



*St. Paul's United Church
Christmas Advent
Newsletter 2020*

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November 2020

Advent Services 10 am

Advent 1 – November 29 – Denis Laurin,
Street Ministry

Advent 2 – December 6 - Communion

Advent 3 – December 13 - Children's Musical
"Sheep in Heavenly Peace"

Advent 4 – December 20 - Choir Cantata
"A New Birth, a New Beginning"

Dec. 24 - Christmas Eve Service - 7 pm.

Join our live-stream service at stpaulsmidland.org



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Three ways for you to easily access our worship service:

- 1. Go to our website** – www.stpaulsmidland.org . Halfway down the page, click on the red YouTube image. Click on a current or previous service you would like to view. Sit back and enjoy!
- 2. Google St. Paul's, Midland on YouTube.** It will take you directly to our YouTube channel.
- 3. Subscribe:** Hit our subscribe button. Next time you go on YouTube, hit your subscriptions button and we will come up right away. Just click on the link and join us.

A Note from the Minister – Rev. Karen Ptolemy-Stam

Our Advent/Christmas newsletter is produced every year



to remind us of the special services that are being prepared for the season. We hope that you will help us get the word out and invite others, especially now, who might very much enjoy these services.

This newsletter is also written to update you on what is happening at the church.

Advent is a time to prepare ourselves to open our hearts and minds to the coming birth of Christ. Like John the Baptist, we are invited to "Prepare the Way of the Lord". How do we prepare ourselves for the arrival of the one we worship? What do we need to do to enable us to truly celebrate the birth of Jesus in the world and much more importantly, in our own lives? Will we listen to the voices within us, echoing the message of the angels, that God is with us, in us and in our world? Might we too run to the stable of our faith to embrace the presence of God in our world and in our lives so that we might live fully, love freely and care for one another and the earth?

As I wrote in last week's email, I'm sure we are all aware that the COVID-19 numbers are rising as we face the second wave. Many of us are beginning to experience COVID fatigue. The real question is **how do we face this?** What coping mechanisms will we put in place for ourselves to help us deal with this reality?

The numbers of COVID cases is rising more rapidly than expected. It is felt that there is still quite a risk to worship in person so we will continue to worship on-line.

The Worship Team has been working very hard to make the Advent and Christmas season as special as we can, given our circumstances. I am excited to tell you that we are having our Children's Christmas musical, "Sheep in Heavenly Peace" and our Christmas Cantata, "A New Birth, A New Beginning". They will be virtual and yes, it will be different, but we hope that it will be inspiring and uplifting. The Musical has some funny lines and the youth have worked so hard at rehearsing and videotaping from home. At this point, we have 21 participants in the Christmas Cantata, from various choirs in our community and afar. One singer is coming in from Vancouver, another from Barrie. It is a lot of extra work for the singers, for Glenn and certainly for Victoria. Having said that, we are hoping that it will help us celebrate the Christmas season, despite what is happening around us.

Christmas Eve will include lots of Christmas carols and a retelling of the Christmas story in a new way. Wait to see our amazing newborn baby Jesus, angels on a beach, shepherds in a field, no room at the inn and magi. We've even had a miracle with dogs coming onto the scene pretending to be sheep. Things will certainly be different, but nothing is going to stop us from celebrating the birth of Christ in our world and in our lives. I urge you, even if there may be no one else in your home, still decorate for Christmas, put up the nativity set and don't let the Grinch of COVID-19 steal your Christmas.

So on that note, I invite you to read this newsletter, note the special services, invite others from far and wide to join us for our worship services. I also want to wish you a sacred journey through



Advent and a very blessed Christmas, albeit it, a different kind of Christmas.

Blessing, Karen

A message from the Chair of the Official Board

A couple of days ago, the news headline blared "brace yourselves for a different kind of Christmas". Well, first it was a different Easter, then a different summer, different Thanksgiving, and here we are about to celebrate a "COVID Christmas".

Thankfully, by now we have learned to do things differently so that we can stay safe and keep everyone else safe as well. When the pandemic started, we were fortunate to have the tech infrastructure in place that enabled St. Paul's to switch to online Sunday services. Also, we mobilized our staff and volunteers to reach out and make sure everyone felt connected and supported by the church. Only recently, we have been able to have small group and committee meetings in the church with strict disinfection and distancing protocols.

To our staff and volunteers, a heartfelt thank you for all your dedication and good work that helps St. Paul's make a difference in the lives of folks in our community and beyond during this challenging time. Everyone's continued support has enabled St. Paul's to meet all its financial commitments including support to community organizations like the Food Bank, the Foodgrains Bank and the Guesthouse Shelter; for this, please accept the Board's sincere appreciation.

In the November 22nd Sunday service, we watched a glorious performance of the Ode to Joy from the Royal

Albert Hall; nothing spells Christmas more for me than this! I was also reminded how much I miss our choir and everyone's voice singing in church. "COVID Christmas" may be different this year, smaller and quieter, nonetheless, it will be Christmas in all its glory because the message of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love never changes for us Christians.

I wish you all a very Merry Christmas, and may the new year bring what we all hope for - good health and an end to the pandemic.



Zena Pendlebury, Chair, Official Board

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ministry and Personnel

A Huge Thank You to Our Staff! We have a wonderful staff, who have been working tirelessly all year long to deliver meaningful Sunday services, intimate weddings and funerals, and virtual celebrations of life. Telephone and "porch" visits have kept those who are ill or lonely connected, and Zoom has helped committees and our Board to fulfil their responsibilities. Small group activities have brought some people together in a safe environment this fall. During this unusual, restricted Christmas season, it may be difficult for many of us to feel as thankful and joyful as we usually do at this time of year – however, our staff have been preparing to lift our spirits with innovative and imaginative Advent Season programs.

We have all enjoyed the humorous banter between Karen and Victoria at the beginning of each Sunday

service; Karen's insightful commentary on the scriptures and their relevance to our current situation; and Victoria's music selections, augmented by Rebecca's lovely voice and children's contributions, the virtual choir, Shayla's beautiful singing and other music which Victoria brings into our service. Glenn and his Tech Team pull all these elements together into professional presentations, seen by many on YouTube on Sundays and throughout the week, not only in Midland but around the world.

Working tirelessly behind the scenes, Colleen has been very busy with pastoral care, augmented by her team of visitors. Sonya keeps the church building spotless and virus free with her passion for cleaning, so small groups and volunteers who enter the building can be confident in their safety. Louise, our Administrator, holds it all together, attending to countless details to support outside groups using our building, church committees and groups, other St. Paul's staff and Official Board members.

We are truly blessed to have this special group of staff, each with unique gifts and an ability to adapt to changing requirements – under Karen's leadership—supporting our congregation with exceptional pastoral care and outstanding programming. THANK YOU from the Ministry and Personnel Committee and the whole congregation!

Louise Leck, Chair M&P Committee

Congregational Life – Pastoral Care

These past few months have brought considerable change to the pastoral care for the congregation of St. Paul's. Visiting in homes, retirement homes and personal care homes has been replaced with cards and letters, phone calls and Zoom meetings. The good news of COVID-19 is

that it has brought many of our St. Paul's folks closer together, as we navigated new ways of communicating, caring and keeping in touch with one another.

The weekly bulletins and email updates from Karen are sent out to those with email addresses. For those without computers, a dedicated team of volunteers deliver weekly to those individuals so that we can all stay connected. For those who would like to view a live-stream service at the church, the opportunity is available if you call to book a time during office hours.

The Women's Grief Support group met at Little Lake Park in the summer, until the weather dictated an indoor gathering! The group is named "Coving – Caring, Grieving, COVID" and we welcome anyone interested to please register in advance to attend on the last Wednesday of each month from 1:30- 3:00 p.m. at the church.



The Men's Grief Group started up again in November. We meet once a month and our next gathering is Wednesday December 9th 10:30 a.m. If you know anyone who is interested, please contact the church. This group is led by Karen and Norm Draper.

The Visiting Team has met, both outdoors and inside, since September and we are very blessed and grateful for their ongoing support and care. Thank you to Barb Carswell, Sandra Flint, Helen French, Argyle Gallichan, Ken & Doreen Gunson, Fran Hill, Diane MacMenemey, Diane Marr, Joan Neville, Zena Pendlebury, Jean Stainton and Mary Vaillancourt for carrying out their tasks - no matter the weather. You are all so appreciated and all

the “little extras” you do for the folks you visit do not go unnoticed.

Advent and Christmas 2020 will certainly look different than it has in the past. However, as we move through the next few weeks and reflect on the simplicity of that first Christmas, may we be able to see the beauty of the story through new eyes. May God bless each and every one of you.

Colleen Gareau, Pastoral Care Coordinator

Faith Formation

Our Faith Formation Committee has been working on finding different ways to do the things that we traditionally do during this season. We have been working on creating a way to have our children stay involved in the church while at home. Since September, Rebecca has been running a zoom-based Discovery kids every Sunday at 9:30 a.m. The children who attend enjoy singing songs and listening to stories and are also able to hear Karen share the theme conversation from the service. Some children have been able to be Christ candle lighters from home and some of our families will be involved in the lighting of the Advent candles as well. If you have a child or grandchild who you think might enjoy taking part in the Discovery Kids meetings, just contact the church and they will be able to provide you with the login details.

The Bible Study group started up again in September and meets every Tuesday morning. This group has reached the maximum number of ten allowed in our building. There are wonderful conversations



about the bible, faith and how it impacts on our day to day lives and in our world.

The Theological Studies Group is a much larger group, so they are not able to meet in person, as they would exceed the maximum of ten allowed for our small groups. This group started in the fall via Zoom and continue to engage on issues of faith in today's time.

Rebecca continues to maintain contact with our youth through various socially distant methods.

For the Christmas season, the Faith Formation committee is hard at work creating a way for our children to be part of the Christmas Eve service. Thank you to all the families who took part in creating their part of the nativity story.

We are always looking for new members for our committee. Currently we meet about once a month through Zoom. If you would like to help, please call the church office and leave them your contact information.

Have a very Merry Christmas!

Lynn Angus, Chair, Faith Formation

Property

As I sit here looking out my window on a not so snowy November afternoon, it is hard to imagine that Christmas is just around the corner. What a year this has been! The pandemic has made this year a very long one.

We will soon be seeing the Christmas decorations going up in the Sanctuary here at St. Paul's. Watch for them on the next live stream broadcast. By the time you are

reading this, we will have the Nativity Scene installed on the front lawn. I have it on good authority that the jolly old elf, Santa, will be coming soon.

Christmas is a very special time of year here as we celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, Jesus. The pandemic will not stop us from our celebrations this year, although they may be done a little differently.

On behalf of the Property Committee, I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a healthy and prosperous New Year.

Members of the Property Committee include Hans Mueller, Tom Barber, Colin Whiteside, Floyd Tilson, George Leck (Hon), Cam Bonner and Bruce Wilcox. New members are always welcome.

Bruce Wilcox, Chair of Property

Worship

Merry Christmas to everyone. This season of 2020 is like no other, YET the same.

As Christians, we have the promise of Hope, in the birth of Jesus. We carry Peace, Love, Hope and Joy with us daily.



Under our masks, a smile is still a smile. The serenity we have is shown by our acts of kindness, the search for justice and in our humility with our God.

The small community where I live in the outskirts of Midland offers me the ability to walk with others and our

dogs (6' apart) in the abundance of nature. My neighbours are friendly, caring, and compassionate with one another. Across from me, the seasonal decorations light up my spirits with appreciation and wonder.

We have very few streetlights in our neighbourhood, so when their lights shine, it reminds me of the Star of Wonder, over the manger, shepherds, angels, animals, wisemen, Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus. Delightful!

Every year my little tree is put up with 3 different manger groupings gathered around its base. Over the years, some pieces have disappeared. I don't know how or where, as I have moved 22 times. Together they are complete, different sizes, yet the same.



From my little tree, my manger scene, my family and the Worship Committee, we wish you and yours a safe, happy and COVID free Christmas season and Happy New Year. However, wherever you celebrate, blessings.

Cathy Metzgar, Chair of Worship

Worship – Choir

As we are all aware, Advent and Christmas services will look very different this year, but I am attempting to make the musical content as close to our “traditional” services as possible. As in the past few years, there will be a Children’s Musical (December 13) and a Choir Cantata (December 20). The next few weeks will also include solos by some of our Discovery Kids and members of St Paul’s. We may not be able to be together in the building this December, but we are striving to make our streaming services as special as we can for you and your family.

Kid's Christmas Musical – Sheep in Heavenly Peace

It's a zoo out here! Bethlehem's homes and inns may be bursting at the seams with travelers for the census, but because of the animals they brought with them, the stable is simply out of control. Camels, donkeys and goats up to the rafters! Even the normally sleepy hillsides are now teeming with an abundance of sheep, and Bethlehem's top temp agency must call on their most eager but often-inept family of workers, the Wooltons, to step up and answer the call (temporary staffing takes on a whole new meaning!).



What they expect to be an unglamorous assignment will soon put them face to face with the angel Gabriel, a sky-full of the Heavenly Host, and ultimately the Good Shepherd himself – Jesus!

Join us for this virtual production streaming December 13th. The cast has been hard at work (in their own homes) rehearsing lines and songs and videotaping themselves for this exciting event! It would be 'baaaaad' if you missed this one!

St Paul's and Friends Cantata – A New Birth, A New Beginning

This beautiful Cantata by John Purifoy will warm your hearts and help you to welcome Christmas into your homes. This is a virtual production including participants from St Paul's, Unity United and



Wasaga Beach United as well as friends from places as far away as Barrie and Vancouver! The performance includes John McCullough and Dan Donaldson as narrators and is accompanied by gorgeous instrumental backing tracks. Be sure to tune in December 20 for this special Advent 4 event.

St Paul's Bell A'Peal Handbell Choir

Believe it or not, even COVID-19 cannot keep these bell ladies apart! They have been gathering to rehearse weekly, masked and physically distant, and have some lovely Christmas music to share (virtually, of course) with you over the season.

**With the best wishes of the season,
Victoria Warwick, Music Director**

United Church Women (UCW)

The year 2020 has been a year of change for all of us. As I prepare the UCW submission for the Christmas newsletter, I look out the window and watch the snow gently falling from the tree branches as the sun tries to make an appearance through the clouds.

The UCW met in October, after a long COVID-19 pause. We will continue to meet on the 2nd Tuesday of each month. Because of our large number of members, we meet at 10:30 a.m. and again at 1:30 p.m., to stay within the 10-person limit guideline.

The pie sale was our first fundraiser since March and was a huge success, selling 48 pies. We are now gearing up for our Christmas goodie packages that



will be ready for pick up on December 10th. You can place your order by contacting Barb Carswell at 705-526-5957. It is our intention to do another pie sale in the new year, so stay tuned.

Thank you to everyone for your support. Wishing you all a healthy and happy year and all the best for the holiday season.

Sharon Foster, UCW President

Some Christmas stories

We Are Pilgrims

We all like to travel. Packing our suitcase with the things that'll identify us in a positive light once we arrive at our destination is a ritual we all know just too well.

During my Christmas trip to Whitehorse, Air Canada and Air North misconnected and my luggage disappeared into luggage never-never land, apparently the size of two football fields. My Yukon family thought this news inconsequential, even funny, since I had arrived safely, on time and in good spirits. I experienced my first non-luggage festive outing in my freshened up travelling clothes and had a good time.

On Christmas morning, I joined the family in an oversize (even for me) colourful sleeping attire provided by my 6'5" son. I fit right into the busy, noisy merriments around the Christmas tree. There were no gifts from this grandmother, which mattered little as long as I lost at "Catnopoly" with my



grandsons and applauded their wiggly attempts of dancing to the music of Sponge Bob. In the afternoon, the Clarke clan and neighbours played hockey in the nearby outdoor rink, with Omi dearest in too big boots protecting the goal. Did I sleep well that night!! My wardrobe got more innovative in the coming days, to afford me taking part in many memorable outdoor activities.

When eventually the call came that my suitcase had been found, I felt regret that my "*thing less freedom*" was being threatened as I replayed with clarity the many examples of my family's unconditional affection. How well they had understood and provided for me.

Home again and many weeks later while singing the hymn "We are Pilgrims", I realize a special bond between the reversible role of the servant and my Yukon experience. Thanks to my lost luggage, I had given my family the opportunity to encompass me with special care and love at Christmas time.

We Are Pilgrims (The Servant Song)

We are pilgrims on a journey,
fellow travellers on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

Sister, let me be your servant,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the nighttime of your fear;

I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping,
when you laugh, I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.

Submitted by Antje Clarke

A child's letter to Santa

Snowflakes softly falling, upon your window they play.
Your blankets snug around you, into sleep you drift away.
I bend to gently kiss you, when I see that on the floor,
there's a letter, neatly written, I wonder who it's for?

I quietly unfold it, making sure you're still asleep.
It's a Christmas list for Santa,
one my heart will always keep.

It started just as always, with the toys seen on TV,
a new watch for your father and a winter coat for me.

But as my eyes read on, I could see that deep inside,
there were many things you wished for,
that your loving heart would hide.

You asked if your friend Molly, could have another Dad;
it seems her father hits her and it makes you very sad.

Then you asked dear Santa if the neighbours down the street,
could find a job, that they might have some food
and clothes and heat.

You saw a family on the news, whose house had blown away,
"Dear Santa, send them just one thing,
a place where they can stay."

"And Santa, those four cookies that I left you for a treat,
could you take them to the children

who have nothing else to eat?
Do you know that little bear I have, the one I love so dear?
I'm leaving it for you to take to Africa this year."

"And as you fly your reindeer on this night of Jesus' birth, could your magic bring to everyone goodwill and peace on earth? There's one last thing before you go, so grateful I would be, if you'd smile at Baby Jesus in the manger by our tree."

I pulled the letter close to me,
I felt it melt my heart.
Those tiny hands had written what
no other could impart.
"And a little child shall lead them",
was whispered in my ear,
as I watched you sleep on Christmas Eve
while Santa Claus was here.



How Rich Are We?

One day, a father of a very wealthy family took his son on a trip to the country with the firm purpose of showing his son how poor people can be. They spent a couple of days and nights on the farm of what would be considered a very poor family.

On their return from the trip, the father asked his son "how was the trip?" "It was great Dad!" "Did you see how poor people can be?" the father asked. "Oh yeah," said the son. "So, what did you learn from the trip?" asked the father. The son answered, " I saw we have one dog and they have four. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of our garden and they have a creek that has no end. We have imported lanterns in our garden and they have the stars at night Our patio reaches to the front yard and they have the whole horizon. We have a small piece of land to live on and they have fields that go beyond our sight. We have servants who serve us, but

they serve others. We buy our food, but they grow theirs. We have walls around our property to protect us, they have friends to protect them."

With this, the boy's father was speechless. Then his son added, "thanks Dad for showing me how poor we are."

There is always a different point of view. Sometimes in our struggle for net worth, we forget what really matters most is our happiness in life.

Today, inspire a friend or family member to take a second look at their life and decide whether they are "rich" or "poor". I hope your life is a rich one!

Submitted by Fran Hill

