

# THE Merry Christmas MEMO



DECEMBER 2020

WINTER EDITION

The Newsletter of St. Mark's United Church,  
115 Orton Park Rd, Toronto M1G 3G9  
(416) 439-8623 • [www.st-marks.ca](http://www.st-marks.ca)



## MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

*By: Janet Smith Zenwirt, Minister*

We know about waiting. We are waiting for the pandemic to end. We are waiting for an end to injustice. We are waiting for the cold, blustery weather to arrive. We are in a proverbial waiting room!

Advent is on our doorstep even as many people wish to rush headlong into Christmas celebrations. Advent is a symbolic time when we wait with hope that God will be among us in new forms, new expressions, and new birth. We wait for the One who will show us a way through the wilderness of life. Our plans and traditions have been both adjusted and upturned since March. Many of our dreams have been placed on

hold and we grieve. Yet, we can still hold onto our hopeful expectations. We can still dream and celebrate with renewed creativity. What if we imagine our dreams expanding like the view of the stars in the evening sky – one spark of light at a time. What dreams do you have for our world? What is your dream for Advent and Christmas?

Let's celebrate this time with many of our traditions and discover some new ones as creativity is being born anew. This change in plans affects our personal circles, families, and our church family. At St. Mark's, we will still celebrate well-loved traditions such as candles, the sounds of the choir, and the children's production

through the blessings of technology. You will read elsewhere in this newsletter about our plans such as celebrating a tree lighting at the front of the church. Still, we also need to take time to slow down. Join us for our online Quiet Christmas service. We can also acknowledge that it is okay to feel sad or disappointed. Take time to step away from the festivities reflect on this. Take time to embrace the beauty of the season. Step outside and look at the stars – enjoy a starlight walk and maybe dream a little. Yes, we wait. We wait for God to be with us, Emmanuel, even as God is always with us. Join me as we wait together. We are offered more than a dream; this is our faith renewed.

# CHAIR'S MESSAGE

*By: Katharina Manassis*

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Hello, everyone.

It's been a strange fall. The seasons are changing, and yet the changed, less distant life we all yearn for is still elusive. We have added the term "COVID fatigue" to our vocabulary. Sometimes there are anxious times where the daily news shows alarming surges in infection, or where we realize how complicated it is to get non-COVID health care these days, as I recently learned with my son's dental surgery. Other times there is just a general malaise about ongoing restrictions or the feeling of being "Zoomed out".

Yet despite the challenges, our St. Mark's family has found ways of staying connected and hopeful. We have gathered virtually in worship services, in our teams, and in spiritual, biblical, and other interest groups. We have gathered in person for music, meals, and initiatives to help the less fortunate. Some have even dared to join others within our beloved building. People have donated so generously of their time and resources for the benefit of both St. Mark's and the larger community. Throughout these events we have heeded necessary safety measures, guided by careful and regular

attention from our Transition Team.

As we move into Advent, we are heartened by the good news of Emmanuel: God is with us. We also see glimmers of optimism in impending vaccines, more efficient testing and tracing, and in the words of leaders who listen to science. Real hope, however, comes not from without but from within. It comes from knowing how we will cope and respond, individually and together, with God's help, however the next few months play out.

Blessings for a safe and joyous Christmas season.



# SHINING WATERS REGIONAL COUNCIL

*St. Mark's Shining Waters Regional Council reps: Glen Greenwood and Randy Stroud*

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We have a new General Secretary, Michael Blair, who came and preached at SM's some time ago. The General Council has also added Adele Halliday who will be taking on the role of Anti-Racism and Equity Officer. Adele has been deeply engaged in related work in

the Church in Mission Unit these past few years.

Please do check out the websites of the greater church: Shining Waters Regional Council, (we are part of this region.) Also check out UCC website.

In October Glen attended an online meeting of our Shining Waters Regional Council. Part of the agenda included a "Conversation about Anti-Racism." More will follow from SWRC on this topic.



# FRONT LAWN SIGN REPAIR



*By: Bart Boniface, Property Chair*

With the reduced visits to the church due to COVID-19, I'm not sure how many noticed that our sign on the front lawn had taken on a rather troubling tilt during the spring when the ground was very moist and carried into the summer months as

the soil dried out so that work could be done to reinforce the existing concrete footings.

Fortunately, in early Nov. the Property Team was given a great stretch of warm clear weather which would allow the concrete to cure properly. So, taking precautions work

proceeded and the sign has been restored to its former stature.

Many thanks go out to Bob Bible, Todd Meyer and Ken Niece for their planning and hard work that day. The process went very well and I hope the sign holds fast for many years to come.



# NOOOOOO YOLK

*By: Gayle Feeney*

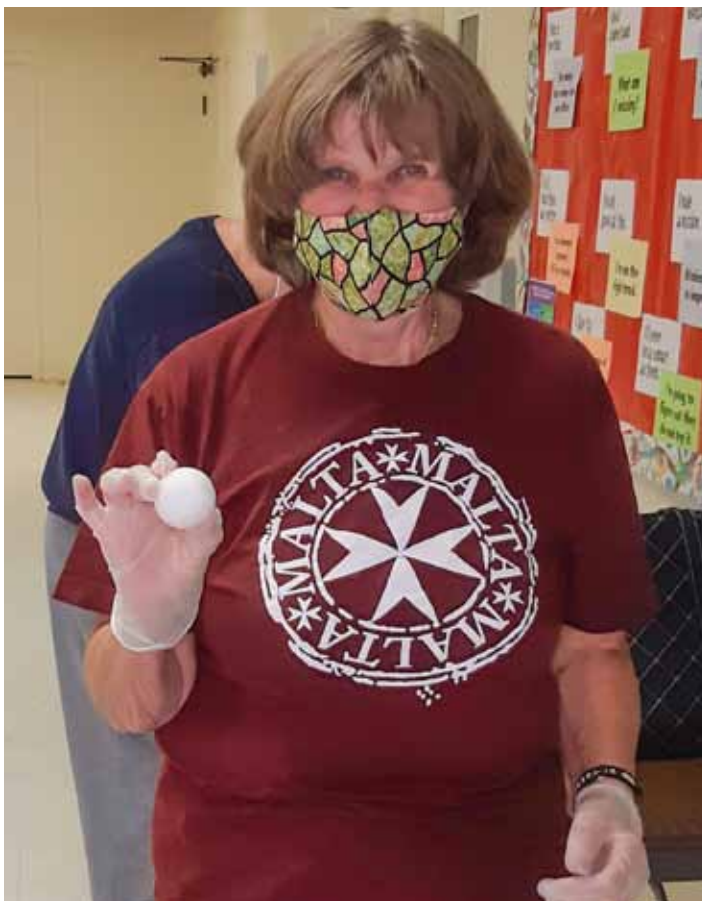
**What do you call a mischievous egg? Answer: a practical YOLKER.** This, however, is NO YOLK!!!! Brian MacFarlane and Gayle Feeney were like kids in a candy store at the Costco Business Centre. This month we purchased 90 dozen eggs and your Within Reach Outreach team re packaged them in half dozen lots for the Thursday Food Bank at Christ Church. As well, we purchased mushrooms, cherry tomatoes, cheese slices in bulk and repackaged those in lots of 8. Large sacks of lentils and rice were also bought to be divided by the folks at the food bank itself. Hand Sanitizer for use at the Food Bank itself was seen as a welcome gift.

How may you ask is all this possible? Again, this is NO YOLK. As well as 18 large boxes of non perishable goods, over a \$1000.00 was donated to Within Reach Outreach at our first ever ..... St Marks DRIVE BY ..... Food Bank! Christ Church is most appreciative of our efforts to

support their weekly Food Bank. A letter of gratitude was forwarded to our St Marks family for our work on their behalf. Special thanks are extended to Gladys Pankhurst, Ethel Clarke, Bettie McKenzie, Kathy Lisle, Brian MacFarlane, Bob Feeney and Barb Merriam for their support with this month's workload. Congratulations on a job well done once again, to all those good folks at St Marks who supported these events.

A large quantity of adult clothing, as well as adult diapers, all of which were donated, was delivered to the Agincourt Community Services Drop In Centre located at Markham and Eglinton. As well, children's and youth masks were delivered to two schools, Eastview and GB Little.

Again, this is NO YOLK, the folks at St Marks bring light to these somewhat scrambled times.







# ANOTHER BOOK STUDY IS COMING TO AN END!

By: Rob Peck



On Friday, November 13th, St. Mark's Book Study Group enjoyed each other's company while participating in the 5th session of a 6-session study of Diana Butler Bass's book "Grateful: The Subversive Practice of Giving Thanks". Our format followed our usual practice of recapping the material being studied that day, sharing our views on the material in small groups of 4 or 5, then having each small group share their views with the whole group.

In the past we have met in person in the church. Unfortunately, with the COVID-19 pandemic that has not been possible. Fortunately, with the help of ZOOM, and our

resident tech gurus Charlie Wardell and Kathryn Moase, we have been able to meet virtually using the same ZOOM link that St. Mark's uses for our Sunday services. Here is a screen shot, courtesy of Charlie, of the happy group that met on Friday the 13th, our lucky day!

Our last regular session is from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm on Friday, November 27th. Then on Friday, December 11th, also from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm, we will have our "party" to celebrate completion of yet another book and to pick the book for, and the timing of, our next book study. I have no idea how we are going to celebrate, given that we are all stuck in our

own homes, but I am open to any and all ideas!

Tentatively, the next book study would start on Friday, January 15th and would run every 2 weeks for 6 to 8 weeks. Typically, we pick a book that relates in some way, directly or indirectly, to our faith. Do you have a book that you want to study? Let Rob Peck or Carol Caise know and we will put it forward to the group on December 11th. No matter if you haven't been a part of the book study group ... we would love to have you participate and we would love to have your help in picking our next book!



# ST. MARK'S MASKS FOR HOPE FUNDRAISER

*By: Karen Boniface*

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A lovely selection available in the church Narthex

In the summer, a group of crafty St. Mark's ladies sewed masks for every member of our congregation. We hope you are wearing them in good health!

We are now offering these masks for sale, as a fundraiser for a donation of \$10 each. They will be available on the table in the narthex. There are many mask shapes and fabric designs to choose from.

These are now an essential item for your daily living for the unforeseeable future, and they also make great Christmas gifts!

Please consider bringing extra cash to buy masks when you come in to pick up your auction items.

Saturday, November 28th - 2 to 4 p.m., or Monday November 30th 7 to 8:30 p.m.

The church is open while Carol is working, most weekday mornings except Wednesday; please call Carol to let her know you are coming.

If you are interested in larger quantities, please contact Karen Boniface or Julia Peck.

Masks are also being given out through your Outreach Ministry team to those in need within our community.



Upcoming  
Events

# TREE LIGHTING SERVICE

**SATURDAY DECEMBER 5<sup>TH</sup> AT 4:30 PM**

*Please call Carol by Thursday, December 3 at noon.*

We will celebrate Advent Light as we share physically distanced companionship. As part of this event, a gift bag of goodies will be offered, along with hot chocolate! Please bring your own mug and mask! Dress appropriately as we will stay outside.

Please call or email Carol to let her know you are coming, and for us to track the number of people

attending. We may offer more than one group if necessary.

We must be in keeping with the current Covid regulations, so keep checking SM News for updates.

If you do attend, please let our gift bag elves know if you can deliver to another St. Mark's member who cannot attend. This helps keep us connected and reduces our volunteer workload.



LOOKING FOR SERENITY & PEACE THIS SEASON? JOIN US FOR OUR ONLINE SERVICE:

## QUIET CHRISTMAS

AN EVENING OF QUIET REFLECTION, CANDLELIGHT, AND SONG.

**THURSDAY  
DECEMBER  
10<sup>TH</sup> AT 7:30<sup>PM</sup>**



See the SM News for link details  
or watch on Facebook



Upcoming  
Events

# HEALTHY TAKE OUT SOUP DAY

**WEDNESDAY  
FEBRUARY 10<sup>TH</sup>  
FROM 3 TO 5<sup>PM</sup>**

*Sign up by Monday,  
January 25*



The Social Ministry team will be preparing a healthy lunch of homemade soup, a fresh biscuit and a piece of fruit. The soups will be cold, so please bring your own container or pot, to be earth friendly! There will be vegetarian offers, and the soups will be low in fat and salt, but still delicious! Soup flavours will be offered in early January, so watch your SM News!

We would also ask that you connect with other members to pick up meals for them. This will reduce the number of people arriving at the church, and makes it safer especially for the elderly seniors that otherwise would be venturing out in the cold.

The set up will be done similar to the Turkey Dinner, so please pre order and pay for your meal(s) by Monday, January 25. You will be given a time slot to pick up your orders.

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## CAITLIN'S EXPECTING!

We are happy and excited to announce that Caitlin Holland is expecting her second child at the end of February!

She has planned to be away for a month. She is conscientiously working with Janet and the choir to prerecord music ahead of time.

We will not seek a replacement Music Director during her time away, due to the complexities of providing music in these times.

We wish Caitlin and her family the best in these exciting times!



# A TURKEY DINNER LIKE NO OTHER

*By: Bart Boniface*

The Turkey Dinner has been a traditional fundraiser for St. Mark's over many years and the fact that we were still able to maintain that tradition while individuals, communities and our country struggle with the affects of COVID speaks directly to the life-affirming spirit found there.

At a time when social gatherings have been restricted, face to face worship services postponed and our emotions strained, the Take-Out Turkey Dinner became more than just a meal. It was a reflection of our values and a reminder to everyone that we are not alone. Thanks be to God.

In a sense, during this time of isolation all who participated in the dinner, sat at the same table for one evening and it proved to bring us closer together during a difficult time.

My heartfelt thanks go out to so many people who helped make this very special dinner happen. Thankfully we came very close to our anticipated (pre-COVID) budget amounts and the happiness it brought holds much greater value.

It was a Turkey Dinner like no other, during a time like no other, put on by a community of faith like no other.





# A CHRISTMAS MEMORY

*By: Bart Boniface*

The Children's Christmas Pageant has always been a favourite part of Christmas at St. Marks. But as much as the adults loved watching the final production, the real magic happened in the basement. The kids laughed, they found courage they didn't know they had, and the kids made memories that bond them together.

This year brought a new challenge to the pageant. How can we safely do a pageant? How do we perform over Zoom? But most importantly how do we make this a special memory?

I won't share all the details now, you need to tune in on Sunday December 13 but I can share with you one very special part of Pageant 2020.

It started when I asked Kathy Lisle

if her son Greg, his wife Amanda and her new grandbaby were in her bubble and if Kevin would be willing to be Joseph. Amanda would play Mary and baby Jesus would be Olivia. They all willing agreed and we set a date to take some pictures for the pageant.

When we arrived Kathy Lisle pulled out a handful of pictures. Wonderful, special pictures! They were of Kathy as Mary and Greg as baby Jesus and his Dad as Joseph.

I unknowingly made a very special memory. Baby Olivia would be baby Jesus just like her father was all those years ago. It tells the story of faithfulness and love, two things that Covid can't take away.



# THANK-YOU

