

St. John's Journal

St. John's Anglican Church, West Toronto
288 Humberside Ave. (at High Park Ave.)
(416) 763-2393 www.sjwt.ca



Advent 2003

Incumbent's Report - "Encountering Silence"

Greetings to you, and I hope our newsletter is great food for thought and faith as we enter the season of Advent.

Recently, I enjoyed a short retreat at a monastery. Mount Saviour Monastery is located on the mountains of New York State between Elmira and Corning. Given the busy pace of our fall life at St. John's, I was quite ready to adapt to the traditional Benedictine pattern of short services of worship seven times a day, beginning at 4:45 am. I enjoyed the plain meals and helping in the kitchen afterwards, and filling my time with walks in the mountains. I was thrilled when at Compline, the last service of the evening, they chanted the psalms accompanied by the harp. In other words, I was ready to continue my frenetic pace in a place designed to slow me down. The monastic life has extensive times of silence. At first I avoided them - our culture doesn't support silence and it is alien!

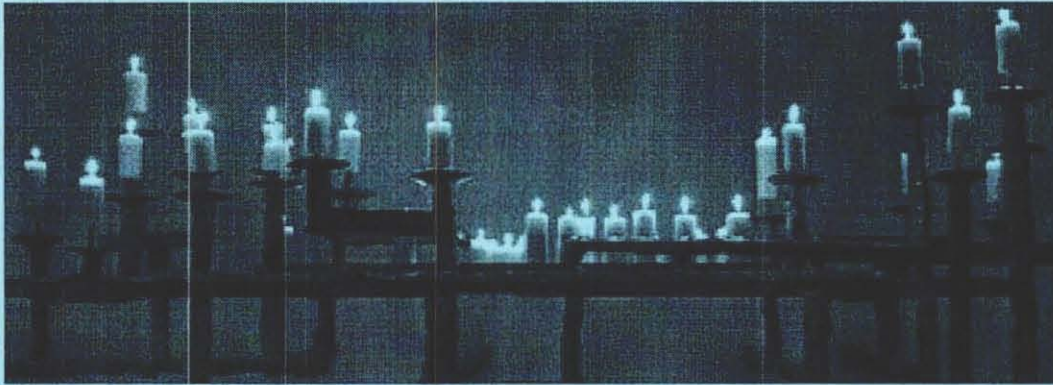
But silence is space before God. Silence is difficult. Raymond Gawronski, in *Why Orthodox Catholics Look to Zen*, writes, "The Word of God comes to us like a deer that emerges from the mist in the forest where you have been sitting without moving a muscle. If you are still enough, you will not scare the deer away." After a day at my old pace, I stopped. It is a discipline to create open space in our selves and in our lives, but in these spaces realizations come. Afterwards, we are often able to say, "It was of God that this was shown to me!" Clergy learn as part of courses in liturgy that silence is important in worship, but the pace of our world's efficiency comes over us too.

Advent is about waiting for God, in its origin as a Christian season anticipating, attending, awaiting the Christ Child. Here are some ways we will encounter this waiting, using silence in our worship.

- **Intentional silence.** It happens twice in our service at St. John's. Right after the children go to the Church School. Right after the sermon. Pauses in silence to encounter God. We already do it. During Advent, the bulletin will contain a brief thought at this point, to help you use the silence intentionally.
- **The psalm.** During Advent, we will say the psalm (or canticle) following an old tradition, pausing for 4 seconds at the asterisk between the two parts of the verse. Each Sunday, this psalm will be led by two people who will help us keep the silence.

(Incumbent's greeting continued)

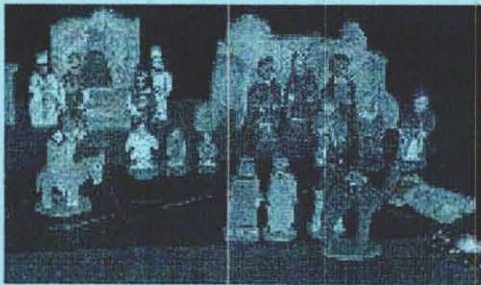
- **Compline.** The Wednesday evening candlelight service will be held weekly in Advent. It will be shorter, include spaces of silence, and in place of fellowship at the pub, will include the invitation to stay for a glass of wine. This service is intended as a refuge from the commercial, driven, and frenetic — the stuff we know only too well!



- **Daily Prayer.** This is one you can do on your own. At the end of each day, try to sit still for 20 minutes. Begin by inviting God's presence. Then run a movie through your mind of the activities of your day: thank God for the gifts, commit to making amends for the errors, ask help with the problems. Then for the rest of the time, try to sit without any distracting thought. You don't have to think anything to be in God's presence. Prayer is not about productivity. See if you can sit for the full 20 minutes...

In this season of the Christ Child coming to us, let us open a space in ourselves for how God comes to us now.

+ Gary van der Meer



READERS WANTED

Our roster of readers can always use a few more. If you feel you would enjoy reading the Gospel, or the first or second reading, or leading the prayers, please contact me by email (may.webster@sympatico.ca) or talk to me on Sunday, or speak to Father Gary. Any necessary training will be provided.

May Webster

PRAYER WALK AT ST. JOHN'S TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 7:30 P.M

"After this the Lord ... sent them two by two ahead of him to every ...place where he was about to go." (Luke 10:1)

Every month on the first Tuesday of the month people from various churches in our neighbourhood meet for a community prayer walk. The starting location is a local church (varies from month to month) where we first sing together and pray for the hosting church. Then people go out in pairs and walk around the neighbourhood, quietly asking for God's blessing on homes, businesses, schools, police and fire stations, churches and everyone living, working and meeting in our area - it is a great way to get more closely in touch with the needs of your neighbours! After the walk we return to the hosting church for refreshments and fellowship. All are welcome.

Marion Karasiuk

THE "SCREENING IN FAITH" PROJECT

"God of abundance and God of life, infuse your children with courage and love, that we may build communities of hope, which are healthy, thriving and safe. Help us to be responsible with our ministry so that both the weak and the strong find their home in our churches, through the profound love of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen."

Excerpt from Theological Foundation section, Toronto Diocese website

Nearly two years ago, in parallel with the Diocese of Toronto, we began working on a screening process and developed the broad principles that we felt were necessary to create a safer church environment. We are now beginning to work out the details of how we should make this a reality. Here is an update on how St. John's is working to implement the staff and volunteer screening process within our parish.

The screening team has been working this fall to ensure we meet the Diocesan timetable of full implementation by September 2004. The methodology has been developed by the Diocese with input from a number of parishes, including St. John's. This has resulted in a well-thought-out plan with considerable documentation and templates developed as a base for our own use.

We are now developing ministry position descriptions using the Diocesan templates (job descriptions if you prefer) for all the staff and volunteer positions within the parish. In fact, we may have been in touch with you to get your advice as we develop the descriptions for any positions that you hold. These descriptions allow us to assess the risk inherent with that particular "POSITION." We should keep in mind that these descriptions are not cast in stone, but may change from time to time to reflect such things as parish growth, changing needs or volunteer availability.

All positions within the parish must have some screening. How much depends on the nature of the risk associated with the position. Special precautions will be required for only those few positions that are assessed as high risk. In all cases confidentiality is important and records will be secured with limited access in the incumbents office and at the diocese. The main steps of the process are:



- Develop ministry position descriptions;
- Assess the risk associated with each position;
- Ascertain whether it is possible to reduce that risk;
- Develop and apply the screening procedures associated with that risk;
- Continually evaluate and update.

The most stringent screening will of course be required for positions with high risk. These positions will include those:

- Working with children;
- Working with vulnerable adults in one to one situations; and
- Working with parish funds or financial plans and budgets.

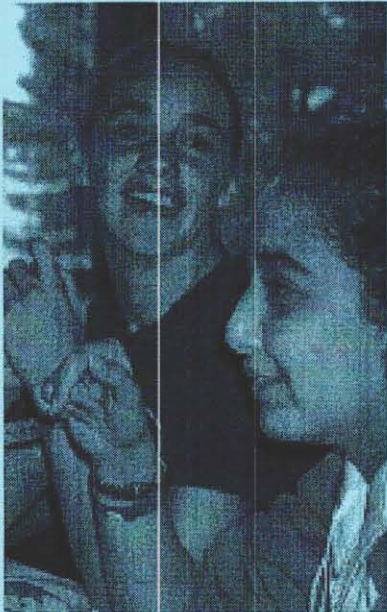
To date, even in our small parish, we have identified 23 volunteer ministry positions and 7 staff positions at St. John's. (Some are part-time positions, some are shared with the day care and some people hold more than one position.) We have completed draft descriptions and risk assessments for 7 of these positions, and will have the balance completed for review early next year. We will share these with you at that time for your comment and advice. Your input is not just valuable; it is essential.

The screening team members consist of **Sally Ritchie, Ian Henderson, Allan Waters, Sheila Crummey, John Mohler** and **Father Gary**. We will be meeting regularly over the next few months to ensure that we commence implementing the screening protocol within the Diocesan timetable. For the most current and complete information I encourage you to visit the Diocesan website at www.toronto.anglican.ca.

Thanks for your support.

John Mohler

YOUTH AT ST. JOHN'S



WHAT'S UP WITH THE ST. JOHN'S YOUTH GROUP

KEEP IT REAL RETREAT

The weekend of October 24 - 26 was a new and special experience for ten members of the **St. John's youth group** and two adult leaders, as we participated in a youth retreat at Muskoka Woods Resort on the north shore of Lake Rosseau.

The theme of the retreat was "**Keep it Real**" - and this proved to be a challenging and fruitful focus for us and some 275 other participants from all points of the diocese.

The program featured a number of presentations by **Phil Cann**, a Christian youth worker from British Columbia. He was already familiar to us through his "Quest" video series, which we are using on both our Sunday meetings and confirmation classes.

Phil's approach is to get people thinking about basic issues of life and faith. He does this through hugely entertaining stories, like one describing his very non-Christian but thoroughly macho response when knocked off his new motorcycle; and another about a chicken that

True wisdom and
real power belong
to God; from him we learn
how to live and also what
to live for.

(Job 12:13, The Message)

learned to fly the coop. Each story makes a point - and also invites the listener to consider a Christian response to that point.

Since youth have plenty of energy, Saturday afternoon was wisely devoted to sporting and artistic activities such as hiking, golf, mountain biking, and T-shirt painting.



Music was also an important part of the weekend experience. The Christian rock group, **Disruption**, who have given a concert at St. John's, provided wonderful music for both worship and entertainment. As we discovered at Saturday night's talent show, our diocese has many gifted young musicians - including our own **Chelsea Mohler** and **Martha Westgate**, who performed a beautiful duet.

While Saturday had been a wet-but-not-Noah's-Flood kind of day, Sunday saw the clouds open. Fortunately, the day was planned for indoors, with the central moment being the celebration of the Eucharist.

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(Youth Group continued)

What did we bring away from this retreat? For many members of the youth group, the fellowship, both within the group and with youth from other parishes, was perhaps the most important part of the experience. At the same time, we all experienced a new sense of the possibilities of faith and Jesus' call to us to enter into a new life. For this, we thank God.

CONFIRMATION CLASSES

The retreat had the added benefit of helping us prepare for the confirmation program St. John's is offering its youth this year. Through this program, we pray that each participant will discern whether he or she is called to confirmation - while recognizing that some will decide it not the time for them to take this step.



Confirmation has been described as "a sacrament in search of a meaning" - reflecting the fact that, as the Church has in recent years renewed its understanding of baptism as the fundamental rite of Christian initiation, confirmation has declined in importance.

At St. John's we are trying to combine the old and the new. Our confirmation program includes a learning component that tries to cover some of the basics of our faith - this reflects an important part of confirmation "as it was." Our "new" component invites participants to explore and develop their call and commitment to ministry and discipleship.

To support our youth in that exploration, some adult members of the parish have agreed to act as mentors. Together, each mentor and youth

participant will meet to discuss faith issues. With the mentor's help and guidance, each youth participant will undertake a project that will encourage him or her not only to think and pray about their faith, but also to carry their faith out into the community through service.

St. John's is truly blessed by the presence of its youth, and also by the spirit and commitment of its adult members who respond to our young people. We would especially like to thank Gary and our wardens for their support.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

If you would like more information about the youth group, please contact me at 416 767-4309 or e-mail ihender@sympatico.ca

Ian Henderson



LOTS HAPPENING WITH SUNDAY SCHOOL

September was a busy time for everyone. Going back to school, signing up for special programs and for some of us coming back to Church and Sunday School.

This year we are getting back to the basics and taking a walk through the Old Testament, starting with Genesis. There will also be special messages and alternative teachings throughout the year at times like Thanksgiving, Halloween and Remembrance Day.

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(Sunday School continued)

BEARS AND STORIES

Beginning with **Advent I (November 30)**, we will be starting prayer time with our **Prayer Bears**. We are asking members of the congregation to bring Bears for the Sunday School children to use until June. These Bears will help us in our Prayer Time Focus. So, if you have a Bear that needs a new home, please think of us!

We also need Seniors from our congregation to act as **Storytellers** for Our Advent message. This will be a 3 week Christmas Sunday School program for the children. The purpose is to help us rediscover the surprise of the Christmas story by listening to accounts from the characters put in a way that the children may not have heard before.

This storytelling will be a great opportunity to get more people involved in the work of the Sunday School and we would like to invite three people to come and read a part of the story. We are thinking of Senior members of the congregation who are not usually associated with children's work so that the children can hear the story as if coming from their grandma or granddad. To show how important the story is we will construct a special storyteller's chair. We will follow the story time with special crafts to emphasize the story for that particular week.

COMING SOON!

We are also pleased to announce that there will be a **Vacation Bible School** held during **March Break**. Watch for more details to come!

HELP WANTED

We would love to have any volunteers able to help on Sunday sign up for Sunday School.

If you would like to know more about any of the Sunday School activities, please come see me or Father Gary.

Blessing,

Ann Westgate

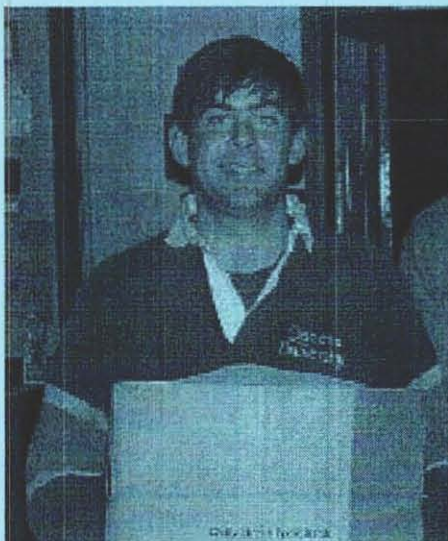
Hallowe'en at St. John's 2003



We gave out candy to the children, and took a lot of pictures...children dressed in black, in robes, in strange outfits.



We gave out candy, and a few tours.



At the same time, we hosted **Hallowe'en Harvest**, a food drive in the neighbourhood, put on by high school students from all over the city and organized by **Inter-School Christian Fellowship**. This year, 57 boxes of food were collected, and we express our thanks to the people of the neighbourhood for your generosity.

WHO ARE WE BECOMING?

WHAT TO TELL PEOPLE ABOUT OUR CHURCH?

Over the past months, I have had to consider what to tell people unfamiliar with our parish about our church. I have been updating the content of our web site, www.sjwjt.ca. I know that some of you go here regularly, and some of you either prefer to know us in person, or do not have access to a computer. It is quite a challenge to write very briefly, both for those of us who use our web site to keep informed, and to attract the seeker who would like to know more about us. Here you will find reprinted a few "pages" from our web site. Consider what you would say about St. John's to attract newcomers to our church.

Of course a web site tells someone what you read below, but what do we TELL when we meet strangers for the first time? In preparation for "A Christmas Carol," I went to the new neighbourhood north of the Dominion on St. Clair, flyers in hand. Just stick them in the mailbox?? No, this was a doorbell exercise. Evelyn Butler and I walked together, parted to go to separate doors and rang the bell. No answer...put the flyer in the mailbox. An answer, from people all over the world? Invite them to church. Here is our script:

"Hi, I am from St. John's Anglican Church, just south of here. I wanted you to know about the benefit concert we are doing for the food bank, a reading of Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol.' One of our readers in Pinball Clemons, coach of the Toronto Argonauts, (only mention David Miller if they don't have someone else's sign in their yard). We also wanted you to know about our new Sunday School program and the times of our Christmas services."

So the model is not the Mormons! The model is canvassing for an election. 30 seconds, and share more if they engage in conversation. As we walked we "debriefed" and had a good visit. We felt like we had accomplished something. And people were interested!

To me, this felt like a good way to talk to outsiders about St. John's. We have a lot of great activities coming up, and I'd like to share this experience with those of you who enjoy a walk.

Gary van der Meer

Excerpt from our website www.sjwjt.ca:

Message from the Pastor - 31 October, 2003

This is a great time to drop in for a visit at St. John's. Over the past two years, we have absorbed a number of changes, and we'd love to show you the results.



Ken Whitely

- **New Colours:** Our vibrant purple, yellow and green interior beautifully highlights traditional stained glass scenes from the life of our Saviour, Jesus. Frankly, we were not a beige congregation, and now that the beige walls are gone, occasionally we wonder, "Why did we put up with them so long?" We love being both **grounded** and **daring!**
- **New Music:** We are now comfortably into our pattern of enjoying a roster of wonderful musicians - traditional organ and piano, folksy guitars, jazz on piano and bass, renewal music on keyboard, Celtic

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fiddle, and a great blues sound. As we get to know our musicians, we have come to appreciate more and more how their distinct styles help us to praise God in all ways. We have also learned the beautiful Christian virtue of bearing with each other as we grow in our appreciation of musical diversity to be found in our great city.

- **New Children's Program:** We welcome our new Sunday School Coordinator, and are pleased with the growth in our Sunday School as our children enjoy growing in the faith. The children are with the congregation for a Focus designed for everyone, then go together to sessions of crafts, songs, and stories that build a foundation of knowledge and faith. The children rejoin us for communion, sharing in our open table. **Bring your kids!**

New Community Outreach: We loved being on the tour for Doors Open Toronto. It's great to be Ground Zero for the Hallowe'en Food Drive. We are so excited to be putting on the CBC-sponsored Public Reading of "A Christmas Carol" with Music, a benefit concert for the foodbank and programs of The Stop. There are so many ways to make a difference in God's world - **Come make a difference with us!**

The Colours:

"After all, we are not a beige congregation."

With these words, the days of that former colour of the church interior were numbered. The congregation had raised the money, and the painters were ready to start, but we held off for what became a time of enormous creativity. People were invited to paint squares of their favourite colours: blues, greens, yellows, even pink. After all, our final choices would be painted over them. Over the Christmas season of 2001, our congregation and our wider community had an opportunity to imagine St. John's as a different place. We soon came to the bankruptcy of our creative abilities. We liked the process, but nobody wanted to make the final choice. Who would want to be remembered for choosing "those ugly colours." And we found help. By a process of detective work, we met **Stuart Reid**, a stained glass artist and professor of colour theory at Ontario College of Art and Design.



We held a meeting of the congregation with Stuart, and he took us through an interesting process. "What kind of feelings do you want to evoke about being in this space? What can the building tell the community about who you are and what happens here?" We answered in words (no negative ones because they damage the creative process!) by saying we are:

- A transforming community
- Easter people
- Risk-oriented
- In dialogue with our tradition
- Engaged in the issues and questions of our day

Stuart took our words to heart, and we often found him in the building, checking the light, taking pictures. He came back to us with a radical proposal. Focus. The church interior spoke of many items competing for our attention. Harmonize the competing colours of wood and pipes, and bring more attention to the windows, which were somewhat lost in the competing elements of the space. Let the windows - a remarkably complete and consistent portrait of the life of Jesus - present our dialogue with tradition. Let the space be more "heart-shaped" by mirroring the curves of the ceiling in the configuration of the pews. Use Easter colours that have both a contemporary feel and are already found in the windows. We saw the proposal, digital photographs of the church interior, with the proposed colours. We squirmed and we deliberated. Purple. Yellow. Green. How risk-oriented are we really - can we walk our talk? And we decided.

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We have since become known as "the Easter Church". **Archbishop Finlay**, with us to celebrate the renewed space, spoke in the language of symbolism. "I have always associated purple with going deeper into the heart of the matter, into myself, into the heart of God. Yellow speaks of celebration. Green is traditionally the colour of growth, growth of all kinds. A church that can live these three things is a healthy expression of Christian community."

Now, two years later, our congregational life is informed by worship in this purple, yellow and green space. The colours wear well. We notice the windows more. We appreciate more than ever the challenge to not make beige decisions, but to live our risk-oriented calling as a Christian faith community.

St. John's Congregation

The congregation of St. John's Church is diverse, representing all ages. While the majority of parishioners are of European extraction, our parish family also has families with origins in Nigeria, Egypt, and the Caribbean.

During the "Language Challenge" on Pentecost Sunday, 2003, we were very pleased to present the 22 verses of the reading from Acts in 18 languages!

Over the years, St. John's ministry to families with special needs, particularly autism and physical disabilities, has become an emphasis on being an inclusive community. (See this particularly in our [Mission Statement](#))

The congregation also presents a diverse cross-section of the working life of our city: medicine, civil service, teaching, accounting, engineering, banking, law, television, the arts, engineering, and the lively in retirement.

The majority of our community live in the neighbourhoods of West Toronto, or immediately beyond.



Our Neighbourhood

"A surprisingly busy piece of sidewalk."

Our reality is that St. John's Church is hardly tucked away and hidden in the neighbourhood - the westernmost block of Humberside Avenue is a surprisingly busy piece of sidewalk. If you walk or drive by, your eye will be drawn through the trees to a colourful banner on the church wall, and you will hear the children of the daycare in the churchyard playground. There is a constant flow of people walking by, enjoying the street with their dogs, or visiting our immediate neighbours:

- **Holy Cross Priory**, to the right of the church driveway, is one of three Anglican religious orders in Toronto. We often welcome Sunday morning visitors who are on retreat at the priory.
- **Humberside Collegiate Institute**, is the high school opposite the church on Quebec Avenue. We borrow their parking lot, host the music department's annual concert, share ministry ideas with the student Christian fellowship group, and you will regularly see Humberside students enjoying their lunch on the St. John's steps.

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- **Humberside Tennis Courts** are located just south of the high school; you will see many people walking through the neighbourhood carrying rackets. Courts are open to the public.



- **Inverness Bed & Breakfast** is across the street at 287 Humberside Avenue. **Elizabeth Leslie** welcomes visitors from all over the world, and we regularly have visitors from the Bed & Breakfast on Sunday morning. If you are interested in staying at Inverness, Elizabeth says mention that you saw it here on our website!

Our local neighbourhood, originally settled around the railroad and mostly developed in the 1920s, includes streets of large red brick homes, tall apartment buildings, several new condo developments, and between us and the lake, High Park. The Bloor Street entrance to this wonderful 400 acre park is just two blocks south of the church on High Park Avenue. High Park Avenue has regular buses, with a stop at the intersection with Humberside Avenue, and the High Park subway station is immediately north of Bloor Street. In the decades following World War II, West Toronto became a Ukrainian neighbourhood, and this can still be seen by the names of some of the shops on Bloor Street. More recently, people from all over the world make their home in the immediate vicinity of the church, and there are many families with young children.

At St. John's, it is important to us to be part of the neighbourhood. The church is a polling station in elections and hosts many community meetings

and concerts. As we get to know the faces and names of parishioners, it is surprising how often we see familiar faces on our local Bloor, Dundas and Roncesvalles shopping streets. And of course, we welcome you from the neighbourhood and beyond to worship with us.

Outreach Ministries

For many years, the most significant outreach ministry at St. John's has been a radical inclusiveness that developed out of our insistence that our congregation also be home to families with special needs members. We made the building completely wheelchair accessible. Our congregation grew to include families with young people with special needs, particularly autism. When "sounds" interrupted our worship, we determined that we were not interrupted. So deep was our commitment to this ministry, that **L'Arche Daybreak**, the community of Jean Vanier and home of Henri Nouwen, referred to St. John's as a "prophetic community."

At the same time we have continued to be involved in "outreach" in more traditional ways. Our parish participates in **FaithWorks**, the social ministries of the Diocese of Toronto, at a level beyond the size of our congregation. From 2001 to 2002, we increased our commitment to FaithWorks by more than 15%. Over the years, St. John's has also held concert series, entitled, "**Concerts with a Cause.**" We also do weekly food collection as part of our offertory, in support of the foodbank at **The Stop**. The St. John's Youth Group share in our outreach ministries with a 30 hour fast each year in Advent. On this "juice-day" we have helped out at other outreach ministries in Anglican Churches in the city, including the breakfast program at **St. Stephen's Church**, (just north of Kensington Market on College Street), and the drop in center at **All Saints Church** (Sherbourne and Dundas Streets).

Another part of our outreach is developing a partner relationship with **St. Saviour's Anglican Church, East London, South Africa**, as part of the companion diocese relationship between the dioceses of Toronto and Grahamstown. Our partner parish is a racially mixed inner city

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congregation, where they recently painted their church interior orange, yellow, green, and black. As part of our outreach, and part of the ministry of our honorary assistant **Bruce Alton**, St. John's has developed and carried a web site for our partner parish.



BLESSING OF THE PETS

On **Wednesday, October 1**, we marked St. Francis of Assisi Day with our third annual "Blessing of the Pets." The occasion began with **Father Leonard** dropping in to bless **Gary and Maya**. Gary then blessed cats **Mollser**, brought by **May and John Webster**, and **Willie** brought by **Margo Raven**. **Elizabeth Leslie** brought her dogs **Maggie** (Airedale), **Seamus** (Yorkshire terrier) and **Mouton** (Poodle) and her parrot **Rob Roy**. **Joan Bull** brought **Duke** (American cocker spaniel). Later arrivals were **Ronda and Adam Nychka**, with their dog **Billy** and cat **Felix**, as well as their stuffed menagerie.



Scriptures read included Isaiah 11:1-9 (the peaceable kingdom), Numbers 22:22-35 (Balaam and the donkey), 2 Samuel 12 and 13 (the parable of rich man's flocks and the poor man's one ewe lamb, and the consequences of David's actions), John 21:15-19 (Jesus tells Peter to 'feed my sheep').



Many pictures were taken, with special thanks to **Martha Westgate, John Webster, and Elizabeth Leslie** for the loan of her digital cameral. Elizabeth informed the group that **Rob Roy** must now be **Roberta**, as he recently laid eggs. **Indra** enjoyed a number of wet kisses and served all the animals treats. There were also human treats: wine, cheese and crackers, cookies and juice. And love and good conversation for all.

SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS



Sergius and Bacchus, Byzantine icon, Kiev.

Bruce Alton is forming a group to prepare a motion for our vestry meeting in the New Year in support of our parish's long-standing policy of inclusiveness. This is an important time for St. John's and our diocese as we move toward officially sanctioned blessings of same sex unions. If you wish to participate in the drafting of this motion, please speak to Bruce or e-mail him at <mailto:balton8664@rogers.com>balton8664@rogers.com.

AN OPEN LETTER FROM A FELLOW PARISHIONER:

Dear St. John's parishioners,

With the crisis facing the Anglican church worldwide concerning the propriety of blessing same-sex relationships (and possibly marrying same-sex partners) I feel compelled to share my own personal experience with this issue.

My eldest sister, Jean, (I am one of seven children born into a family with devoutly Roman Catholic parents) has been living in a committed lesbian relationship for many years (more than 10). Her partner, Aline has become an integral member of our extended family and their relationship has been a source of inspiration and joy for all of us.

When I read and hear theological arguments - based on scriptural passages - that appear to condemn same-sex relationships - the arguments do not touch me in any way. I can only come to this issue with first-hand knowledge of how the people in my life who live in committed same-sex relationships have influenced it - for the good. Through my sister and her partner I have met many of their friends - also lesbians living in committed relationships. They are wonderfully loving, caring people who support each other and who contribute to their communities in many ways.

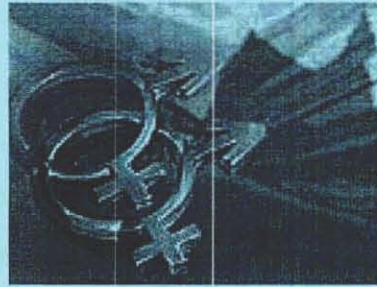
Jean and Aline decided over 10 years ago to celebrate their commitment to each other and invited their friends, families and co-workers to a "commitment ceremony". The law did not permit them to marry but they wanted to make a public commitment to each other of their love. They wanted their families, friends and co-workers to witness their commitment. Just as in wedding ceremonies, their families and friends offered to support them in their commitment to live with each other faithfully and with love. It was a joyous occasion which was attended by every member of my extended family (including all nieces and nephews). Jean and Aline gathered friends, family and some co-workers together at their home for dinner and dancing which followed the commitment ceremony itself. The ceremony was inspiring and uplifting. The party was great fun.

Since then, Jean and Aline have continued to thrive in their relationship. It clearly nurtures not only them but our extended family, their friends and the community of which they are a part.

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(Same Sex Letter continued)

Let me show you what I mean. They reach out to so many people in so many ways. Each summer they host "cousins weekend" which is a chance for all Burke nieces and nephews to visit at their home and explore New York City. It is an important reason why the next generation in my family are so close. They have been attending "cousins weekend" for over 10 years and it has become an important tradition.



Graphic from CBC Website - www.cbc.ca

Jean and Aline host a variety of other family gatherings which include Aline's family as well. Aline's niece lived with them for a year while she attended a nearby community college. They offered her critical support at a difficult time.

Aline retired recently and since she was not working full-time like the rest of us, last week she offered to fly to Buffalo to help my mother care for my stepfather who had just been released home from a month's stay in hospital. At age 80, my mother was trying to cope with arranging for home care so that she could care for my stepfather at home. Aline filled in when the rest of us were not able to be there - she spent a week - and offered immense support to not only my mother and stepfather but also to our whole family.

These are just a few examples - there are countless others. Jean and Aline's lives demonstrate to me that their relationship is founded on love and is a nurturing force not only to them personally but to everyone around them. How can such a relationship be condemned? Common sense tells me it is to be valued and supported.

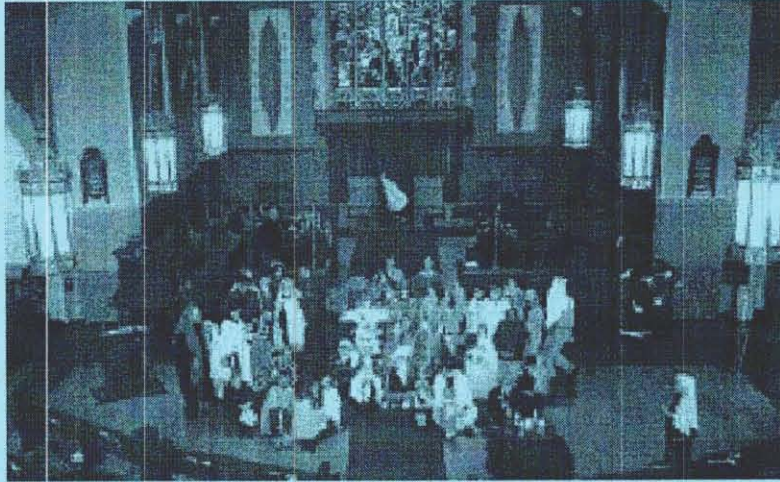
The essence of a Christian marriage is living together in an intimate relationship that is founded on mutual love, respect and support for each other and which is grounded in the Gospel. That is the kind of relationship my sister has built with her partner Aline. They demonstrate to me what a successful "Christian marriage" is all about.

They shall know we are Christians by our love. Jean and Aline's relationship is all about love and their love spills out into the community around them. As a church I would hope we bring to this issue the love spoken of in the Gospel, and that as a church, we open our eyes to the many gay and lesbian couples in our midst who live loving and faithful lives. We could learn much about marriage from them, particularly because their relationship has been forged in a world that is often hostile to them, yet in spite of the additional challenges of a gay/lesbian relationship, many are thriving and showing us what it means to live out the Gospel through a marriage relationship centred on Christian love.

I believe gays and lesbians should be permitted to participate in the sacrament of marriage if they have chosen, like any heterosexual couple, to make a marriage commitment to their partner. Based on my personal experience, such marriages would enrich the life of our Christian communities worldwide.

Sheila Crummey
November 16, 2003

Advent & Christmas Celebrations



"A Christmas Carol" **Saturday, November 29, 7:00 p.m.**

Together with our sponsor, CBC Radio One, we are pleased to present Charles Dickens' wonderful Christmas story as a benefit concert for the foodbank at The Stop (Davenport & Symington). Guest readers include **Mike "Pinball" Clemons** (Toronto Argonauts), **David Miller** (Mayor of Toronto), **Archbishop Terence E. Finlay** (Anglican Diocese of Toronto), **Mary Lou Fallis** (Soprano soloist), **Veronica Tennant** (National Ballet of Canada), **John Wright** (Toronto Western Hospital), **Jean Carter** (CBC Reporter) and **Mary Ito** (Host, TVO "More to Life"), and **Nick Saul** (Executive Director of The Stop). One of St. John's regular musicians, **David Jones**, will be providing musical accompaniment.

Service of Compline - Wednesdays in Advent **December 3, 10 and 17, 7:30 p.m.**

Please join us for a brief time of sanctuary from the commercial hustle and bustle, as we observe Compline, the ancient monastic closing-of-the day worship. This brief candlelight service includes special prayers, Taize chants, a few familiar hymns and the eucharist. Join us for a short time - about 40 minutes - and in place of our regular excursion to The Rebel Chop House for fellowship, we invite you to stay a few moments longer for a glass of wine. We will return to the regular monthly **Candlelight Eucharist** on the "Middle Wednesday", **January 14, 2004**.

"Journey to Bethlehem" Congregational Christmas Pageant **Sunday, December 21, 10:30 a.m.**

Come to this service dressed to re-enter First Century Palestine. Wear blankets, towels, rugs, angel wings, soldier helmets, togas (a supply will be on hand in case you forget to bring your own). Our Pageant includes a few spoken parts. Please let us know in advance if you would like to volunteer! We especially invite photographers. This is intergenerational worship at its best, and we will share the Holy Eucharist with everyone in costume. **A Christmas Pageant for Everyone!**

"Christmas Eve" **Wednesday, December 24**

- **Family Christmas Eve, 5:30 pm.**
- Carols, Children's Christmas Story, Communion.
- **Candlelight Holy Eucharist, 10:00 pm.**
- Carols by Candlelight, soloist, communion. Sing "Silent Night" in the dark.

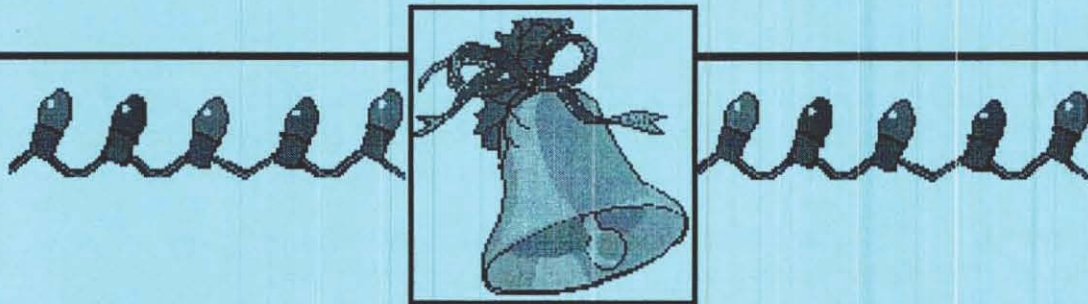
"Christmas Day" **Thursday, December 25, 2003**

Christmas Morning: Table Eucharist, 10:30 a.m.

A Table Eucharist includes scones and juice, prayers, the Christmas Story and Communion. Ideal if you are planning to travel, or if you need a place to go on Christmas morning.

CELEBRATE THE SEASON AT ST. JOHN'S

- December 2 7:30 p.m. **Neighbourhood Prayer Walk from St. John's**
- December 3, 10, 17 7:30 p.m. **Service of Compline**
(Candlelight service with Taize chants, hymns & eucharist)
- December 21 10:30 a.m. **"Journey to Bethlehem"**
(*A Christmas Pageant for all ages. Come in 1st Century Palestine costume (Togas, towels, blankets, staffs)*)
- December 24** 5:30 p.m. **Family Christmas Eve**
(*Carols, Children's Christmas Story, Communion*)
- 10:00 p.m. **Candlelight Holy Eucharist**
(*Carols by Candlelight, Soloist, Communion*)
- December 25** 10:30 a.m. **Christmas Morning**
(*Table Eucharist with scones, juice, prayers, Christmas Story and Communion*)
- January 14 7:30 p.m. **Monthly Wednesday Candlelight Services resume**

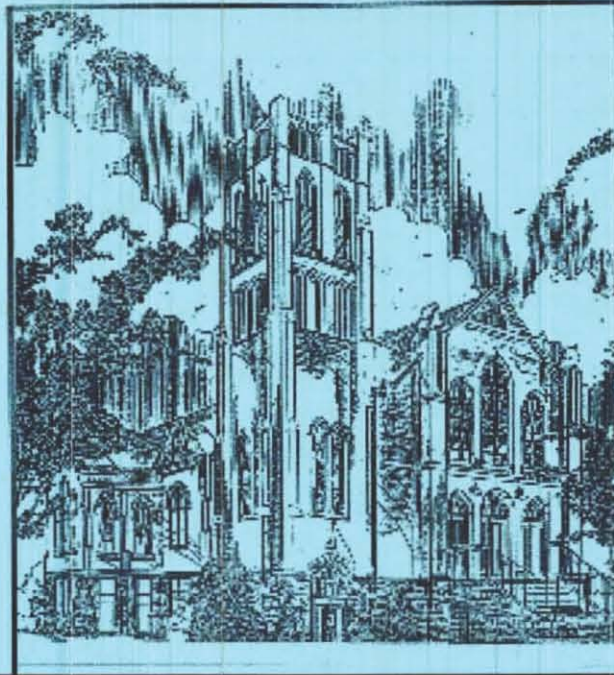


ONGOING ACTIVITIES

- Mondays 7:30 – 9:30 p.m. **Monday Evening Adult Christian Education**
(Discussing "What's So Amazing About Grace?" by Philip Yancey)
- Thursdays 10:30 a.m. **Thursday Morning Service**
(Scripture readings, shared reflection, prayers, singing)

This list continues to be updated.

Please forward updates to Andrea Ritty (416-769-7948, cmrd@sympatico.ca)



We are not a Building!

We're an accessible, accepting, diverse community. We are young and old, able-bodied and disabled, employed and unemployed. We are married, single, divorced, widowed, straight and gay. We are from all over the world, yet we could live next door. You will find open minds and open hearts at St. John's.

The mission of St. John's Church is to build a community of caring believers committed to Christ to work for justice and service to all in need. We gather to praise God and to give and receive support to meet the challenge of our daily ministries. We call on all who will to come and join us

We have a proud (120 year) history, an exciting and challenging present, and a dream of the future that we'd like to share with you.

A Few Words from the Editor:

Thank you to everybody who contributed to this issue, especially Father Gary, Ian Henderson, Sheila Crummey, John Mohler, Bruce Alton, Chris Ruddy, Ann Westgate, Marion Karasiuk and May Webster. I wish everyone a joyous Christmas season and all the best in the New Year!

If you have any questions about the Journal, please see me or send me an email at cmrd@sympatico.ca.

Peace!

Andrea Ruddy



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Yahoo group: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stjohnstoronto>