality during the Santa Claus Parade, which was the next day. Banners declaring that Jesus is God's gift to us are on the Church lawn and plans for Worship through to Christmas are beginning to take shape. Christmas is coming. Advent is almost here. In fact, we may have begun our journey into this hopeful season as you read this newsletter.

Advent is a time when we reflect on hope, peace, love and joy. It is a time also of endings and beginnings. As we come close to the end of a calendar year, a new Church Year begins. In many ways, pregnant Mary was surrounded by endings – large and small, personal and political. She was also surrounded by beginnings. She proclaimed a hope in God who was, and is, making all things new. Jesus' birth offered a new beginning for the shepherds and the Magi; invited to see themselves and their relationship with God in a new way. While this was all happening, there were those who tried to bring Jesus' story to an end before it had really even begun.



When we, ourselves, navigate seasons filled with endings and beginnings, we need reminders, of God's presence and love and of our belovedness, reflects the team at Sanctified Art. We need words that can feel like steady ground, like a path for our feet to find as we step forward into the unknown. Through Advent, we will reflect on blessings, with words we need to hear as we begin a new season. We will reflect on truths that we might want to tell a child, that God wants to tell the world and that we need to tell each other.

For Advent this year, the worship team from Sanctified Art imagined words Mary might speak to her newborn son. What Scriptures and stories would she impart to him? What lessons would she teach him as he grew?

Moving slightly away from the lectionary and leaning into scriptures, stories, lessons & blessings that Mary might have spoken, we will spend time hearing stories and reflecting on lessons that we might teach children and that we continue to learn and relearn as adults. They may be lessons that we might want to share with those we love at special times in life, sacred times. And so, we are invited to enter this new Advent season as if we are entering a sacred new chapter, holding fast to that which bolsters us for the journey ahead.

As we travel through this season, may you find words for belovedness and hope. May you see that God is with us in beginnings and even, especially, in endings. May you see the blessings that are offered to you by God and the blessing that you are in this season and always.

With peace,
Laura



Clerks message

An Advent reminder of the some of the Latin words we learned last month.

The very term we use “Advent” comes from the Latin word “adventus” - a coming, a preparation for the coming of Christ. It begins on the 4th Sunday before Christmas which is, appropriately for us Presbyterians, the traditional feast of St. Andrew, the apostle. The candles of advent have for several hundred years been set in a ring to represent the eternal love of Christ for humanity.

- Advent week 1 – Hope: Prophecy Candle

As we gather in the narthex before service, we hopefully anticipate the coming of the new born Christ child, the promised one.

- Advent week 2 – Peace: Bethlehem Candle

As we enter on our journey into the nave, we continue on that ship of our faith, seeking to find inner peace in not only our individual but our communal worship.

- Advent week 3 – Joy: Shepherd's Candle

Interestingly, Christian tradition - which we know was steeped in Latin - has it that this candle is pink! A pink candle was lit on “Gaudete” Sunday– the Sunday’s Mass: “Rejoice (gaudete) in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice.” In the ancient Church the Pope gave a citizen a pink rose and Catholic clergy wore rose-colored vestments. As a result, the pink candle gained a place in the Advent wreath. [source - The Catholic Spirit]

As we receive the gifts of music and the Word from the chancel each of these Sundays, like the shepherds let us rejoice and be glad in it!

- Advent week 4 – Love: Angel's Candle

As we approach Christmas eve and harken to the angel’s message that a new king is born, may your time in the sanctuary be a time of reflection on the “adventus”, the coming of the great gift of God’s love for us.

Christmas Blessings,

Diane Hamilton

Clerk



Opportunities to gather for study during Advent

"The Christmas Letters" by Magrey R. DeVega
Wednesdays at 7:00pm from November 27th to December 18th

Think about Christmas letters you have received in the past. You scan the photos to see the places your friends have visited. You read the milestone moments they have observed together. You think about your own interactions with them over the past year. You ponder when you might see them again in person.

Now imagine that, tucked among the piles of Christmas letters from family and friends, there waits for you a stack of correspondence from the greatest sender of all: the God who created you, loves you, and draws near to you in Jesus. Wouldn't those be letters worth cherishing?

This study centers on a special set of letters that were delivered thousands of years ago to the earliest Christian communities in the first-century Greco-Roman world. They were not Christmas letters, but they were letters about Jesus. They were not specifically about his birth, but they give us the earliest glimpses about what the church believed about the Incarnation – the miracle that God became human.

We will focus on four Epistles in particular and discover what they reveal to us about what the first Christians believed about the Incarnation. We will see their points of connection to more familiar Advent Scriptures: lectionary texts from the Prophets and the birth narratives in the Gospels.

We will consider these texts as a special set of Christmas letters, written by our spiritual ancestors and inspired by the God who became flesh for us in Jesus. Most of all we will rediscover how to make Christmas more than just an annual observance, but a way of life, modeled after Jesus, all year round.



From the introduction to “The Christmas Letters”

“Ponder these things” by Rowan Williams

Tuesdays at 6:00pm from November 26 to December 16 – on-line

This study is hosted by Rev. Dr. Emily Bisset as part of “Presbyterians Read”

You are welcome to watch or participate

Register on-line by going to [Presbyterians read advent 2024](#)

“Ponder These Things” by the Rt. Rev. and Rt. Hon. Prof. Rowan Williams is a collection of four meditations that invite the church to explore the meaning of Christ’s incarnation and ministry by focusing on three icons of Mary and the Christ Child and a fourth reflection based on a legend about a woven sanctuary veil. In the four meditations, Rowan Williams reflects on the “drama of God’s love in Christ” that the icons embody and the stories they reveal. The meditations Williams provides are about how we are led by faith to live in the world, as it is only while we are aware of the utter strangeness of God that we can understand what is immanent in all that is familiar.



Giving Tree

The Congregational Care Team invites the congregation to consider giving gifts of non-perishable food items for the Newmarket Food Pantry.

Gifts can be placed under the “Giving Tree” which will be in the Sanctuary beginning December 1st.

Carol Sing – beginning December 1st

What is your favourite Christmas Carol?

Through the season of Advent, we are going to give our wonderful Praise Band a break and sing Christmas Carols before the Worship Service beginning at 9:45 each Sunday.



Mitten Tree Sunday is December 8th

When we first started decorating the “Mitten Tree”, it was something done by the children. Since that time, we have included some of our Elders, Grandparents, and Young People. The excitement is contagious, and we welcome anyone who would like to help cover the Christmas tree in mittens, hats & scarves.

It is a time of laughter, celebration and incredible generosity, as we offer our gifts.

These gifts that we have such fun giving, will go to people in our community who need help staying warm this winter.



Longest Night Service – Saturday December 21st at 4:00pm

We will gather together for a gentle time of remembering that in this season of joy and celebration we may also live with loss and grief and many other emotions.

Together, we will pray, sing, listen to Scripture and know that we can hold both grief and joy together.



Choir Cantata – Sunday December 22nd

“Touched by a Child, Touched by a King” by John Purifoy

The Choir is working on a new Christmas Cantata that they will share during Worship on Sunday December 22nd.

The music and the words speak of the timeless miracle of Christmas and how it reaches into our daily lives.



Thank you

Thank you to our amazing Bazaar Team for all of their hard work!

We had Baking, Crafts, Knitting, Purses, Jewelry & Scarves. There were books and fabrics, treasures, macramé angels, chocolate covered popcorn and Avon products. There were cookies and coffee and sandwiches and an abundance of welcoming smiles. We were able to raise over \$6,000 which will be used for our Church Work and Outreach Ministries.

Thank you for the wonderful gifts to our Student Care Packages!

We had a team fill shoeboxes with gifts pens, candies, tea, hot chocolate, popcorn and socks and lots of other surprises, on November 18th.

The love and care of the congregation was shared with 19 students this year. With the Postal Workers on strike, families have been asked to pick up the boxes. Some have already been received and unpacked with great joy and gratitude.

Thank you to our talented gardeners and maintenance team!

The cedars have been trimmed. Parking lot lights have been changed and leaves have been bagged. Bulbs and bushes have been planted. So much work have been done to make the Church property welcoming.

Sale of the Manse

The congregation met on Sunday October 20th, after Worship, to discuss a recommendation from the session that the manse be sold. (A manse is a home that is owned by a Church for the use of its Minister.)

After discussion at the special Congregational Meeting, it was decided that the manse would be sold. The next step was to seek approval from Presbytery to proceed.

Presbytery met on Tuesday November 19th and gave permission for us to move forward with selling the manse. According to Presbyterian Church Law, the Trustees will invest the proceeds of the manse sale. This is called a "Manse Fund". The interest accrued will be accessible, with the idea being that it will pay the Minister's Housing Allowance and the principle will be invested in a manner that will keep up with inflation. The congregation will also have use of up to \$100,000 from the proceeds of the manse sale for the work and ministry of the Congregation.

The Trustees will begin to work towards putting the house on the market soon. Updates will be offered to the congregation as there is news to share.

St. Andrew's Financial Update to Oct. 31, 2024

'Our Church Work' Current Operating Account:

Total Revenues received : \$185,379 Expenses: \$218,074

Current Operating Deficit: - \$32,695 (negative balance) Plus: 2023 Deficit carried over: - \$13,951

Total Deficit: - \$46,646

Deficit to Be Covered by Investment Interest from 2024-25: - \$33,951 (from two ministers)

2024 Deficit to be Covered by Congregation: - \$12,695

Presbyterians Sharing: \$10,501 (16% lower than YTD target)

Our Operating Account deficit for the first 10 months of 2024 is -\$46,646. This includes a carryover deficit of -\$13,951 from 2023. These are funds used to pay all staff and non-staff expenses. Please note that in the first four months of 2024, Rev. Robert Royal's transitional allowance package was included (ended April 30th). By the decision made at our 2024 Annual Meeting, the portion of the deficit to be covered by the interest from our investments for 2024 and 2025 is -\$33,951. As of this November, 2024 we will pay off \$16,185 reducing the deficit to be covered by Investment Interest to -\$17,766.

This leaves a remaining 2024 deficit of -\$12,695 accumulated during the 10 months of 2024. We are so grateful, the Nov. 9th Bazaar netted \$6,150. The Financial and Stewardship Committee decided at their Nov. Meeting to allocate \$4,900 of the Bazaar funds to reduce the 2024 deficit to -\$7,795.

The F & S Committee hopes, with the commitment of our congregation, we can eliminate this remaining 2024 deficit by December.

The F & S Committee also decided that the remaining \$1,250 of Bazaar funds will be allocated to four of our Missional Funds and a Newmarket Charity including: the Newmarket Food Bank (\$400), Boarding Home Ministry (\$250),

Community Lunch (\$500) and Prayer Shawl Group (\$100).

As you review plans for your givings for the remainder 2024, please consider that our operating expenses for staffing, utilities and maintenance have increased and the importance of our Missional priorities. Again, the F & S Committee also understands the current challenges our present economy presents to our congregants, especially if they are on a fixed income. We know our congregants are committed to our church and are doing their best.

The Finance and Stewardship Committee would like to thank the congregation for their support of 'Our Church Work' (Current Operating Account), as well as our Missional programs. We ask for God's help as we work to support our church and local community.

Finance and Stewardship Committee: John Hopkins (convener), George Smith, Bruce Lindsay, Anthony Samuel, Cory Philip and Jane Martone



Ways to Give to the Church:

As announced previously, we have expanded the ways you can give your offerings to the church, especially while virtual services continue. These options are still in place and are listed below, in priority of our preference. Donations made through any of these options are recorded and tax receipts are issued.

PAR: You can contact the Church office to arrange Pre-Authorized Remittance (PAR). This will initiate the transfer of your givings to the Church account directly on the 20th day of each month. You may print the enrolment form from the Church website then contact the Church office to make arrangements to deliver it with a cheque marked 'VOID' at the office or drop it in the mailbox located outside the Water Street entrance to the Church. (With PAR, there is only a 50-cent administrative cost per givings per month.) The PAR method is preferable and helps the F&S committee to forecast donations and budget expenses most effectively.

Interac E-Transfer: Use our email address: donate@standrewsnewmarket.org. It is configured with auto-deposit, not requiring a security question.

Church Envelope: In addition to bringing your offering envelope to the Worship Service, you can mail or drop-off your monthly givings using your 2024 Church envelope (or a blank envelope with your envelope number written on the front). Please ensure to send a cheque, not cash. The Church mailbox outside the Water Street entrance to the Church is secure and checked regularly. If necessary, you can contact your elder to pick up your envelope and courier it to the Church.

PayPal: You can donate through PayPal (Or, click the Donate button on the Church website). (Paypal charges are 1.6% plus \$0.30 per online transaction). We will issue a tax receipt in February for the previous year.

**Prayers and Blessings to reflect on, or offer,
while decorating this season**

(From Traci Smith's "Faithful Families for Advent & Christmas")

Christmas Tree Blessing

God who created all things, bless this tree as we decorate it and make it a joyful symbol of our home. May its branches remind us of the shelter and shade you provide for us and for many creatures. May its trunk remind us of your strength. May its lights bring us peace. May we remember your gift to us this season, the gift of Jesus. Amen.

Angel: (When putting the Angel, or Star, on top of the Tree)

As we put the angel on top of the tree, we remember the angels in the Bible who say, "Do not be afraid!" May we be reminded that God tells us not to be afraid and watches over us.

(adapted from Traci Smith's words)

Star:

The Bethlehem Star in the Bible shone bright and showed the way to Jesus. So, too, may this star shine brightly on our tree, reminding us that Jesus can light our path.

The Story of Saint Nicholas, the Secret Giver

You've probably heard the song "Jolly Old Saint Nicholas," about the man who comes down the chimney and puts presents in stockings. But have you heard about Saint Nicholas, the man who lived in what is now modern-day Turkey 250 years after Jesus died? Not a lot is known about Saint Nicholas, but many people said that he was a very generous gift-giver and that he like to give his gifts in secret.

One story says that there was a time when Saint Nicholas wanted to help three people, but he didn't want them to know. He put gold coins in three bags and, at night, threw them through the window of the house where the three people lived. What a surprise the people must have had when they opened the bags of gold!

The Bible says, "but when you give.... Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." (Matthew 6:3) This is another way of saying that some gifts should be given anonymously, without calling attention to the gift. Do you know anyone who might benefit from an anonymous gift? How could you give them a surprise without anyone knowing it was you who gave the gift?

(Adapted from Traci Smith's "Faithful Families for Advent and Christmas")