

November 2022

Happy Advent!

Churches across the globe find themselves with very serious challenges. I was at a funeral recently and a staff person at a church in our city told me about a meeting after church. What to



do about financial shortfalls as government supports over COVID have ended. This church would expect 120 people on a Sunday pre-March 2020. Now they see approximately 30-40 people in the pews. The upside, about 75 people are watching their services via livestream. Here at Bethany these challenges are ours too. But the effect is a little less severe. We typically saw 175 people on a Sunday (pre-COVID), now we find about 125 in the pews with an additional 150 devices connected to our service via livestream. I have been asked how we maintained our numbers (despite many deaths), how 20+ people joined us in 2020 and 2021. The phone tree is one reason. Emails, e-newsletters, confidence in our COVID protocols another. Barry's recorded services early in COVID, the quality of our livestream services (thank you Barry, Glen, Rob, Steve, and Penny), are other reasons. But I believe the biggest reason was this; we kept *the home-fires burning*. The lay-leadership and staff and key ministers of hospitality (largely under the radar) helped us stay connected. When it was safe to gather in-person again, we did. And most importantly, we wanted to!

Advent is a time of preparation, anticipation, leaning into the Spirit of Christmas and Epiphany. There are things we can't do in these times of caution, but many things we can, if we are creative and engaged with **Advent's Spirit of Opportunity**. Over the summer we had that Spirit embodied in our student-staff. In the fall we saw it in gatherings in two city parks, in our Hall, in the sanctuary with Ukulele "jam sessions", Shawn's silent movie night, many weddings and celebrations of life, meditation, faith studies, youth groups, Sunday School in the renovated gym, and in the winter there is Walk and Talk, Joy-Lunch, Men's Supper, UCW, engagement with ISANS (Bethany people linked up with new Canadians in conversation circles), Handbells, and lots of ongoing pastoral care with persons living with challenges. We are NOT standing/sitting still. We are actively searching for **Advent's Spirit of Opportunity**.

Join us in-person or online to be part of Advent's hope, peace, joy and love. Kevin

## Upcoming Events to experience Advent's Spirit of Opportunity

**Sunday, November 27 - 10:30 am.** First Sunday of Advent, our first in-person Communion since COVID, personal testimony to Advent's Spirit of Opportunity from our own Bob Healy (how he came to sponsor several Ukrainian families).

**Tuesday, November 29 - 7 pm.** Advent Faith Study, based on the book by Marcus Borg and Dominic Crossan, The First Christmas (exploring Matthew's & Luke's versions of the Christmas story). The study will occur four Tuesdays, ending December 20. All welcome. Location, in the Chapel with opportunity for others to join via ZOOM,

**Sunday, December 4 -10:30am** White Gift Sunday, is a special day each year when we are invited to share our Christmas with the wider community and world. Everyone is invited to contribute to Local Outreach with an "unwrapped" non-perishable food or a financial donation in support of Brunswick St. Mission. Please bring your gifts to the worship that day. Let the natural Light of God's love be the wrapping paper.

**Sunday, December 4 - 630 pm.** O Holy Night! A Living Nativity and Old-Fashioned Christmas Celebration. The Christmas Story narrated and demonstrated with Biblical characters from our congregation (Vince is always the Angel Gabriel!), live donkeys and goats, and a joyous spirit in our Joseph Howe parking lot. Bring a friend or a neighbour! Later, hot cider & a sweet, Christmas tree craft, carol singing, and a surprise visit from a loud man dressed in red (not me), gathering of gifts for Phoenix Youth, and a warm spirit of community. *(A list of desired stocking items will be shared in an upcoming announcement.)*

**Tuesday, December 6 - 12 pm.** JOY Lunch in the Rev. Ewen Moase Memorial Fellowship Hall. A St. Nicholas Storytelling experience, Kevin will share three short stories about Christmas, ending with the singing of Carols. See Ann for more details.

**Wednesday, December 7 - 630 pm.** Men's Club. *The first rule of Men's Club, you talk about Men's club.* You have been asking when we would return to our monthly gatherings. The answer is now. The men are treated to a first-class meal from Tim and Dave, then a great speaker. In December we hear the Salvation Army Band play Christmas carols in place of a speaker. For more information speak to Ian or Randy.

**Wednesday, December 14 - 7 pm.** Blue Christmas in the Chapel. Not everyone is "festive" for Christmas. Grief for loved ones who are no longer with us, broken relationships, economic hardship, all conspire to make for mixed feelings this season. If this describes you, this service may be what you need. A quiet, reflective gathering, a personal reflection on grief from Barry Paton and some rainwater to remind us of the "Cloud of Witnesses" (Hebrews 12) throughout the season. Everyone is welcome.

**Sunday, December 18 -10:30am - Lessons & Carols Service** is a beloved time of worship at Bethany. Where we celebrate the season with scripture, reflection and music.

**Saturday, December 24 - 4 pm.** Christmas Family Service in the sanctuary. Live donkey, baby Jesus arrives with his mother Mary and Joseph and other Biblical characters, narrated by Sunday School and Youth. One of the two or three iconic Bethany events every year for the whole community.

**Saturday, December 24 - 9 pm.** Christmas Eve service: harpist (8:30 pm), sermon, carols.

**Sunday, December 25 - 10:30 am.** Christmas Day service. Intimate gathering.

