



# ADVENT GRAPEVINE 2024

## Minister's Meanderings

If I were to ask “What is Christmas all about?” No doubt the answer would include some bits and pieces from Matthew and Luke about Mary, Joseph, Bethlehem, Shepherds, a star and wisemen, who by the way usually show up too soon on Christmas cards and in pageants.

Even though we have bravely claimed the “Jesus is the reason for the season”, I remember putting that sign up every year at one of my churches, and “Keep Christ in Christmas!”, we have faced stiff competition from Santa Claus. Santa shows up at a lot of Church Christmas bazaars, ironically accompanied by the Grinch at one we attended, and I saw 2 massive blow-up Santas at the entrance of an Anglican Church in Welland.

I think my all-time cringe worthy favourite is Santa kneeling at the cradle. Although the Wisemen have been credited (blamed) for the gift giving craze, really it should be Santa's responsibility for people maxing out their credit cards in November already.

I must say that back in my day when the naughty and nice list actually meant something, my brother and I actually made an attempt to clean up our act by the end of the year.

The bribery worked to some extent giving our parents a much-needed break from our shenanigans. That was their Christmas present.

And grace abounded. We always got a tangerine instead of a lump of coal in our stockings. We are very good at blending our theology with our cultural traditions.

Be good or God will zap you. Be good or Santa won't come. Be good, God is watching you. Be good, the elf on the shelf is watching you.

What is Christmas all about? For Christians who have been around or a while, it is about “The virgin Mary had a baby boy...” Our Lessons Carols and Cookies remind us of “The Story” going back to the Old Testament prophecies even.

Advent services lead us into the moment when “The Word became flesh and lived among us.” We get to sing the Christmas carols that have been largely replaced in stores by the mind-numbing songs that are driving sales people nuts.

Christmas is about a two-month mixed bag of nostalgia, parties, special events, gifts, going into debt, generosity, reconnections, hopefully, reconciliations and still the freedom to say “Merry Christmas!” if we want to.

Having said all this, I take a moment to contemplate what Christmas is all about for me. In the midst of a vast universe. In the fullness of time, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive adoption as His child. Imagine. In the infinity of time God chose one life-changing moment in

history to become a human being and save us from ourselves. God and sinners reconciled. Born to give us second birth. What a gift!

Thank you for letting us be a part of this wonderful Church family.

Wendy and I wish you the richest of Christmas Blessings!

*Blessings, Gordon*

## From the UCW

The ladies started meeting again in the fall with much enthusiasm and a few new members. While we are finding it a little more challenging to work as we used to, we appreciate the time together and friendships that are continuing. We laugh, pray, encourage and support each other as friends and family do.

We have had discussions on ageing and the problems associated with driving and keeping our license while keeping safe. November was a very interesting month. We had a visitor from Palliative Care Niagara. This informative session brought up the idea of Wills and Power of Attorney, we hope to address in the future. Very important topics for both young and old. Winding down the year, kept us very busy with the Christmas Home Tour and Lessons, Carols and Cookies. Again the Hamilton's have offered their home for our Christmas Luncheon to be held on December 11<sup>th</sup>.

As always we invite all ladies of the Church to join us on the second Wednesday of each month at 1:00 pm in the Friendship Room.

Merry Christmas from the UCW.

*Betty Garner, UCW Secretary*

## Pastoral Care

### *Shining a Light on Poverty*

Two weeks ago, if you were driving on King St. by Trinity United Church in Beamsville, you would have noticed a blue tent on the lawn. Irene Romagnoli, a member of Trinity hoped to make the public more aware of homelessness by spending a week in the tent. As she searched for water, bathrooms, food and places to get warm she became keenly aware of the struggle homeless people have for basic necessities. The number of people who ignored her, spoke keenly to the loneliness of homelessness. If someone stopped by, she asked them to sign a petition to be sent to the Ontario Government to create poverty safety nets like a guaranteed income.

On Dec. 3<sup>rd</sup>, I attended a panel discussion to learn more about poverty and homelessness. The panelists were Lyn Timmers, the Deputy Mayor of Lincoln, Carol Fuhrer the Executive Director of Community Care West Niagara, Dr. Karl Stobbe the medical director of REACH Niagara and Rev. Karen Orlandi the minister of Silver Spire United Church.

Over sixty people attended bringing thought-provoking questions and ideas. One of the learnings for me, was that homeless people are not always visible. They are people living in their cars, couch-surfing and living in precarious situations which may suddenly change because of illness, separation or job loss. I learned the term renoviction, if a landlord owns the building, the whole building can be evicted for renovations. It seems that our basic needs, food and housing have become profit centres. Many in the group called for a livable guaranteed income.

Some people might think that homeless situations don't exist in Fonthill, but I imagine they are hidden. Certainly there is a scarcity of low-rental housing here and our food bank is used more than ever as food prices rise. I know when I took someone to the St. Catharines food bank, I was shocked. The building was filled not with street people as I imagined, but women my age. Women who were struggling to make ends meet.

Lack of public transportation was another area cited that makes it very difficult for people without a car. Welland and St. Catharines have more services, but how do you get there? Next steps for the group? They will compile information, isolate the gaps in services, seek solutions, share that with people who can make it happen.

As a church community, we need to continue to support our local food banks and the Hope Centre. We should keep talking to our politicians, asking about housing, transportation and medical services.

*Sheila Laundry, Pastoral Care Committee Chair*

### **From the Outreach Committee**

The House tour was a great success thanks to many volunteers. Some of the funds will be given to different outreach programs. These would include, adopting a family of five for Christmas, Huntingtons Society (Local Chapter), and Wellsprings Cancer Support. We have already given to Hospice Niagara and the Worship and Membership committee has been doing drives for Pelham Cares all year. Most of the money raised is used to support our building, a place where a person can find comfort, kinship and follow spiritual teachings. Outreach includes being able to supple a place for people to worship and bring people together with common interests. The goal of a Church is to meet people's spiritual needs, where we can give strength to each other. Nobody is a solo Christian.

Thanks to everyone who is making a difference in our Church and may you all have a safe and merry Christmas with Family and Friends.

Thanks to all

*Submitted by Janet Hamilton, Chair*

### **From the M&P Committee**

Ministry and Personnel Committee Members include: Nancy Curran, Gaye Meloche, Alvin Penner and Sandra Harding (Chair).

Reflecting back on 2024, it's been a busy, yet consistent, time within our church family. From the stimulating words and the gift of musical accompaniment we hear every Sunday to the recent staff changes in the office, the year has gone very quickly.

Reverend Dr. Gordon Crossfield continued leading our congregation with his inspirational words on Sundays. He also supported and guided our church members and various committees. Combined services with Fenwick United Church periodically helped ease some of the burden especially over the summer months.

Bill Outred, our Music Director, continued leading us and our choir with his musical gifts on Sundays. His music is inspirational to the spirit as is his witty sense of humour. We have also appreciated his leading us during the occasional Sunday service.

After over 21 years of service, Patrice Walker, our Office Administrator, announced her retirement in the fall. She was such a valued staff member and will be dearly missed. With this change, we have since hired a new Bookkeeper/Manager. Sandra Palkowski has much experience working in a church office and we greatly appreciate her joining us.

The M&P Committee was busy with the mission of recruiting as well as other tasks it is responsible for during the year. Nancy Curran and Gaye Meloche will be stepping down from the committee at the end of December 2024 and February 2025 respectively. The M&P Committee has appreciated the knowledge and skills that both of these individuals shared over their time on the committee and they will be missed.

It is exciting times and we are looking forward to the many possibilities 2025 has to offer.  
Respectfully submitted,

*Sandra Harding, Chair of M&P Committee*

## **Worship & Membership Committee**

I am so thankful to be working with such a dedicated Committee. Everyone in my Committee is so giving of their time and talents. Glimmering candles, greeters to welcome you and a sanctuary always dressed appropriately for the season.

Thank you to the " Christmas Decorating Team" for all your hard work decorating the church before the House Tour.

The Christmas tree in the Narthex has been named The Memory Tree. There has been an overwhelming interest in this and the tree is getting very full of cardinals and looking beautiful!!! Thank you very much for your support on this.

This is a generous congregation. We have had Food Drives and now a Toy Fundraiser for Pelham Cares. By holding successful food drives we are meeting the needs of our community and strengthening our community ties.

We are privileged to have such a talented Music Director. He is always working hard to provide beautiful music and also bring in musical guests like Bruce Morrirt, Ted Augustine, Whitney Augustine, Jean Mcken and Carol Glanfield. As well as doing his regular Sunday services and adapting to constant changes, he has been busy with extra Christmas concerts this season.

Rev. Crossfield has been teaching our congregation many things including the "pretzel" for Ash Wednesday, the Seder Meal on Palm Sunday, Anointing services for Mother's Day and Father's Day and a beautiful Anniversary message just to name a few. We are so thankful for his support and time with us now.

Congregation involvement has been ongoing in celebrating 182 years for the United Church of Canada. Once a month a member of the congregation is preparing a short story on what the church means to them. This will continue until June 2025. I am still looking for volunteers!!

With a strong congregation with varied gifts and abilities graciously given by God we can do this for many years to come!!!

Merry Christmas everyone!! God Bless you this Christmas Season and great health and happiness in the New Year.

Respectfully submitted,  
Heather Jesik

*Chair of Worship and Membership*

## Council

Another church year has passed and what a year it has been. Our church has been a hive of activity this fall, and it is wonderful to see the energy and enthusiasm in support of our special programs. I would like to thank all who provided leadership in organizing the Benefit Concert in October and the Christmas House Tour in November and to all who worked to support these programs. The return of the House Tour after a five-year hiatus was very much welcomed and supported by the community and was an overwhelming success.

We said goodbye to Patrice, after 21 years of faithful and very capable service. She has been a blessing to our congregation, and we wish her much happiness in her retirement. We also welcome Sandra to our team and look forward to working with her. The M&P committee did a great job recruiting and managing this transition.

To all members of Council, thank you for your dedication and all the tireless work you do on behalf of our congregation. You really do so much behind the scenes to support our congregation, and we owe you all a debt of gratitude. Please keep our Search Committee in your prayers as they continue to work hard to find us a new minister.

The season of Advent signifies the start of a new church year, offering us the promise of new beginnings. So let us look forward with eager anticipation to all the exciting opportunities yet to come.

Our annual meeting will be held on Sunday, February 2, 2025, immediately following the church service. At this meeting we will be electing the governing body of Fonthill United Church called the Church Council. We currently have 11 members on Council and additional people who served on supporting committees. If you have an interest in serving the church on Council or on a committee, please let me know. It is important to have good representation from the congregation on Council and you might be one to offer your skills and talents. Please give this some consideration.

In closing, I would like to thank you for your support and wish you all a very Merry Christmas.

*Lyn Taylor, Council Chair*

## From the Finance Committee

We are pleased to report that as of Oct.31<sup>st</sup>, there was a year-to-date surplus of \$4,825 in the operating fund. This included approx. \$2,500 in early receipts from the house tour. As you know this year's tour was extremely successful and we will see the overall net position in the Nov. statement. We are very much encouraged by these results.

As mentioned in the Fall Grapevine, we must complete some major work in the area where the Hydro line enters the building and with the main electrical panel. We are hoping to have this done over the next two weeks. We are working with all tenants, plus committees re-scheduling as the power will be off while the work is being done. We expect it could take 4-6 hours. Projected costs are \$10,000 +/- . We should also note when we turned the furnace on in October, we incurred repairs totaling \$2,100 to replace pressure valves and older connections which were leaking. As mentioned in the past it is difficult to find some of the parts.

The Finance and Property Committee would like to take this occasion to say "THANKS" for your very generous support over the past year.

We also wish each of you a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year.

Thank You.

*Jim Bradley, Chair, Finance and Property Committee*

## Snow Days

The snow is coming and if it comes late on a Saturday night, you may get up on Sunday wondering if there is to be a service at Fonthill United. The decision will be made by the minister, the Council Chair and the Worship Chair. The way to find out whether the service has been cancelled is to check your email. In the case of cancellation, an email will be sent to the congregation. We trust that those who do not have an email address will get a phone call. Notice of cancellation will also be posted on the Fonthill United Church website.

### Upcoming Services & Events

Dec. 15 - 9:30 am	Special Musical Sunday Service
Dec. 22 - 9:30 am	Sunday Service - Advent 4
Dec. 24 - 9:00 pm	Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion
Dec. 29 - 10:00 am	Joint Sunday Service at Fenwick
Jan. 5 - 10:00 am	Worship with Fenwick