

## OUT OF THE COLD

The fourth season of Out of the Cold held at Knox United draws to a close as this issue of *The MEMO* is published. The programme at this location, running from November 1 to the end of March, can feed up to 50 people, and sleep 20. However, on one bitterly cold night this year, 27 people slept over – 22 on mats, the other five on blankets on the floor.

Each year, we see many of the same people as the previous seasons. Some of them have had and lost housing. Some of them live in the tenacious grip of an alcohol addiction. A few of them travel together daily, caring for and protecting each other. One man who had housing and lost it this year remarked that he was just lonely and missed the companionship of his homeless friends. He couldn't take the isolated feeling of being alone in his room. Since then, he has acquired housing again, through another agency. This time he's more hopeful; he has a support person and she's awesome.

St. Mark's hosted Out of the Cold on February 13/14. We had a Valentine's theme and all the guests received a small gift bag with personal-size toiletries. And chocolates, of course. Donations of clothing and books were set out at the beginning of the Friday evening. The books disappeared in a flash, and everyone who needed a clothing item, was pleased with her or his selection.

We served a turkey dinner with all the trimmings to over 30 people, who left the table totally stuffed. Several people who are not associated with St. Mark's but who had heard of our participating came out to help, too.

Preparing breakfast the next morning was, as usual, a really fun time. Not all St. Markers in attendance fully appreciated 5:45 am starting time but they could've fooled the rest of us – they were cheerful and totally on the job! Our leftovers from both meals were delivered to Agincourt Community Services Association who expanded their serving the community to include Saturdays now.

Thanks to all those who volunteered their time and talents for Out of the Cold !

## COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND PARTNERSHIP

With the great response to last fall's invitation to help St. Mark's become financially sustainable, able to support all of its core ministries without reliance on a full-time week day tenant, we are now freed to explore some new, and previously "unaffordable", uses of the space in the basement! What a great opportunity! And blessing!

In this spirit, we are exploring with West Hill Community Services establishing a Community Kitchen programme! More details as they become available, but the idea is that six or eight people, with the direction of a certified food preparation person, will gather in our kitchen on a regular basis to learn more about nutrition, healthy, economical shopping practices, and meal preparation. They will eat together, build relationships, and have food to take home.

St. Mark's has recently made a donation to the Dental Clinic at the Scarborough

Urban Health Outreach Centre. The clinic helps people with absolutely no money or dental insurance, many of whom are looking for a job and need dental work done for their health and to improve their appearance.

This is just one of the a vital services and programmes that we are privileged to be a part of through our Community Outreach (Benevolent) Fund. Your continued financial support makes a world of difference!

## CARING FOR THE CARE GIVER

St. Mark's has a great team of Caregivers who contact members of the congregation on a regular basis, others who step up when an exceptional need arises, and many who quietly provide care to members of their family.

Often Caregivers forget to look after themselves. On March 12, 2009, the Membership Ministry Team hosted an evening with the Rev.

John Taylor, a member of St. Mark's and chaplain with the Rouge Valley Health Care System. He recognized from his own personal experience the importance of caring for oneself in order to provide care.

Pastoral Care is the ministry of presence – willingness just to be there and listen, caring for the whole person – body, mind and spirit. John shared the critical need for self-care through rest, balanced diet, exercise, and time and space for oneself if you are to give quality care to others. Thank you, John, for your care and guidance!

If you would like a copy of some of the tips and resources for healthy care giving, pick up a copy in the Narthex or call the office – 416-439-8623.

## FORGOT MY OFFERING SLIP!

We've all done it in the race to get out of the house on Sunday



# The MEMO

The Newsletter of St. Mark's United Church, 115 Orton Park Road, Toronto M1G 3G9

[www.st-marks.ca](http://www.st-marks.ca) APRIL, 2009

## TWO SIDES

## TO EVERY STORY

*Rev. Alan Hall*

It's true. There are two sides to every story. Some stories have many sides and can only be told with surround-sound stereophonic speakers.

This is certainly true of the scripture stories, especially our Christian stories of the events leading up to Jesus' death, his crucifixion, and the events that follow that fateful day. To tell it as if it is a solid single monotonous fact is to rob it of its rich, wondrous, horrible, challenging, frightening, life-giving, terrible, awesome depth. And height.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on what we call Palm Sunday, the course of that week, his arrest, trial and crucifixion are the stories of the Passover, that dreadful night when the first borns were slaughtered and the Hebrews fled their Egyptian home. They are the stories of all of the trials encountered in that long, seemingly endless journey that tested even the best of them. These are our stories of confrontations with trials that have robbed us of our best, left us with our least, and abandoned us to disordered wildernesses.

Easter Sunday, the resurrection, is the story of the Passover deliverance of our Hebrew ancestors from slavery to what bound them and their arrival in the land of their hopes and dreams. It is our story of finding companions in those deserts, coming home to that which is safe and good, meeting new life where we thought there could never be life again.

These are ancient stories. These are modern stories. They are your stories and my stories. They are the stories of peoples of all times, of all cultures, of all faiths. They have many sides. They have been told. They are still being written. They are full of fanciful myth and imagining. They are soaked with tears. They are adorned with lives blessed abundantly and endlessly.

So come, come this Holy Week and Easter. Hear stories. Tell stories. Write stories. Live stories. Palm / Passion Sunday we'll celebrate the Passover Seder. Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings of guided prayer will help us unfold the scripture stories with our stories. Good Friday we will confront the story, regardless of its ugly complexities. Easter Sunday . . . maybe there will be a new story . . .



## HOLY WEEK & EASTER AT ST. MARK'S

*Palm Sunday*  
April 5th - 11 am

*Sunday of the Palms,  
the Passion and the Passover*

*Guided Prayer*  
Tues, Wed, Thurs  
Apr 7, 8, 9 - 7:00- 8:30 pm

Three evenings of being guided  
in prayerful reflection by  
the biblical stories of  
Passover and Passion

*Good Friday*  
April 10 - 11 am

Confronting realities

*Easter Sunday*  
April 12 - 11 am

A new story!



The United Church of Canada

L'Eglise Unie du Canada

*St. Mark's is a progressive, inclusive, life-affirming Christian community of faith within The United Church of Canada.*

*Worship services are held Sundays at 11 am.*

*St. Mark's offers a range of online services and material at [www.st-marks.ca](http://www.st-marks.ca).*

## THREE EVENINGS OF GUIDED PRAYER

*Tues, Wed, Thurs, April 7, 8, 9 - 7:00 - 9:00*

Most people think of prayer as a solitary activity. "Guided Prayer" is not. It is interactive, engaging, and informing. A team of leaders from St. Mark's is offering three evenings of guided prayer to enhance our Holy Week experience and help us weave our stories of life and God with the biblical stories of life and God.

Different from prayer-as-usual or Bible study, this highly personal approach challenges us to reflect on familiar scripture passages in new ways. Each evening we will explore a different aspect of guided prayer. We will ask ourselves questions like *"What struck you in the scripture passage? How did you feel about it? Where was God at work and how did you respond? What did God reveal? What did God ask? What feelings surfaced during prayer? Did they change in any way? What gift of Grace did God offer? Does something from the passage draw you to return to it? What action do you feel moved to take or prayer to offer?"*

As guided prayer 'retreatants', we will then share those new perspectives with another person or 'companion' in conversation. The companion has been trained to attentively listen for God speaking in the prayer and in the story of your life, supporting and encouraging you as you respond to God.

This year we will work with the Passover and Passion stories of Holy Week. They are dramatic, exciting, and challenging. We will let the words, the images, the sounds of the stories guide us.

The three evenings are intended to build on each other but if you can't attend all three, maybe only one, still plan to participate. You will be glad that you did!

Pre-registration is appreciated. It will help with planning. Sign the sheet on the bulletin board at the church or contact our office -- [office@st-marks.ca](mailto:office@st-marks.ca) or 416 439 8623.

## CONFIRMATION CLASSES

Alan is offering a Confirmation programme for kids 13 to 16!

Meeting over food from 4:30 to 6:00 Tuesdays throughout Easter (starting April 14th running to May 26th), the kids will have an opportunity to:

- learn something of what "church" has been, is, and can be;
- explore issues of concern and interest to them from a theological/faith perspective;
- each week meet and talk theology with one of our church leaders.

At the conclusion of the programme if they so wish they may confirm their faith and their membership in the church.

So far eight kids have expressed an interest. More, whether members of St. Mark's or friends who'd like to learn more about faith and faith communities are welcome!

## Postcards from the Valley

*Helen Jones reviews the Moderator's new book on living in the shadow of cancer*

As a three time cancer survivor, I can identify with our 39<sup>th</sup> Moderator as he talks about his cancer experience in the first section of the book "Do not fear – only Believe". He shares with us his feelings of lowliness, vulnerability, limitation and beauty on the journey through the valley that has been a source of deepening his experience of the presence of God and of the way of Jesus.

The rest of the book is a collection of short notes to fellow sojourners on the way through this frightening health journey, as well as articles and stories published before and after he became Moderator in 2006.

Although each article has a life of its own and was written under particular circumstances, they have been divided into sections in this book for easy reading and reference. Personally, I found myself returning time after time to the first section about fear and belief to help me through a difficult and frightening time in my own life.

The author challenges us with these words, *"What does it mean to be faithful when life seems to be bringing loss to our door, calling us to walk among the long shadows of the Valley?"* We learn that God is with us, our source of strength and hope, and will not leave us. As we encounter those who are suffering, we encounter Jesus who was grounded in the earthly realities of the world, and shares with us our weakness and failures. We find that the way through the valley is the way to a new life – God will not abandon us.

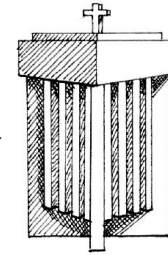
As individuals or as a community, we come to experience life in new ways and to find our way with God, trusting that life has the final word.

Whether you use this book for daily reflections, conversation with friends, or a companion in your journey in the world, you will hear God calling on every page. Check out our Church library for a copy!

## THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

On the Second Sunday of Easter, April 19th, we will celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism!

Baptism is one of the two most sacred acts in our Christian faith practice. It names life as a blessing, claims our place in a realm of blessing, and commissions us to go forth blessing others.



## ART IN THE CHURCH

*Fri & Sat, April 24 & 25*

A number of years ago Melinda Calway, a member of St. Mark's, went back to school to pursue a long-time dream of being an artist. Today she is a professional painter, photographer and teacher! St. Mark's will be the site of her next solo show! Fri, Apr 24 (3 - 8) and Sat Apr 25 (10 -5 ) you'll find her latest work and new abstracts on display. There will be a cafe with treats to enjoy while you contemplate the artwork.

## WORKSHOPS AND WORSHIP

*Sun, April 26, 2 - 5 pm*

Scarborough United Churches are called to gather Sunday, Apr 26, to take part in a series of workshops (including one offered by St. Mark's on being an affirming ministry) and share in worship together.

The service will also mark the conclusion of our 23 years as a Scarborough Presbytery. As of July we will join with churches from Toronto South and Don Valley presbyteries to form the new Toronto Southeast Presbytery.

Southeast Presbytery will be made up of over sixty congregations and provide new opportunities for shared and extended ministries.

## LAWN SALE - June 20

Starting your spring cleaning or garage clean up? Please put aside any gently used items for our lawn sale on June 20th!

Unfortunately, we don't have on site storage space available, but we will have volunteers here the Thursday and Friday evenings before the sale and make special arrangements with you earlier in the week to bring your goods in. Articles that sell well are: bikes; sports equipment (hockey stuff, skates, helmets etc); small appliances (toasters, mixers, blenders, hair dryers, lamps etc); furniture; electronics (computers, radios, tvs etc.); toys and games; books; jewelry; dishes; and tools. If you are unsure if we can use items you have just ask Art Nicholson or Melinda Calway who are again this year co-ordinating the day.

## PRIDE PARADE FLOAT

As a newly minted *Affirming Ministry* within the United Church, St. Mark's is joining other United Churches in building and "personing" a float in the Gay Pride parade on Sunday, June 28!

Building sessions begin on May 2, from 9 a.m. 'til noon, and will continue each Saturday after that until the float is assembled in the parking lot at Metropolitan United, on June 27. Volunteers are welcomed to help build and to be among the people on and around the float in the parade. No experience needed!

To let us know you'd like to join in the fun, please tell us at [outreach@st-marks.ca](mailto:outreach@st-marks.ca), or contact Carol in the office.

## VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION EVENING

*Thurs, May 14*

Do you make coffee Sunday morning? Greet at services? Help out with our gardens? Read scripture? Sing in the choir? Repair our fence? Teach Sunday School? St. Mark's is a community of volunteers! Thank you for your ministry service! Mark your calendar for an evening of refreshments, conversation, and laughter as we express appreciation for generosity in ministry!

Not currently volunteering but would like to? Come out on the 14th, meet the good folks (there may be some sweets, too) and offer your spirit.



## CURLED AGAIN!

What a great, fun evening back in March when over a hundred of us gathered at the Tam Heather Club for an evening of curling and dinner! Thank you, Teresa, for attending to all of the details, juggling all of our special requests, and ensuring everyone had a good time.

Don't repeat it, it's only a rumour so far, but word has it that Don is looking into organizing an evening with the Blue Jays at the Rogers Centre sometime in September . . .