

## FINANCES, OFFERINGS, ANNUAL MEETINGS, AND THINGS LIKE THAT

No doubt that headline got your attention and stirred excitement for reading on!

While finances, offerings, and annual meetings often stir emotions, they seldom are welcomed ones! Especially in these days of unemployment, deficits, plant closings, and unstimulating stimulus packages. Here at St.. Mark's we appreciate the trust that members and friends extend to our church by contributing financially. We respect your trust by practising transparency with our accounting and reporting, and welcome your questions, comments, and concerns.

St.. Mark's Annual Congregational Meeting for Finances is called for Sunday, Feb 8th, after worship and lunch. At this time we will receive 2008 financial statements for our general, outreach and trust funds. On June 7th we meet formally again to receive reports on our ministry and mission activities, all those things we do, fueled by your donations and your generous sharing of time and talent.

### BACKGROUND TO OUR FINANCIAL RECORD KEEPING AND FORWARD PLANNING

Prior to 1992 St. Mark's followed the traditional practice of having one Congregational meeting, usually in January, when ministry reports, financial accounts and budgets were presented. And like in most churches, the meeting was almost always only about money, debating and changing the budget line by line, having people leave angry or in tears, and testing every good spirit in the room. OK, maybe not this bad, but you get the idea.

With this history, we said when writing our first Constitution, "*There has to be a better way!*"

What we designed, with advice from Presbytery and a careful reading of The Manual of the United Church, was a process in which in November the Board would invite each ministry teams (committee) to consider what ministry plans they had and what dollars and people they needed to do these ministries.

These committee budgets were dropped into a spread sheet to produce one document. At a pot luck meeting in early December the Congregation and Board met (not in a formal Congregational meeting) to review the plans, consider how we might raise the requested dollars (the people needs piece goes off to the Nominating Committee for the June meeting) and make recommendations of where changes might need to be made or pieces need to be looked at more closely. At the end of the evening there was a pretty good sense of what was imagined and what could be.

In January, with year-end figures in hand, the Board would then finalize and adopt the budget. This ensured everything was in place for the Treasurer to set up the new books, including payroll and assorted deductions for January.

We pulled the Congregational meeting into two portions. A meeting is held in early February to receive financial reports and to table the budget (which members had access to developing

in Nov and Dec). In June the meeting focuses on mission activities, goals and objectives.

### AT THIS YEAR'S MEETING

At this year's February meeting the Board would like to hear whether this process continues to meet our needs and the test of transparency and ownership. So bring your ideas and your experience!

### YOUR STATEMENT OF OFFERINGS

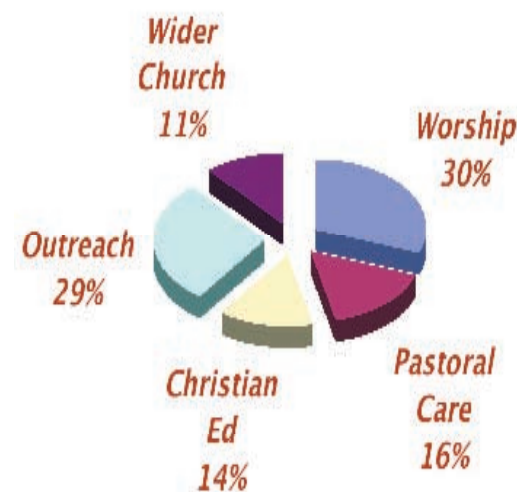
Included with this newsletter are two documents for your attention.

The first is a statement of your offerings in 2008. Review it carefully, please, and advise our office of any discrepancies with your records by February 14th. After that official receipts will be printed and mailed to you.

The second is a report on 2008 general and outreach funds accompanied by the budget projections adopted by the Board in January for 2009.

### Without the Accountant's Lines

What would the budget look like without the lines? What if we rolled all those columns into what we really plan to do? What then would the 2009 budget look like? This:



# The MEMO

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

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## RADICAL ABUNDANCE

*The Rev. Alan Hall*

Last month I attended the Trinity Institute National Theological Conference sponsored by Trinity Wall Street Episcopal Church in New York City. This year's theme was "Radical Abundance: A Theology of Sustainability."

An extraordinary array of lecturers and participants gathered at this 1697-founded parish church in downtown Manhattan: environmentalists; community activists; economists; musicians; agriculturists and theologians from around the world. Each spoke about the rich, abundant capacity of the earth and of the communities that inhabit this earth. They also spoke about how when our practices have become exploitative of either the land or the community, abundance is restricted and scarcity is experienced. Hunger, fear, pollution, depression, social disintegration result.

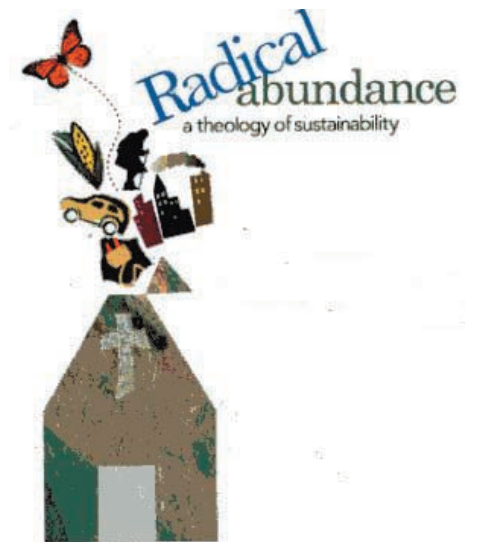
Can you think of a more accurate depiction of the current global economic meltdown? And who has not seen the economy of diminishing scales when we push our bodies to the point of burning out, when we overextend our leaders and volunteers til they have nothing more to offer, when the earth is taken to the brink of breaking! Each time the result is a diminishment of abundance.

One of the observations by Néstor Miguez, a professor of New Testament Studies in Buenos Aires, Argentina, resonated strongly with me. He was remarking on the tyranny of globalization decimating local markets and communities. The market, he asserted, must be accompanied by an equal measure of grace. "*If there is no place for love, forgiveness or grace, there is no place for life.*"

Where have you seen lack of grace strangling markets and communities, individuals and households? When have you seen grace restore abundance to relationships and to lives?

Our faith tradition, at its best, calls us to be people of grace, of generosity and blessing. At St. Mark's we like to talk a lot about abundance, radical abundance of good things, grace included. Maybe this is what contributes to the strength of this faith community. Let's start a conversation about how we might bring an abundant measure of grace to our households and work places, to the communities where we live and to this city that we call home. How can grace strengthen and enhance our relationships?

Nurturing strong, respectful communities ensures there will always be enough for all. Our ancestors in faith know this well. That's why they call us to be good stewards, caretakers, of everything in this realm. That's why they consider it a divine imperative that we take care of ourselves. Cared for, respected, honoured, we are able to be more than just ourselves and for ourselves: the divine becomes real, here, now, today.



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).*

LENT IS COMING! LENT IS COMING!

More than you ever wanted to know about Lent

The Rev. Alan Hall

What is coming??

Lent! The Season of Lent!

And what?, you ask, is Lent?

Lent is one of those ancient words that has largely fallen out of use today, except in more traditional churches. It originates in Middle English (the form of English predominant from 1150 to 1500 CE) with a word that meant *to lengthen*. Coincidence that the days are *lengthening*? Oh no! The Church has used the word for its traditional season of fasting and repentance, those 40 days before Good Friday.

It is also not coincidental that 40 features prominently in the stories of Moses and Elijah. Also with Jesus: how many days was he in the wilderness? 40! This is the first gospel story we tell during Lent!



Now the 40 is not all that straightforward. Count the days from Ash Wednesday (which this year is February 25th) and Good Friday (April 10th), and you get more than 40. You see, in the Eastern Rite churches (Orthodox) Saturday and Sunday are exempt from the austerities of Lent so there were only 36 days stretched over seven weeks. In the West, it was six weeks, leaving out only Sundays. Unless you were in Jerusalem where you fasted for five days a week over eight weeks to actually have 40 days. Go figure.

For much of the last thousand years the focus of Lent has been life's grimness. It has been marked by self-denial, dark colours, God-forbid, no *Hallelujahs* uttered in church or out! Shake this dark stuff off. We've done all that long enough. Think about Lent, these 40 days (however you count them), as a time to be deliberately mindful of that powerful, elusive presence of God that ministers to us through all of our times and seasons. Create the space to hear the divine permission to step into the quiet curves, the gaps between the meanings, even the crater carved by sadness, and find that even there God is present.

Awesome!

How can you get into this Lenten thing?

Grab a book that you can read daily, something that will draw your attention to blessing, goodness, that will set a tone of gratitude and grace for your day. One suggestion for this is a collection of daily readings by a number of authors entitled *Why Would Jesus Say That?* It is kind of like a book of puzzles. Each page has a saying attributed to Jesus followed by some thoughts on why that might have been preserved and what it might have meant. Then there are questions for you to take away with you. Copies are available from our church office for only \$12.

Another way to mark these days is to establish a discipline. No, I don't mean

standing in a corner! *Discipline* comes from *disciple*. Both have their roots in ancient words that mean *to learn*. Like the Muslims' Ramadan fast is a *discipline* to help them focus upon the graciousness of Allah, a Lenten *discipline* can help you kept forward in your mind some good way to live, to be, to engage others.

My suggestion is that you each day engage some way that reduces your use of energy. Walk to the bank instead of jumping into the car. Go back and turn that light off in the kitchen. Turn the thermostat back a degree or two. Or another suggestion -- make a point of doing a good deed every day for

someone, someone you know, someone you don't know, someone in the city, someday far away. You get the idea.

Keep a log of what you do and tell me what you *disciplined*, you know, *learned*.

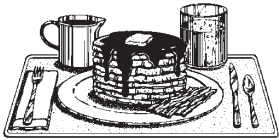
Start your Lent with Ash Wednesday Service, Feb 25

Start the season with our Ash Wednesday Service on Wednesday evening, February 25th at 7:00. It is a beautiful, gentle service remembering who we are and whose we are. It draws us into quiet places, into shadows of peace and grace. It sets a positive tone for the days ahead.



Pancakes. Just because.

Because Lent was traditionally a season of denial and discipline (stand-in-the-corner kind), households had to use up any fat in the house -- it wouldn't keep. So fatty foods were prepared and eaten on Tuesday, *Shrove Tuesday*. *Shrove* is the past tense for *shrive*. (That helps, eh?) It just means the day before the shriven season -- the days of confession and penance (think back to the grim old I'm-a-sinner days of the church). Come out Shrove Tuesday (Feb 24) for



a traditional pancake dinner at the St. Mark's. 5:30 - 7:00. It is kind of like a *Mardis Gras* over indulgence before the serious days. Eat, drink and . . . then Presbytery meets at St. Mark's.

Pray

Over the last couple years a team of members have been training in and practising *guided prayer*. This is a tradition of using the imagery, words and emotions of scripture stories to guide us in our prayers. This year the team invites you to participate in three evenings of guided prayer during Holy Week, the last week of Lent -- April 7, 8, and 9.

Be fashionable.

Now if you want to be fashion correct, always wear purple during Lent -- purple is the colour of penitence and solemn reflection. Church hangings were always purple for the season. So wear purple, but because life is not meant to be grim and solemn, throw some yellow or green or blue, your favourite colour, with it!

Come, let's do some Lentening!

Remember I said that *Lent* originates with a word that means *lengthening*. Already, even at the end of January when I write this, there is an hour more of sunlight every day than back on the darkest day, Dec 21st. The days really are lengthening! Lent is a time to remember that God is, indeed, good, and this life is blessed. Come along, lets do some *lenting*!



Tues, Feb 24, 5:30 - 7:00  
Shrove Tuesday Pancakes @ SM

Wed, Feb 25, 7:00  
Ash Wednesday Service @ SM

Sun, Feb 28, 11:00  
First Sunday of Lent  
Sacrament of Communion

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Sunday, February 8

St.. Mark's Annual Congregational Meeting for Finances is called for Sunday, Feb 8th, after worship and lunch. At this time we will receive 2008 financial statements for our general, outreach and trust funds. The 2009 financial projections and goals will also be presented. See next page for details!

OUT OF THE COLD

Friday & Saturday, February 13 & 14

St.. Mark's is hosting dinner and breakfast at the Knox United Church, Midland at Sheppard, Friday February 13th and Saturday the 14th! Why not lend a hand with meal preparation Friday afternoon, serving and cleaning up Friday evening, hosting guests through the evening, or serving breakfast in the morning? It might not cut it with you partner as a Valentine's gesture, but it sure is a fine way to say *I care*.

SCOUT / GUIDE GUESTS

Sunday, February 22

St.. Mark's welcomes local Scout and Guide troops on Baden-Powell Sunday, Feb 22nd. We are all going camping together! Yep -- 11 am in the Sanctuary! Bring a camp story!

WELCOME POT LUCK DINNER

Sunday, February 22

St. Mark's has been blessed over this last year or so with many new members, guests, and visitors. Welcome to all of you! As we say here, *We are all more for your presence*.



On Sun, Feb 22, our Membership Team invites everyone to a pot luck meal (5:30 - 8:30) around which we will have a chance to get to know each other a bit better, hear stories of church when it is good, ask questions (like *Where are the pews?* *Have you ever heard of a "centre aisle?"*), and, of course, in the finest of St.. Mark's style, share a meal.

So, pack a pot (or an order-in menu) and come on out Sunday evening at 5:30. It will be lots of fun, lots of friends, and lots of good food.

TAX CLINIC VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

*The Store Front* resource centre at 4040 Lawrence Ave East is recruiting volunteers to assist at their tax clinic this winter! Love taxes? Never get enough? Good with figures? Always get a refund? Just want to do something good (see Lent)? Give a call to our office (416 439 8623) or drop us an email (outreach@st-marks.ca) for more information.