



The MEMO

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

www.st-marks.ca

December 2009

An Annual Plea

Rev. Cheryl-Lynn MacPherson

For a number of years now I have had the privilege of participating in a pre-advent retreat at St. John's Convent (Anglican) here in Toronto. The convent guest house has become a home away from home for me as I soak in the hospitality of the sisters and the quiet, contemplative atmosphere. I suppose it is my way of feeding my soul in advance of the advent and Christmas rush.

I must confess a certain amount of frustration at this time of year as our consumer society decides that everyone must spend lots of money on the perfect gift for everyone on their list, and cook the perfect turkey, and have a beautifully decorated home, and a big ole dose of holiday cheer. Oh yes, and a perfectly happy family. We all know that this is not reality for most of the world and yet we feel the pressure to try to live up to this image.

Now, I am not a scrooge. I love to see the excitement and delight of the children around me, I am not averse to giving and receiving gifts, I love the sacred music of the season. But – I make my annual plea for some integrity, some congruence between what Christians profess about the “reason for the season” and how we live that out.

In my contemplative time at the convent I began to think about what the seasons of advent and Christmas really mean. In advent we prepare to welcome the divine, in the season of Christmas – yes, it's a season – 12 days, not 1 – we celebrate incarnation – the union of divinity and humanity. We welcome the divine. We revel in the birth of divinity in an infant, born to a peasant family on the run. We celebrate God with us and God within us – that is something to celebrate!

It is quite remarkable really, to proclaim the presence of God with us and within humankind; and if we let it, it could have a powerful impact on how we live. What we're saying is that even in the bleakest, most impossible situations, God is steadfastly with us. We are claiming and proclaiming that the divine is in each of us – even in people we don't like very much. Sometimes divinity is in disguise – in a peasant infant, in the woman staying at the convent guest house who scowled at me each time she saw me in the hallway, in the person who has committed horrible crimes, in a grumpy client.

Let us remember in this season, that God is with us even in the bleak times; and that God is within us and everyone we meet. Let that guide how we live. I think it's safe to say Autumn is my favourite season. I love the crispness in the air, the vibrant colours as the leaves change and their crunch under my feet as I walk in the woods. I love the sights and sounds and smells of a fall fair where one can experience the rich bounty of the earth, where a community can gather and celebrate the harvest. This year I experience these things with a grateful spirit, conscious of the many blessings in my life.

I consider St. Mark's to be one of those blessings. It is indeed quite early in my time with you to offer much perspective, but I can say that it is indeed very refreshing to experience a congregation that has committed itself to claiming and living out its faith. I see dedicated people in leadership positions in the congregation who are working hard to ensure that St. Mark's moves forward in faith. I see a congregation that celebrates God's presence and acts with deeds of generosity, kindness, justice and peace.



December Events at a Glance!

- Dec. 6th - 11am Sacrament of Communion and "White Gift Sunday"
- Dec 13th - 11am Sunday School Pageant
- 7:30pm Joint Carol Service at Scarborough Bluffs United
- Dec 20th - 10am Continental Breakfast
- 11am Choral Service
- Dec 24th - 7pm Stories & Carols service
- 11pm Christmas eve communion
- Dec 27th - 11am Christmas continues

For the detailed SMUC Calendar of events
www.st-marks.ca > Outreach > Calendar



The United Church of Canada
L'Eglise Unie du Canada

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

Worship services are held Sundays at 11 am. Come early for coffee and fellowship!

The Real Value of the Turkey Dinner!!

Bart

As I sat down following my announcement of the anticipated results from the previous evening's Turkey Dinner, the realization came over me that maybe I had missed the point. Of course the dinner requires extraordinary efforts to create 6 pails of stuffing, 40 home baked pies, 50 pounds of vegetables, 80 pounds of potatoes, 210 pounds of turkey and serve approximately 230 dinners.

Surely it is a tremendous success to exceed our budget and raise close to \$2,500. But as I reflected, it seemed to me that the real value of the Turkey Dinner goes well beyond the dollars and cents and comes from the fellowship and community of working together towards a common goal. It appears time and time again in the sharing of our gifts and talents.

If you had the opportunity to go upstairs during the evening you would have been greeted by a wonderful display of arts and crafts set among the tones of a flute. Waiting for a table never felt so good. Downstairs, the meal was great and so too, was the friendship and conversation that took place. Many chose this evening to dine with us for the first time, and I believe they were not disappointed on any front. Yes we worked hard (thank you) and we did well (congratulations) but the real value of the Turkey Dinner is longer lasting because it has brought us all that much closer together.

...and while we waited for our table to be called readied at the Turkey Dinner...

The elves were busy and it certainly looked a lot like Christmas at Gayle's home before the annual turkey dinner. Her annual sale netted the church another \$1,500.00. Thanks once again to all who participated in the sale and enabled the project. Gayle, your efforts were much appreciated.



...and the weeks before the Turkey Dinner...

The Social Committee Shepherds were very busy making 75 Shepherd's Pies cooking 40 lbs of ground beef, 10 lbs of veggies and 70 lbs of potatoes! This satisfyingly savoury super supper solution succeeded in adding over \$400 more dollars to a very successful fundraising November for St. Mark's! Many thanks to Karen, Debbie, Jennifer, Kathy, Bettie, Marg & Jennifer for all their hard work and inspiration!



...(and to complete the Turkey Dinner theme)...

Bettie's –Turkey Dinner Stuffing Recipe

Old-Fashioned Bread Stuffing (with a Healthy Twist)

This recipe has received many accolades and proven itself over many years of Church dinners. Cooked outside the turkey, this recipe makes about 20 cups.

Preparation: 1 or 2 cups chopped celery, 1-2 cups chopped onions,
1 firm chopped apple (or pear), ½ cup butter or margarine
14 - 15 cups of bread crumbs (suggestion: use the food processor on Pulse). Set aside in a large bowl.

In a large skillet (or microwave), heat butter over medium heat. Add onions, celery, and apple. Cook, stirring occasionally for 10-15 minutes (until veggies are tender). Add to the bread crumbs in the large bowl. Add herbs and spices (1 cup chopped fresh or ½ cup dried parsley, 4 tps. crushed dried sage, 1 tsp. each thyme, savoury, marjoram, or poultry seasoning (any comb.), 1 tsp. salt, ¼ tsp. pepper).

Mix - ¾ c. chicken broth (from a can, powdered+ water, or 2 bouillon cubes). Mix well with bread crumb mixture.

Pack into air-tight container and freeze. When ready to use, thaw, put into Micro-safe dish, add a drizzle of turkey drippings, or a little more chicken broth. Microwave on high for 10-15 minutes depending on how big a bowl you are using. Stir part way through. Serve when hot and steamy.

If your family has a special ingredient that they like in the stuffing (cooked sausage meat, raisins, cranberries etc.), it can be added.



...hmmm – that shirt – where do I know that shirt...déjà vu maybe?hmmm



Shepherd's Pies Cooking Instructions

For those of us who are stove-challenged....
...these pies are fully cooked, so you just need to reheat them!!!!

Oven: Preheat oven to 350-375° F. Remove the lid and plastic wrap. Put in the middle rack of the oven for 35 to 45 minutes or until bubbling and headed through.

Microwave: Remove casserole from the metal pan and place in a microwave safe dish. Heat on high until heated through, 5 to 10 minutes.

JNAC Process Draws to a Close

Marg – JNAC Chair

The work is done. On December 3, at a congregational meeting chaired by a representative of Toronto Southeast Presbytery, the congregation of St. Mark's United Church approved the recommendation made by the Joint Needs Assessment Committee in its report. This followed the report's presentation at the Board meeting on November 26, and their recommending its being passed along to this next and final step before it is given to the Presbytery's Pastoral Relations Committee.

After the Presbytery approves the recommendation, it will declare vacancies and the job of finding our new permanent ministry personnel will be handed over to the newly-appointed Joint Search Committee.

St. Mark's congregation was very cooperative in responding to the survey that was offered. The comments they shared were probably just as informative as the blanks they filled in on the survey and the numerically-based answers. The JNAC worked with all this information to discern who we are, where we want to go, and the ministry personnel we need to accompany us on our journey. St. Mark's Mission Statement was the guiding principle behind the questions and the answers.

The JNAC recommended that two vacancies be declared. One would be for a full time minister of Word and Sacrament, a called position, and the second would be for a part time appointed person to develop and implement a cohesive youth and children's program and assist other ministries as time permits.

It was made clear to the JNAC from the congregation's answers, that in order to be as inclusive of the young people as we are of others in the church, we should spend more time nurturing them and providing them with good programming to meet their needs. A strain has been placed on volunteers from the congregation in the past few years in this area, and the congregation felt that a position formally dedicated to this area of ministry should be named.

The JNAC process was conducted on a very tight timeline. It is hoped that the Joint Search Committee will find ministry personnel who can begin their work with us on either July 1 or September 1, 2010. These are the traditional times for ministers to begin new jobs. The members of the Joint Needs Assessment Committee are to be commended for the tremendous amount of work they accomplished in such a compressed period of time.

As chair of the group, I'd like to thank everyone for her/his diligence and faithfulness. It was an enriching, rewarding experience to work with a group who respectfully shared opinions and did everything asked of them in a timely fashion to be able to bring the report before the congregation on the planned date. Best wishes to the Joint Search Committee as they begin their work of finding the ministry personnel who will be just the right fit for St. Mark's. This is another exciting time in the progressive, inclusive community of faith that is St. Mark's.

Weather Alert – SNOWSTORM!!!

St. Mark's – like each of you within your own household's – is preparing for that wild and wonderful next BIG SNOWSTORM!



Inevitably, the snow will fall on a Sunday, raising the questions – is the Church open and will there be Sunday Service?

A proactive protocol was approved at the November 26th Board meeting. The “go/no go” decision will be made the morning of the service and will be communicated as follows:

- 1) SM News, St. Mark's Friday summary of immediate or late breaking news will broadcast the status of Sunday Service; and
- 2) The automatic answering machine will be updated around 8:30 AM with the open or closed decision and appropriate message.

The St. Mark's website (www.st-marks.ca) and St. Mark's OUTBOUND automatic telephone dialer and message service are also under consideration – so stay tuned, we will update this advisory in upcoming MEMO's.

And as always, please remember, if you have recently adopted a new technology, acquired or changed your email address, or changed your contact information, let Carol know in the office so we can find you!

Thinking Of Others....



Each Sunday, “Prayers of the Community” are offered for people both inside and outside our congregation, or for issues impacting our broader church community.

If you would like someone mentioned in prayer, write a note in the Book of Prayers on the Communion Table, or talk to Carol.

Drop Everything And Read! Friday January 15th is the kick-off of the St. Mark's Book Study!

Your Friday nights will never be the same after you have made time for reading, discussion, fellowship, food and fun!

While not everyone has weighed in yet, the early replies indicate that we will likely choose “The Emerging Christian Way”. CE will even subsidize the book purchase!

Treat yourself – DEAR - and contact Rob, if you are interested or have any questions. Rob can be reached by email at robpeck@rogers.com or by phone (h) 416-284-3975 or (mobile) 416-569-3646 – or - ask Carol in the Office (she knows everything!).



*St. Mark's strives to be a nut free environment.
Please give attention to all ingredients when bringing food to events.*

To Gown or Not to Gown....

This seems to be a question on some people's minds at St. Mark's – whether the minister should wear a gown and stole on Sunday mornings. I have been asked to explain why I wear vestments. For me personally, putting on the gown and stole is an act of profound courage and empowerment. I was denied ordination in another denomination because of my sexual orientation. Indeed the vast majority of Christians around the world say, in the words someone said to me shortly before I came to St. Mark's, "gay people should not be preaching the word of God." In wearing the gown and stole, and occasionally a clerical collar, I am publically witnessing that the United Church is different – in our church, sexual orientation is not a barrier to ordination. When I am among queer Christians it is often empowering for them as well to see that yes they are loved by God, yes, they can be queer and Christian and there is a church they can call home. It is important to me to feel the support of my denomination when I wear any kind of vestment in public. I wear them in quiet defiance of those who would deny my calling. My gown and all of my stoles have been gifts from individuals and congregations. Their symbolism is important to me and I believe that as progressive Christians we have every right to claim and reclaim Christian symbolism. Different clergy will have different reasons for wearing or not wearing vestments. This is where I'm at in my journey right now, and I wanted to share this with you so that hopefully those with questions will have a greater understanding.

Sincerely,

Rev. Cheryl-Lynn MacPherson.

The Latest from Wetaskiwin First United

As the MEMO reported in November, on October 13, 2009 the thriving Wetaskiwin First United Church, a small community just south of Edmonton, was levelled in a fire.

St. Mark's intrepid Board Member has maintained contact with WFUC's minister Rev. Ruth Lumax and again extended our experience and support in any way.

Rev. Lumax replied, "Thanks St. Mark's. We are doing as well as can be expected. We continue to worship in a few different venues, although have decided to use the Funeral home as our home base for now. Demolition has begun on our decommissioned building remains. People continue to grieve and it comes in the most interesting comments. Planning and research is underway for some of the options about building but likely won't name a committee till the new year. We continue to be well supported by our community and consider ourselves blessed in so many ways. We also look for ways to "pay that forward" - so to speak - which opens up further possibilities for community connections. In the mean time, thank you for your prayers and for remembering us. Prayer very much keeps me going! :) Blessings to you in this season of wonder and expectant waiting. Ruth



REVIEWER'S CORNER

DVD Review: The Proposal (PG13)

Karen – Contributor-at-large

I saw 'The Proposal' starring Sandra Bullock and Ryan Reynolds. This is a very funny chick flick. I'm not sure about the rating, but it is not a kids movie. It is about Sandra Bullock, who is a top executive of an American publishing company and her visa expires, so she will be deported back to Canada. To stop this from happening, she says she is engaged to her secretary (Ryan Reynolds), who in actuality is scared of her. The story mainly takes place during a weekend Ryan brings Sandra home and the comedy ensues as they try to learn about each others past, to fool the immigration inspector. I really enjoyed this movie and give it 4 stars



Classified Column

If you need to get something out there....place it here!



A Christmas Chestnut

CBC Radio and Church of the Holy Trinity, Guildwood, present a Dramatic Reading of Charles Dickens A Christmas Carol Featuring Christopher Thomas, Jill Dempsey, Melba Cuddy-Keane, and East York Brass

Saturday December 12, 2009 at 3pm - Scarborough Bluffs United Church, 3739 Kingston Rd.

Tickets \$15 balcony and \$20 main floor includes refreshments and reception. Call 416-464-9671

Toronto Southeast Presbytery

The Presbytery announcements for this month are offered below.

Dec 6 – West Hill United Church - Affirming Celebration 10:30 AM. Guest speaker - Deputy Premier, The Hon. George Smitheran. Lunch follows.

Contact Glen, St.Mark's Presbytery representative either on Sunday or at glen.greenwood@rogers.com for more Presbytery activity.



St. Mark's United Church: We are called to be a progressive, inclusive life-affirming Christian community of faith within The United Church of Canada.

An "Affirming Congregation" is one that has intentionally reflected upon what it means to be inclusive and that has evaluated its openness to the ongoing work of being intentional about how it welcomes and includes others within the life and work of the church. All barriers to those wishing to be a part of the congregation are explored, particularly, though not only, those around issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.

ST. MARK'S REACHES OUT!!!



Our recent JNAC highlighted our commitment to our Outreach ministries.

Well the proof is in the “pudding” errrr.. MEMO! One full page of Outreach activities! FANTASTIC!

While the need is great 365 days of the year, St. Mark's pays special attention to the special needs of the winter months when people are most vulnerable.

St. Mark's is involved in a number community initiatives this winter. Inventory what you have and what you can give to what is needed.

Pitch in as St.Mark's REACHES OUT!!!!

St. Mark's Christmas Hamper Program is READY TO ROLL!

Mary Ethel – Outreach Chair



Our goal is to deliver Christmas Hampers to 50 families from our community and EVERY FAMILY has been adopted!

If you feel you cannot shop, please make a donation to the Community Outreach Fund & we'll get Santa's elves to do the shopping for you! As well as the gifts, our hampers include one week's food for the family and a \$25 food voucher.

Please remember to save some time the week of December 13 – we need all the help we can muster to help pack. Our plan is as follows:

- Tuesday December 14 starts with setting up the Sanctuary and starting packing! We will work into Wednesday evening as required.
- Thursday December 16 kicks off deliveries and this will run through until Friday evening. If you drive a van or a truck, PLEASE let us know, we'd love to have you volunteer.

Find Mary Ethel at Church or email her at outreach@st-marks.ca if you wish to sign-on or offer your gifts in some way. Again, Thanks to all for your efforts to help our community.

Help Someone Get Out of the Cold...

St. Mark's annual participation in east Scarborough's "Out of the Cold" program is set for January 22-23.

"Out of the Cold" runs out of Knox United Church (at Shepherd and Midland). A sign-up list will be posted on the bulletin board shortly.



We prepare dinner for Friday night, serve it & clean up with the clients. On Saturday morning, the "early" shift prepares breakfast & provides a bagged lunch for all clients. Gifts of socks & mittens are also gratefully received

Curran Hall Community Winterfest

Also happening on January 23rd is the Curran Hall Community Winterfest. Starting from 10AM and running to 2PM. St. Mark's will be hosting a food drive at the Community Center for West Hill Food Bank. Come & watch the children participate in the "Curran Hall Olympics". All are welcome!



Mitten Tree for WHCS

Our traditional "Mitten Tree" (Set up @ the Parking Lot Doorway) is now ready for contributions of new scarves, gloves, hats, and mittens.



In early January all of these items will be distributed by West Hill Community Services to those in need within our own community.

Many thanks as always for your generous support.

Catherine

SMUC is Hosting a Christmas Party!!!!



West Hill Community Services Family Resource Centre

accepted St. Mark's invitation to host their annual Christmas Party!!

The date is Thursday, December 17, 2009 between 10:00am and 2:00pm.

St. Mark's will be providing the gifts for over 50 children plus their parents.

This is made possible through the generous donation of Toronto East Club - ACT, which was originally initiated through the late Lorne Brown.

[Editor's Note – Yet another example of St. Mark's having the financial flexibility to apply our mission within the community.]

St. Mark's Best Financial Year Closes Dec. 31

Loreen - Chair, Finance and Stewardship Ministry Team

We are all getting ready for the celebration of Christmas – that time of year when we are reminded again of the love that came into the world that all might experience abundance in life. St. Mark's has been abundantly blessed in 2009. We are a community of faith that has worked hard together with much commitment and energy to respond to God's invitation to strive for wholeness in our souls, our communities and with creation. Thank you to everyone for your time and financial commitment to our many ministries.

We are entering the last month of 2009, and I would like to encourage you to think about your financial contributions to the ministries of St. Mark's and the Mission and Service Fund of the United Church of Canada. This year-end and holiday season might be a good time to consider a donation to the Embracing the Spirit Fund or the Mission and Service Fund in memory of a loved one, a special event during the year, or a thank you contribution for the good things that have been accomplished at St. Mark's during 2009. The sharing of our financial gifts support ministry in our congregation, in our community and around the world that all may experience the wholeness of God's love. Your offerings need to be received by December 31 in order to be included in your tax receipt for 2009.

The Finance and Stewardship Ministry Team has compiled the proposed St. Mark's 2010 budget. Our budget process is primarily about ministry planning both for one year and for the long term. Decisions around budget relate to the faithful stewardship of our resources to fund ministry. Our ministry teams have done excellent work in developing ministry plans – ministry objectives are creative and exciting. Our proposed 2010 budget combines proposed costs for ministry team plans as well as recommendations resulting from our recently completed JNAC process. The final 2010 budget proposal will be developed by the Board following the congregational meeting on Thursday, December 3. This meeting provided the congregation with the opportunity to review and vote on recommendations in the JNAC report, and to participate in conversation related to 2010 budget plans resulting from the JNAC report and ministry team proposals. Together we shared ideas and commitments regarding our ministry and budget priorities for St. Mark's in 2010.

We enter 2010 in a strong position to live out our mission statement in a new and faithful way through our decision to implement the JNAC report. Together our sustained financial support for St. Mark's in the new year will enable us to provide focused programming for our children and youth, as well as implement the expanded ministry plans and objectives of the individual ministry teams in our congregation. We have achieved self-sufficiency in 2009 – we are now challenged to support this new, exciting and expanded vision of ministry for 2010 and the years to come through the increased stewardship of our financial and volunteer resources.

Let us give thanks at the close of this year for the energy and support that we receive from our community of faith, and encourage one another to continue to live out our faith and trust in God's love that we might generously participate in God's healing work for our church, our community and our world.

St. Mark's United Church (11 Months Ending Nov. 30/09)

	Jan - Nov 09	Budget	% of Budget
Income			
Fund-Raising Projects	9,219.52	10,500.00	87.8%
Membership and Pastoral Care	700.00	700.00	100.0%
Offerings	143,415.38	145,600.00	98.5%
Property	6,925.00	8,500.00	81.5%
Social	62.00	450.00	13.8%
Worship Related	1,480.00	1,000.00	148.0%
Total Income	161,801.90	166,750.00	97.0%
Expense			
Administration	9,953.59	8,700.00	114.4%
Christian Education	624.91	1,500.00	41.7%
Membership & Pastoral Care	4,303.14	5,185.00	83.0%
Personnel	107,724.85	125,781.00	85.6%
Property Expense	26,848.26	31,000.00	86.6%
Worship	1,521.18	2,725.00	55.8%
Total Expense	150,975.93	174,891.00	86.3%
Net Income	10,825.97	-8,141.00	-133.0%

The projected \$10,000 year-end surplus will be transferred to the Trustees. The money will be split evenly between the general fund which is used for capital expenses (computers, projectors, sound systems) and the building fund which is for major repairs to the building.