



MEMO

NOVEMBER 2023

ADVENT EDITION

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

Message from the Minister



By: Janet Smith Zenwirt, Minister

I saw a few snowflakes mid-morning on Hallowe'en. It was a reminder that winter is coming. Shades of yellow, orange, and muted reds are still hanging from some of the trees and covering the grass as I write this. Wildlife has been active as all prepare for winter's cold. I wonder how the deer that nibbled on the berries from the trees along the church driveway during the summer are preparing? All of creation is preparing and waiting for winter, a time of restoration and renewal.

We are also waiting for Christmas. The stores are filled with decorations and gifts. Christmas movies are being aired and Christmas music soon will fill the airwaves and stores. Some of us are planning activities and making to-do-lists. We yearn for joy and levity. It has been a challenging year for our world and many of us. We wait

for peace and justice for all people. We wait for action regarding climate change, especially after the summer's wildfires and extreme heat in many locales. Some of us wait with dread for December to end as we struggle with the holiday season. It may be the first year without a loved one. Feelings of unease and memories may fill others as well. We wait. This is part of our Advent ritual; Christmas and the months of winter are not here yet.

In our waiting, can we also find time for restoration and renewal? What if we took time to savour nature's beauty? Can you slow down enough to watch the snow falling gently on the trees? Can you watch the natural world preparing for the winter months? Gardens are finding rest as roots strengthen. Animals are building nests or burrows. Let's pause long enough to witness the wonder that surrounds us. We also can

witness the joy and love in gathering with others. As you read through the pages of this newsletter, you will see that we have held some wonderful activities at the church and have plans for more. Let's join the rhythm of creation and find balance as we wait with joyful expectation.

As the days grow shorter and colder, let us embrace the longer nights. The light will return but not yet. We wait with all creation remembering that this time brings in new beginnings. We can wait together like Mary and Elizabeth did. They supported each other as they shared tears and laughter. Together, we wait for God's love to be birthed in us, once again. Let's wait. Something is on the horizon. That is the Advent promise for all creation.

I wish you hope, peace, joy, and love during our Advent and Christmas seasons.

Chairs Message

By: Brian MacFarlane

The past year at St.Marks has been a busy one, a time of gradual return to familiar activities though with precautions, mindful that the ongoing saga of life in the time of Covid is still requiring due care in all of our interactions with others. I am grateful for our ministry personnel and the leadership and participants of our ministry teams and their support from members of the congregation in the work of St.Marks within and also beyond our church building's four walls.

Within our church community and across the city homelessness has reached a state of emergency. Our church community parks, Botany Hill Park, Morningside and Curran Hall Ravine Parks have all had encampments this year where tents have been set up to become homes for many without the ability to afford any other type. As the weather has grown colder the city announced late in October that a warming centre will open in Scarborough close to our church in the building that housed the congregation of St.John the Divine for over 60 years. Since the announcement was made I have had ongoing communication with contacts I have made with the city to determine what role St.Marks

can fill to help with the success of the centre. I have suggested that we can provide a temporary space for donated clothing and toiletries to be dropped off sorted and delivered as needed to the centre to allow for their clients to get through this time with warmth and dignity and to know that they are thought of and not alone.

The warming centre manager will contact me sometime in November once she has a sense of the needs of the centre and when this happens I will be able to share this information with our congregation and the wider community with a call for donations and volunteers to help.

Over the past year a constant subject of conversation at our church board meetings has been that there is a need for change. Since Covid came into our everyday lives, the world and how it thinks and functions has evolved and so should we. The cost of necessary and costly renovations to our church building this past year and the realization that more will be required to ensure the good upkeep of the building for future use, is telling that decisive action plans are needed. This requires all hands on board as we look for new ways to stay fiscally sound amid hard times

economically for many and the cost of everything going up with less money coming in to the church.

It is felt change in the form of renewal is our best move forward at St.Marks, and not with the sole objective to fill seats on Sunday mornings, but most important to provide a place to build new authentic nurturing communities of belonging inside our building but in some cases outside of our congregation, still aligned with our foremost value of providing a safe and inclusive place in Scarborough.

Renewal is important work that will take time and energy. It is neither overly pessimistic nor optimistic – it takes a realistic view of the situation. Do we have the courage to make the change? Do we have the courage to reach for transformation and renewal? I am hoping optimistically for our congregations support and participation in the journey of renewal that we will begin at St.Marks in the new year. To every thing there is a season!

I wish you and yours a blessed Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

Social Teams

By: Barbara Merriam

It has been a very busy fall season in our church. From keeping up with supplies for volunteers once again signing up to host coffee time, to the Welcome Back Breakfast.

After being on summer holidays a continental breakfast was offered for the first time this year on behalf of the church board at the end of September as a new way to wish all a warm and inviting way back into the life of our church. The response to that breakfast was so positive that the Social Team has decided to offer another breakfast

in December on the morning of the children's pageant since the choral service falls on Christmas Eve morning this year. So please do circle the date on your calendars Sunday December 17th and we look forward to seeing you there.

In October we celebrated St. Mark's 75th Anniversary with cake served up by our minister Rev. Janet Smith Zenwirt and one of our anniversary award winners Carolyn Nicholson. We also celebrated the fact that Christopher Niemela was presented with the

Baillie Volunteer Service Award.

All social team members and social volunteers helped out and work hard at the annual Turkey Dinner early in November. And of course we will be at it again as we are looking forward to having people from the surrounding community into the church for the return of the Bazaar and Crafts Market on Saturday November 18th.

If you would like to join our band of merry workers, please reach out to the Nominating Team or the current Social Team Chair Barbara Merriam.

Update of the "St. Mark's Family" Photo Directory

By: Luella and Tom Stephens

Having a photo directory is a great way to get to know the members of our church family better and we would like to update our family records from the last one we did in 2019.

- In due course we will advise Spring, 2024 dates when we will take photos before and after church

- If for any reason the dates and/or getting to church is a challenge, we will also take photos where and when it suits

- We encourage everyone to have their photo updated, even if you would rather remain "forever young"

If you have any questions please contact Luella or Tom (416) 283-1267 or email tom.stephens@sympatico.ca

St. Mark's Comes Together to Distribute Hope & Nourishment to Those in Need

By: Gayle Feeney

We, at St Marks, are sooooo fortunate to be able to celebrate all of the important events in our lives from birthdays, to holidays, to times of remembrance. We often celebrate with traditions that centre around food. Having said that, food insecurity has become an integral part of our everyday lives here in Scarborough and that sad fact must be acknowledged. When I first began my term as Chair of Outreach, fifty

Families were being supported by the Christ Church Food Bank and now one hundred families, representing as many as five hundred people, line up each Thursday morning as early as 7:30 to insure that they will be serviced that day. Because of this increased demand and Outreach's desire to enable as many families as possible, Outreach has made food insecurity a priority. We have tried to do as many large Costco shoppings

as our budget will allow. We provide bananas, bread, cereal, Kraft Dinner, kidney beans, toilet paper etc. for the families. As well, we shop in bulk for food store specials. Tuna and pasta are on sale this week and we will buy each of these items for the 100 families. Thank you for supporting Outreach and know that we are trying to make a difference in our community.



Financial Update

By: Janet MacKay, Chair of Stewardship and Finance

As is often the case, things have been very busy around St. Mark's this fall. We started off September with the Golf Tournament, then we had a Turkey Dinner the first week of November, the Gift Card Campaign in October, and the Bazaar is coming up on November 18th. These are just a few of the ways that we as a congregation raise funds to allow St. Mark's to fulfill its mission. The unfortunate reality is that our weekly offerings do not cover all our operating expenses. We as a congregation must and do step up to fundraise so that we can continue to reach outside our walls and into our community.

Going forward, this will be even more critical as we face a period where major repairs must be done to keep our

building in good repair. It may seem hard to believe but our building is now 40 years old. Loans were required to make several major repairs in 2023. It may seem scary to some that St. Mark's has taken on the burden of loans. However, loans can be viewed as a sure sign of hope for the future. If we weren't firmly convinced that we as a church and as a congregation had a future, we would be only doing the bare minimum. Instead, we are preparing and investing in our future and declaring that we plan to be here in our community for many years to come.

As we move towards the end of our financial year, we are providing a snapshot of where we stand this year.

We are indeed running a deficit, but it is not as bad as we expected.

We are in a better position than

expected for two main reasons – the Golf Tournament was not budgeted for, so that provided additional funds. Secondly, the funds we received through the United Church of Canada to help cover additional costs related to Rev. Janet Smith Zenwirt's sick leave. In the interest of brevity, the details of this expense are not shown but I will provide the details to any member on request. All figures are as of October 31, 2023.

	ACTUAL	BUDGET
Fundraising	21,393	15,000
Offerings	125,289	165,100
Rental Income	5,850	7,000
Social	30	0
Total Receipts	152,472	187,100
Expenses	160,801	218,900
Deficit	-8,329	-31,800

Please renew your support of St. Mark's as you are able in the coming weeks and months as we journey forward into our future.

Respectfully,

The Helen Jones Library November 2023

By: Karen Wigle



Did you know there is a copy of the fall book study book available to borrow?

To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings by is a “blend of elegant, poetic language and spiritual insight (that) offers readers comfort and encouragement on their journeys through life... O’Donohue explains “blessing” as a way of life....O’Donohue awakens readers to timeless truths and shows the power they have to answer contemporary dilemmas and ease us through periods of change.”

Here are other new books that you might enjoy reading:

The Blue Wonder Why the Sea Glows, Fish Sing, and Other Astonishing Insights from the Ocean by marine biologist Frauke Bagusche uses photos and prose to take “readers on a fascinating and beautiful deep-sea dive into the ocean.... an intimate account of the beauty, mystery, and amazing science of the ocean.”

Seven Fallen Feathers, “Tanya Talaga’s account of teen lives and deaths in and near Thunder Bay is detailed, balanced and heart-rending....Using a sweeping narrative focusing on the lives of the students, award-winning investigative journalist Tanya Talaga delves into the history of this small northern city that has come to manifest Canada’s long struggle with human rights violations against Indigenous communities.” It was the winner of the RBC Taylor Prize in 2018 and was a finalist for the 2018 Hilary Weston Writers’ Trust Prize for Nonfiction.

The Little Community That Could The Story Behind Our Story East Scarborough Storefront’s First Decade of Building Community Together by Kathy Mann.

Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice by Rupert Ross. “In his new book, Rupert Ross, who spent 14 years working as a member of the Canadian mainstream legal system in northwestern Ontario, describes the ongoing struggle in native communities to develop a system of justice that is consistent with traditional aboriginal teachings.”

Africville is Jeffrey Colvin’s first novel. It traces the story of the Black community near Halifax, first settled by Jamaican prisoners the British expelled in 1788. This story begins in 1933 as schoolgirl Kath Ella follows the multi-generational tale of her family.

Men's Breakfast

By: Bart Boniface

Next Men's Breakfast is scheduled to take place on Thursday, Nov.23rd and per Gord's recommendation we are going to try KATHRYN'S, located on Old Kingston Rd. in Pickering in a small plaza on the N.E. corner of Rougemount & Old Kingston Rd. Our usual meet up time is 8:30am. Please let me know if you plan on attending.

Interlocking Stone work

By: Bart Boniface

St. Mark's is going to have the interlocking stone at the back of the church replaced and regraded to allow for better water drainage possibly towards the end of next week or the week following. To reduce the cost of this work we have the option of removing the stone ourselves and we hope to use the old stones to try and level out the emergency vehicle route that runs along the cedar hedge that is south of the church. I realize that this work is not suitable for everyone, but hopefully there are enough of us to make this happen. Our first go at the stones will be this coming Sunday afternoon at 2pm and the thought was that we could pick away on Monday and Tuesday if necessary. If you are willing and able to help please let me know. Heavy work gloves would be recommended and we currently have three wheelbarrows available, a couple more would be good.

St. Mark's Property Committee Update

By: Randy Stroud, Chair Property Committee

Your Property Committee (Randy Stroud; Larry Smith; Ken Niece; Reg Lanning plus ongoing property project volunteers Bart Boniface and Brian MacFarlane) continue to work to repair and maintain our 40+ year old church building and property. Recently, you may have noticed a few maintenance projects on the go. Or perhaps you have simply noticed jobs have been completed resulting in improvements and ongoing maintenance of our church building. You may recall that your Trustees – who are responsible for the church building and property - asked your Property Committee to arrange for a building assessment by a professional engineering firm to get an expert opinion on what our 40+ year old building needs in terms of repairs and/or maintenance. An assessment was completed by NoVi Engineering last April, and Property has been working on the outcome of that assessment ever since. Our Trustees have also been working hard to find the funding needed to hire contractors to do the more complicated and/or technical maintenance and repairs highlighted by the engineer who conducted the building assessment.

Some of the jobs completed over the

past few months are listed for your review.

1. The downstairs washrooms have been renovated. There was an urgent need to make repairs to the floors in the downstairs washrooms, because the floors had sunk below the floor drains, such that water on the floors would not drain properly. Over the past two years, we have had two floods in the basement with water spreading out into the hallways, the nursery, the kitchen and the large meeting room downstairs with lots of water damage that had to be cleaned up. To avoid future flooding of the downstairs, in case of water flooding from a burst water pipe or water overflow, the floors had to be re-sloped to ensure flood water went down the floor drains and not spread out into the rest of the downstairs rooms. The floors in the downstairs washrooms were successfully repaired and the washroom renovations have resulted in improved functional washrooms for the benefit of all who use the church space. The work was completed by Ron Gooch Project Management with many unanticipated, out-of-scope

issues handled and many upgrades to materials and fixtures donated by Ron and his team - free of charge - resulting in major savings on the job to the church. Many, many thanks to Ron and his team!

2. Heating in the downstairs kitchen has been improved. You may not notice the heaters themselves, but you should notice improved heating in the kitchen – although when the kitchen is being used for an event, there is much hustle and bustle and heating is the last thing on anyone's mind. But heating is important, at the very least to ensure water pipes do not freeze and burst in winter.
3. Last year, we had an electrical system inspection conducted by an electrician, to satisfy a building insurance requirement. We have completed the upgrades and repairs uncovered by the electrical system inspection thanks to many, many volunteer hours spent by our friendly electrician Mr. Bob Copeland (not a member of St. Mark's, but he has spent a lot of time at the church working on electrical repairs – for free). Thanks Bob – again!

4. The engineering assessment uncovered issues with brick spalling on outside brickwork on the building. Spalling is brick deterioration including fine cracks that develop in the brickwork over time. If not addressed in a timely fashion, the cracks can widen by water getting inside the cracks then freezing when the temperature drops below zero. If a crack in the bricks reaches the foundation, there can be major issues with the stability of the building. A contractor addressed the brick spalling issues all around the church and found a few cracks that had progressed to the foundation, but was able to repair the problem. Luckily, we have a good brick building and it sits on a solid foundation now that those repairs have been made.
 5. The engineering assessment also pointed out the immediate need for repairing cracked caulking around the windows and doors in the church building. Good caulking prevents rain and wind from getting into the window and door frames and causing problems. All windows and doors that needed caulking repairs, including the stained glass window, have been repaired by an expert caulking contractor.
 6. The overhang in the front of the church was hit by a too tall bus earlier this year. The bus driver reported the incident to Carol in the church office, and we were able to get a settlement from the bus company's insurance company for the damages, to cover repair costs. Repairs to the overhang, including repairs to loose and failing bricks in the column that holds up one end of the overhang have been completed. It's good to have a roof over our heads, especially our outdoor overhang roof on a rainy day.
 7. Recently, you may have noticed the lower patio at the back of the church is being worked on. The back patio has had water drainage problems for some time – most noticeable after a summer rain storm. We asked several contractors to provide an estimate on repairs to the patio to fix the drainage problems, but no contractor was interested in repair work. Quotes to replace the existing patio with new patio pavers and fix the water drainage issues were quite expensive. Bart to the rescue! Bart 'I know a guy' Boniface knew a guy – of course – who put us in touch with a salesperson at Unilock who agreed to donate new patio pavers to the church. The Unilock salesperson also recommended an installer (who Bart knew) who provided a reasonable quote for installing the donated pavers and address the drainage issues. But we had to remove the old bricks ourselves to make the space ready for installation. Bart organized a group of volunteers who removed the old bricks over several days. Well done volunteers, and many, many thanks for all your efforts on the patio project. Take a look at the new patio, when it's finished. And add your thanks to Bart for knowing guys who can help us get things done at a good price, and the volunteers who helped remove the old bricks. A new patio with good drainage will be a splendid space for all users of the church, both visually and functionally. Enjoy it!
- Your Property Committee and Property project volunteers will continue to ensure St. Mark's will have a safe and functioning building and property for all to use and enjoy.



ST. MARK'S UNITED CHURCH

PROGRESSIVE, INCLUSIVE, LIFE-AFFIRMING

Join us for our online services on Facebook.

<i>Advent 1</i>	Dec 3 Communion	★	11:00 ^{AM}
<i>Advent 2</i>	Dec 10 The Waiting Continues	★	11:00 ^{AM}
<i>Quiet Christmas</i>	Dec 12 A time for reflection, candlelight, song	★	7:30 ^{PM}
<i>Advent 3</i>	Dec 17 Children's Pageant	★	11:00 ^{AM}
<i>Advent 4</i>	Dec 24 Music Sunday with Choir	★	11:00 ^{AM}
<i>Christmas Eve</i>	Dec 24 We tell the story with carols, candles & Communion. [All ages]	★	7:30 ^{PM}