

THE Merry Christmas MEMO



DECEMBER 2021

WINTER EDITION

The Newsletter of St. Mark's United Church,
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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

by **JANET SMITH ZENWIRT** | MINISTER

Hurray up and wait! Advent and Christmas are on the horizon and many of us are “making a list and checking it twice.” Some of us make more than one list! Advent is a season that allows us to practice waiting and to prepare room in our hearts for God to be born anew in us.

We continue to spend our time in anxious expectation even as we make plans. We are weary from the constant vigilance of waiting and deciphering all the conflicting information regarding the pandemic. We are weary of the changes in our plans and the disruptions in our lives. We are tired of waiting for justice for all. Some of us are drained from the lack of newness or variety in our daily lives. Waiting is challenging. Yet, there is more. We also can see glimmers of hope and light flickering around us.

How do we “make room” for light and hope to seep in? Can we let go of things that no longer serve a purpose? Alternatively, can we find a bit more

space for something new? We may need a bit of both. Many have weathered significant storms this year while others are still waiting for the storms to subside. We can make room in our hearts to reach out in compassion and to accept kindness from others when we need assistance. I am inviting us to find a bit more breathing room in our hearts as we wait to accept the persistent hope of Christmas – joy amid sorrow, unconditional love offered, and peace experienced in an uncertain world.

Let's prepare room in our hearts to wait in joyful expectation. Please join us as we celebrate at St. Mark's. Together, we wait for God's love to be birthed in us, once again. Remember the perennial favourite Christmas hymn that we sing each year: *Joy to the World*.

Amid life, let's make room for joy, awe, and wonder to fill us and for the Spirit to dwell in us. Enjoy a starry night or the quiet of a gentle snowfall. Crank up the volume on your favourite Christmas tunes or listen to the subtle key or tempo changes in much-loved music. Watch the range of colours in a candle flame and the glow that surrounds the room. Let's open our hearts and make room in our lives for tenderness, joy, and love. This is something that we need not wait to share; let's do it now. Make room for love to enfold our world and all our relationships throughout this season.

***Joy to the world! The Lord is come: let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare him room,
& heaven and nature sing, & heaven and nature sing,
& heaven, & heaven & nature sing.***

CHAIR'S MESSAGE

by **KATHARINA MANASSIS** | BOARD CHAIR

We're heading into Advent: a time of waiting and anticipation. Waiting can provoke anxiety when we're anticipating an uncertain test result. Waiting can be exhausting when we're waiting for a break from work, or waiting for a pandemic to end. Even when the event we're anticipating is as positive and hopeful as Christmas, waiting can be hard.

Young children find it more difficult than most of us to wait for something positive, to delay gratification. That may be a reason for the holiday tradition of the chocolate Advent Calendar, which seems designed to sweeten the wait. I have fond memories of opening the small numbered portals of the calendar to find the chocolate surprises. I had a younger brother with whom I was expected to share, so each of us got a treat every other day. By the time I was seven I had figured out that the best Advent calendar strategy: I let him go first. That way, he would get all the treats on the odd-numbered days and I would get all the treats on the even-numbered days, and everyone knows that the biggest chocolate is always behind the door for December 24. On top of scoring an extra-large chocolate, I would also get some rare praise from my mother for being mature and kind because I had let my little brother go first. What could be better? I was obviously a rather competitive child.

In hindsight, I'm not sure the Advent calendar is such a good idea though, and not just because of nutritional concerns about having chocolate for breakfast. Rather, the

calendar encourages us to focus on counting down the days when it is so much more meaningful to focus on making the days count. Waiting times need not be wasted times. Some of the best conversations happen in the check-out line at the supermarket. Some of the kindest gestures occur among people stuck on a delayed train together. Our upcoming Advent daily food collection is another great example of making the waiting time count.

Let's not merely plan for December 24 and December 25. Let's plan for December 5 and 10 and 13 and all the other days in Advent. In some traditions, waiting times are

considered a special opportunity to reconnect with the Sacred. Whether you pray, breathe, walk in nature, or walk a labyrinth, pencil in some time for your soul. Waiting times can also reconnect us with each other. Try cooking or decorating *with* your family rather than *for* your family. You might be surprised what you learn about each other when you're not having "serious" conversations. Find a way to reconnect with your church family too, whether on Zoom, by phone, at an outdoor or drive-by event, and (when it's possible) in the building as well. Waiting is never easy, but with practice we can learn to wait well.



GIVING US A LIFT

UPDATE

by **BART BONIFACE** | PROPERTY CHAIR

As our mission statement indicates, we are Progressive, Inclusive and Life Affirming. The elevator was approved at our 2020 Annual Congregational meeting to allow people of ALL abilities to move between the sanctuary and the lower level of the church. Though the need for an elevator has been known for some years, we have now come to understand that this level of inclusion is essential to live into our mission statement.

In the September MEMO we reported that \$36,000 had been donated towards our goal of \$64,000 to fund the installation of an elevator. Now, we are absolutely

THRILLED
TO REPORT
THAT THROUGH
YOUR GENEROUS
DONATIONS,
WE HAVE NOT
ONLY REACHED
OUR ELEVATOR
FUNDRAISING
GOAL OF
\$64,000
BUT HAVE MODESTLY
EXCEEDED IT.

The thermometer sign, marking our fund-raising progress will now soar to the top.

In Galatians 5:22-25, Paul says: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. ... If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. ... 6:7 You reap whatever you sow... 6:10 So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially those of the household of faith."

We are very grateful for ALL donations received for the "elevator project" via the Building Fund and look forward to celebrating the completion of this very meaningful project.

Construction of the elevator is scheduled to begin the week of November 15th with completion before the end of the year if all goes well. Here you see the Property Ministry Team busy relocating



the organ in preparation for the construction work to begin.

With Appreciation from St. Mark's Elevator Team: Bart Boniface (Chair), Wendy Jarvis, Gord Maunder, Teresa Smith, Luella Stephens.



DEEP ROOTS

by **BRIAN MACFARLANE**



As many of you may already know, this autumn the famous and loved apple tree in Bettie and Dave MacKenzie's backyard reached the end of its working life.

Losing a tree happens, as with all forms of life it is a part of the course in the circle we are all within. This particular tree was special, it had significance, it had history, it had stories, it also had a lot of faith put into it.

Going back in time to the mid 1950's, a severe housing shortage in Toronto quickly transformed the landscape of Scarborough with a tidal wave of new homes, apartments and plaza's. Farms across the borough that were all a part of the rich agrarian history of the township and borough, worked by pioneer families for generations, were disappearing fast. In a wave moving west to east, south to north, the gaps between the villages of old, were filled in with subdivisions.

In 1971 with a growing family Bettie and Dave made the decision to move to a larger house than the one where they resided in the Curran Hall community, just around the corner from St. Marks. In 1971 they moved to their present home close to Meadowvale Rd. and Lawrence Ave. which had been just recently constructed. The land on which the house was built was a part originally of a 120 hectare farm purchased in 1922 by Beatrice and John Watson, remaining at that size until 1970 at which time with the passing of the last

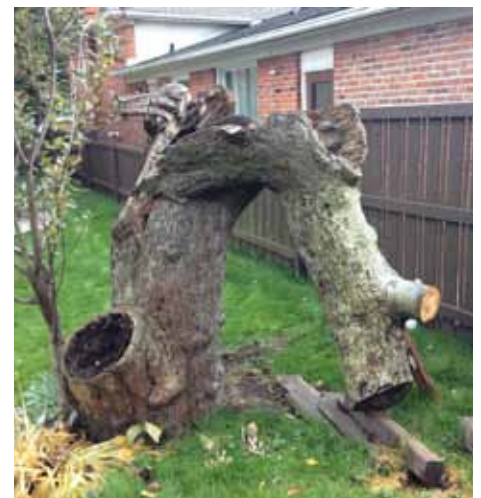
of his parents and the encroachment of a growing suburbia, son Cameron sold all but 10 hectares of the farm which was maintained as a smaller working farm. For some time after the farm continued in providing produce that was sold at supermarkets across Toronto and for 74 years by the family at their north St. Lawrence Market stall.

When the MacKenzie's moved into their home, a remnant of the farmland, an old and haggard looking apple tree from the Watson orchard remained in their backyard on the south side, looking neglected and in poor shape. Despite its appearance, where most people would opt to have it removed, Dave and Bettie looked beyond this and saw its potential. Initially with some help, Dave's father helped prune it and an arborist was consulted for advice on what was needed next to keep it in good health and productive. Over the years and up until recently, the tree has had holes patched with concrete, weak and failing limbs supported with multiple braces and where limbs have broken off, new shoots grafted on to healthy limbs. When the tree finally collapsed it was found to be extensively hollowed out by insects and weakened with the exception of some of the younger limbs which were intact.

Incredible that it survived as long as it did but how telling of the love, attention and patience it was given to make it possible to bear fruit for as long as it did. What is known about the age of the tree is that it could have been between 87 and 100 years old. The Watsons recorded the loss of their orchard from severe weather in the winter of 1933, and though not known, this tree could have possibly been one of the ones to have survived that particular winter. The tree, bearing the variety of apple Dave advised me is called a Heritage

Greening, was famous at St. Marks for the delicious pies it produced as a fund raising initiative for the church over many years, orders quickly filled after the church service with their availability announced. Working together with Harry and Suzanne Brown the MacKenzie's produced the apple pies, forty at each time offered, and over the years, several hundred were produced which were delivered frozen. Dave and Harry would wash and peel the apples and both Bettie and Suzanne who have experience in catering, made the pies. This being the tree's last year to produce a crop, fruit collected from it was given to volunteers in the congregation who baked apple pies that were enjoyed by many who purchased meals from November's turkey dinner.

I am grateful as I know many of you are of Harry, Suzanne, Dave and Bettie's beautiful teamwork as congregants at St. Marks and as neighbours, and their contribution of time, talents and heart that went into all aspects of this initiative and others we have at St. Marks enjoyed for many years, also for the MacKenzie's dedication to the tree, sharing not only its fruit, but the example of love and faith they put in to its survival over the fifty years in their care. *Thank you,*



THE FINANCIALS

by **WENDY JARVIS** | FINANCE CHAIR

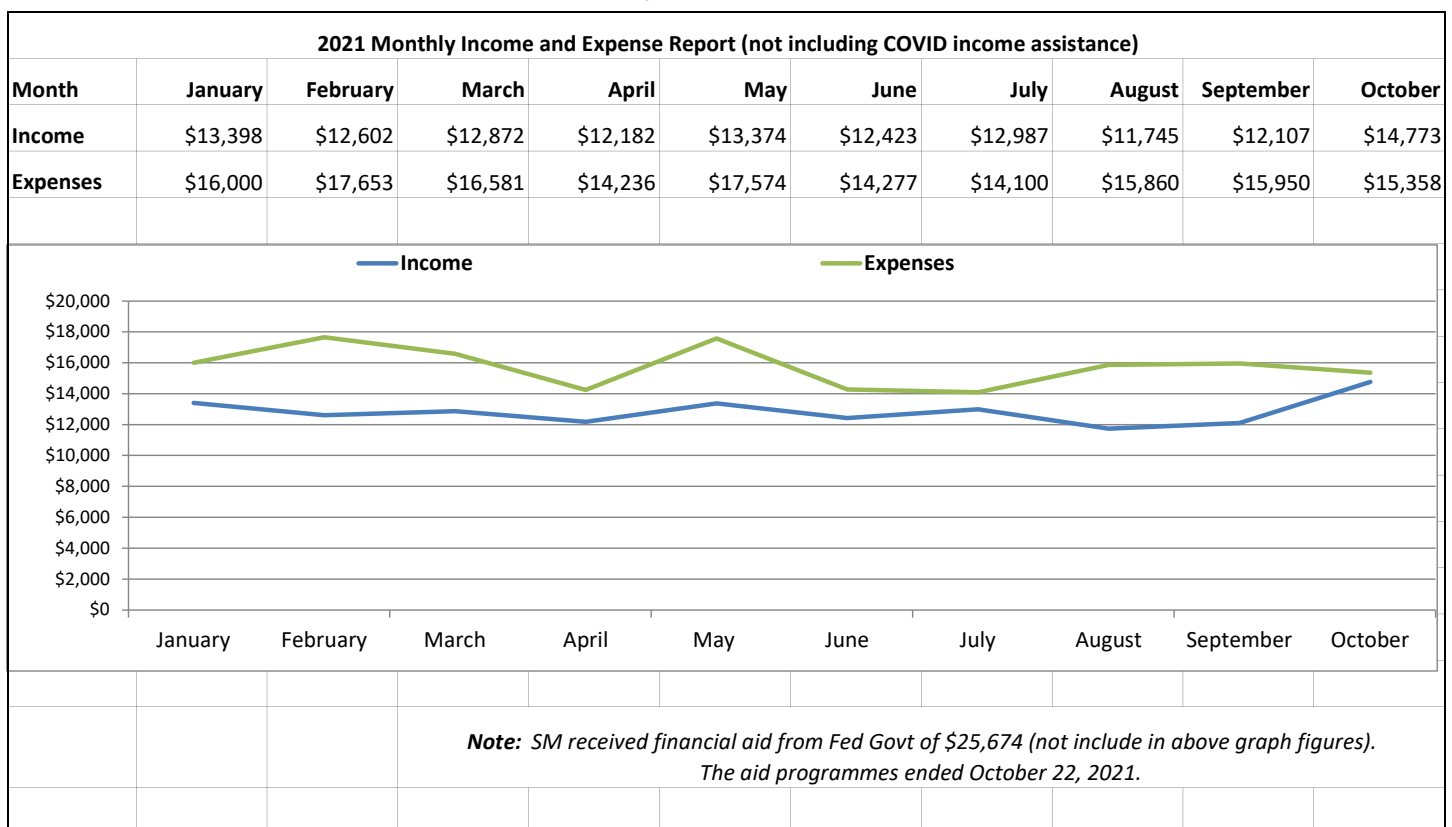
The attached graph shows that St Mark's income vs expense gap narrowed at the end of October. We're tremendously grateful for the faithful offerings of our members & adherents that have contributed to "narrowing the gap". Our year-

to-date deficit as of October 31 is now about \$3,500, and we hope, with the help of the annual Red Envelope campaign (which starts with Advent) to finish the year with a no substantial deficit. That would be a remarkable achievement in our

second year of COVID, considering the resultant loss of rental revenue and a more limited fund-raising opportunities.

With thanks from the Stewardship & Finance team.

Income vs Expenses as of October 31, 2021



FALL, DID YOU SAY FALL?

by **GAYLE FEENEY**

If you fall down, you pick yourself up, brush yourself off and start all over again. Your Within Reach Outreach Team is constantly brushing itself off and starting all over again. Yes, this is what your Team is constantly doing as we gather steam for each new initiative.

We have shopped until we dropped to provide eggs, bananas, lentils, pasta, pasta sauce, soup, cereal and good old KD for the Christ Church Food Bank. "A" is for Apple and your own Bettie Mackenzie hand polished 5 large boxes of apples which were also delivered to the Food Bank. October's Drive By Food Drive was most successful from a volume of goods perspective. We collected nearly \$1100.00 in donations and 40 boxes of food. Christ Church is



always sooooo surprised by and appreciative of your efforts on their behalf. When we began to support the Food Bank we were helping 50 families. During the summer some 70 families were helped each week and now over 80 families are seeking support. Each family can represent up to 6 people on the average. OUCH!!!! Our mission is to REACH OUT and YOU are.

Congratulations on a job well done, St Marks.

Can you hear tummy's growling? It must be lunch time. There's a lunch bunch, who frequent 202 Markham Road, where folks can pick up a hot or cold meal. St Marks gave Agincourt Community

Services a cheque for \$250.00 to help them to provide lunch for the folks who visit the centre. As well, 6 bags of clothing and shoes were gratefully received by the folks at Agincourt Community Services.

From tummies to backsides, you do it all St Marks. One of the schools in our catchment area reached out to us for help. Their kindergarten children, who had accidents, (too much information, right!!) did not have dry underwear to change into. St Marks you went to the rescue. The teacher said that the gift of new underwear for little backsides was like a gift of gold! A beautiful card was received thanking you for the gift of backpacks, snacks, and undies.

Your good work in the community does not go unnoticed. It was acknowledged by the Scarboro Golf and Country Club. They chose to generously support St Marks Outreach Fund so that your good work will continue into the Christmas season.

There is no "I" in team and once again, your Outreach Team would like to thank the St Marks congregation for their continued support. You ARE making a difference.



A MESSAGE FROM YOUR ST. MARK'S SWRC REPS

by **GLEN GREENWOOD & RANDY STROUD** | ST. MARK'S SWRC REPS

Across Canada, the United Church has created regions, with Regional Councils working to support United Churches within their region. St. Mark's (SM) is part of the Shining Waters region and the Shining Waters Regional Council (SWRC) has been working on vision, governance and policy for our Region since 2019.

SWRC has been busy these past few months preparing for the 2021 Fall Regional meeting which was held online on Saturday, November 13, 2021. Planning for the fall regional meeting involved a tremendous amount of work and a lot of communication with regional council reps, including your St. Mark's SWRC reps, Glen Greenwood and Randy Stroud. Glen and Randy have been monitoring the various communications from the regional council, including several online town hall information meetings, which Glen participated in. Glen has shared information with the SM board members. This message shares the key learnings from all the various communications we received from SWRC pre-fall meeting and from the 2021 fall meeting itself.

The 2021 Fall Meeting Resource

Book is available on the SWRC website if you are interested in all the details about the issues discussed at the Fall Meeting held 13Nov21. You can also find the meeting agenda as well as all other resources and meeting materials on the SWRC:

Fall 2021 Regional Meeting - Shining Waters (shiningwatersregionalcouncil.ca)

(This link posted Monday, November 15, 2021 has an uploaded recording of the meeting)

Here are our key learnings:

I SWRC is well organized and communicates well, keeping us well informed about the vision, governance and policies that touch us as members of SM and SWRC. A variety of topics were discussed at the fall meeting and if interested in the detail, please read the Resource Book and other documents available on the SWRC website (as above). A significant portion of the Fall Regional Meeting's agenda was dedicated to considering and voting on proposals intended for action by either the Regional Council, or by the General Council next summer. Eleven

(11) proposals were submitted for consideration at the regional meeting (2 for SWRC and 9 for General Council consideration). The proposals are available on the SWRC website (as above).

2 One key topic covered at the meeting was a budget for SWRC. SMs is currently going through a budget process for us, so a comment on the budget for the region may be of interest. While SMs has a budget of less than \$200,000, SWRC has a budget over \$2.7 million. Part of the SWRC income comes from an assessment levied by SWRC on churches like SMs (our assessment is under \$7,000 annually). So when you donate to SMs, you are not only supporting the excellent work being accomplished at SM, but you also support the mission and work of SWRC. That should make you feel very good! Another part of the SWRC budget involves grants supporting worthy recipients. So when you donate to SMs, you are not only supporting the excellent outreach work being accomplished at SM, but you also support grants from



SWRC to worthy recipients. That should also make you feel very good indeed! You are supporting worthy causes by donating to SMs, both local causes when you allocate donations to our community outreach programs and outside our local community when you allocate your donations to support SMs mission and work, including the assessment money we provide to SWRC.

3 Glen attended the SWRC budget Town Hall meeting online on 10Nov21. Here's Glen's comments from that meeting: "For me, the key item was the time devoted to UPRC (United Property Resource Corporation). Essentially SWRC, and by implication, the UCC, (all of it) has entered an association with UPRC. In the past, when churches closed, the property was sold, (this is a general statement). That revenue

helped sustain the church. The church has decided that we need to have a broader path to steward our properties. The church has realized that these churches, built some years ago, are a gift from previous generations, (Michael Blair, General Secretary, shared this insight) "The church," has an opportunity to repurpose these properties for the common good of the church, its community, and the environment. Here is a link to UPRC. It offers a glimpse into what they do as partners with SWRC. <https://uprc.ca/>

4 At the 10 November 21 Town Hall meeting, David Jagger (Stewardship & Gifts Officer, Philanthropy Unit, General Council), made a presentation on M&S (Mission and Service). The presentation included that SMs is one of the four churches he offers as examples. Maybe, just maybe we get a gold star. Thanks

to all at SMs who serve our church and community! Your donations allocated to M&S should make you feel proud, so now, you should be feeling really, really, really good!

5 Glen attended the online SWRC 2021 Fall Meeting on Saturday, 13 November 21. The meeting was widely attended, representing approximately 166 churches. Nominations for SWRC executive, one commission, 7 committees & General Council Commissioners were completed and the President-Elect: Betty Lou McNabb was installed.

As Glen likes to say "So...as the NYT theme reads, "That's all the news that's fit to print." At least for now."



IN PERSON SUNDAY SCHOOL HAS BEEN A *BLAST*!!!

by **ALISSA DUHASKY** | SUNDAY SCHOOL COORDINATOR

On person Sunday school has been a blast!!! This fall we have been blessed with clear skies each week as we have learned about “The Fruits of the Spirit”, played games and did crafts. The highlight of our Sundays was Halloween and our Trunk or Treat. We had ten cars offer candy and games to our St. Mark kids as well as 30 local families. It was such a fun time and we hope to make it an annual event. Thank you to all our host cars.





Upcoming
Events



St. Mark's United Church

Progressive, Inclusive, Life-Affirming

Join us for our online services on Facebook.

ADVENT 1 NOV 28 ★ 11:00^{AM}

ADVENT 2 DEC 6 ★ 11:00^{AM}

QUIET CHRISTMAS DEC 9 ★ 7:30^{PM}
QUIET REFLECTION, CANDLELIGHT, & SONG

ADVENT 3 DEC 12 ★ 11:00^{AM}
PAGEANT SUNDAY

ADVENT 4 DEC 19 ★ 11:00^{AM}
CHORAL SUNDAY

CHRISTMAS EVE DEC 24 ★ 7:30^{PM}
STORIES, SONG, & CANDLELIGHT COMMUNION



ADVENT AGE

Calendar

This advent we bring gifts
to the Christ child by
supporting our food bank.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
November 28 Advent 1 –HOPE rice	November 29 pasta	November 30 can of tuna	December 1 tooth paste	December 2 brown beans	December 3 pancake mix	December 4 lentils
December 5 Advent 2 – PEACE soup	December 6 macaroni and cheese (like KD)	December 7 tea bags	December 8 pasta sauce	December 9 tinned fruit	December 10 tinned vegetables	December 11 apple sauce
December 12 Advent 3 – JOY crackers	December 13 instant coffee	December 14 oatmeal	December 15 paper towels	December 16 peanut butter	December 17 toothbrush	December 18 sugar
December 19 Advent 4 – LOVE cookies	December 20 box of cereal	December 21 canned milk	December 22 juice	December 23 kidney beans	December 24 bar of hand soap	Christmas 

- Each day, set aside the item listed for that day (These are items the food bank has indicated they would like to receive)
- Substitute any items, if you wish. (Items listed are only suggestions)
- An alternative might be to collect the same item each day during Advent – or a portion thereof. (For example, you may prefer to collect soup – or some other item - the 1st week, KD the 2nd, brown beans the 3rd, tinned vegetables the last week or even soup or some other item throughout.)
- Deliver to church Wednesday, December 29th between 1:00 and 3:00 p.m. or call Gayle Feeney for pickup.