

News for Scattered Pews

December 2022



Val's Voice

God is with us in a world full of change!

I appreciated a reflection I read earlier this week on Advent... thoughts about Mary, and what she revealed of her faith with the Annunciation.

The author, Debie Thomas, noted that initially Mary heard Gabriel's words and was perplexed, wondering what on Earth he meant.

And fair enough! I remember in my younger years noting that once Gabriel stopped in, Mary high-tailed it off to her cousin Elizabeth's. I wondered if she was looking for a refuge from wondering neighbours, or perhaps she was just looking for the wisdom of years.

Either way, at some point in her three months with Elizabeth, Mary calmed. Maybe she wasn't any less perplexed, but she was less worried about it. During her time with Elizabeth, Mary learned to sing of the good news of God, which comes in the ways the world will change, in the midst of the ways everything will be turned upside down.

She learned that it was good news for God's community that the proud will be scattered, the lowly raised, the hungry filled because of God's mercy, though it might not feel like good news all the time. What would those changing times and structures feel like? Chaos sometimes, I am sure. **But in the midst of a life that changed drastically Mary learned to know and love God in a different way - in the midst of that change and uncertainty.**

Debie Thomas noted that throughout her own life, she has realized that as the world changes, her ideas about God change as well. Many of the ideas she had when she was young have changed almost completely as life went on. She learned, as I think many of us do, that Scripture isn't one-dimensional, any more than we are. Shifting perspectives and even doubt are part of the richness of the tapestry of faith. She learned that the mystery of God comes to mean more to us as our own lives unfold in changes we could never anticipate.

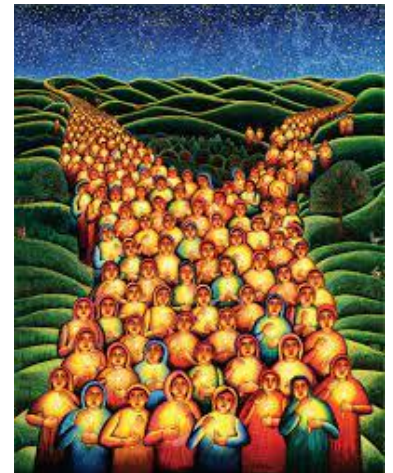
Our whole world continues to rumble along over the many struggles of life. Hearts break in Ukraine. And hearts break closer to home as well. The uncertainty of our own lives is becoming more familiar, though equally unsettling.

For us as a parish in the midst of familiar financial challenges and times that remain uncertain, if we are honest we don't know exactly how life will unfold for us in the next years.

I spoke with Bishop Geoff recently, and he said what I think is true:

As we continue to live our baptism, and explore creative ways to engage with the world; as we continue care for our neighbours while we follow Jesus, our efforts will bear fruit.

God's life surrounds us and upholds us. Life has been on hold for so long it takes awhile to get up, but every time we risk doing something new, and then risk again if that thing doesn't seem to go well, God is there watching and cheering - supporting us in living God's own vision.



John August Swanson, artist

These Sundays of Advent, we hear over and over the justice and love to which we are called and the healing and hope from God which result. We also hear that it is God's decision to live among us and make that vision a reality. Jesus wasn't a success in any typical way, but throughout his ministry, his presence and his voice and his love shone God's light on our world like the Christmas star in our stories.

That is our call too, to shine God's light and love on our world. Over these next months, as you hear the stories of the world around us, please stop and pray, seeking to discern how we as a parish can also be good neighbours, and shine God's light and love where they are needed.

Val

Vestry Notes from November 22

As we continue to work towards reconciliation, it was decided that one-third of this year's **special Christmas offering** will go to Indspire, an Indigenous national charity that invests in the education of First Nations, Inuit and Métis people for the long-term benefit of these individuals, their families and communities, and Canada. (Charity Intelligence Canada recognized Indspire with a four-star rating and has named them a Top 10 Canadian Impact Charity for the last five years!) The remainder of the Christmas offering will continue to support the needs of our parish.

As Brian Crow (Finance Chair) noted in worship on December 4, we currently **need about an extra month of offering to break even at the end of the year** - not a surprise, as we passed a deficit budget for 2022. It will be so appreciated if you are able to help the parish end the year with balanced books!

THANKS a Minion!



Many of our **regular renters** are back, but some are not. If parishioners have ideas for community groups who may be interested in renting space from our parish, please speak to Carey or Heather.

Come spring, we will look at **flying a Survivor's flag outside our church on an ongoing basis**. The website of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation notes that "The Survivors' Flag is an expression of remembrance, meant to honour residential school survivors and all the lives and communities impacted by the residential school system in Canada. Each element depicted on the flag was carefully selected by survivors from across Canada, who were consulted in the flag's creation."



We took a **first look at next year's draft budget** which the budget committee proposed. If passed, we will again have a \$25,000 deficit for 2023. The draft budget also proposes that only half of the Mission and Ministry monies requested by the Diocese be given.

It is absolutely the generosity of parishioners that means we don't end the year with the deficits we budget for at the start. If you are able to commit new funds to help us end 2022 and move ahead "in the black," please consider doing so!

Vestry will have another look at the draft budget this month before voting on its approval.

Despite the underlying worries about the budget, our meeting seemed to be filled with **optimism, good will, and even laughter as we look ahead**. The visioning day seemed to lighten our mood and open us up to working together in new ways. People were glad to hear of plans for Advent Soup and Prayer, Christmas caroling, cookie baking with the kids, and were open to other community building ideas. Do you have some ideas to build community and re-light the vision of our parish? Let someone know!



Christmas Eve Services

2:00 pm

~ Christmas Pageant and Eucharist
with a Christmas tea afterwards ~

8:00 pm

Christmas Eve Eucharist

Christmas Day Service

10:30 am

Quiet Communion

~ A quiet Christmas Day service with music ~

Visioning Day 2022

Deacon Michelle Collins, who led our Visioning Day on October 29, provided a report to us in which she was very affirming of our parish. Vestry took time to discuss the day and the report.



We remembered Michelle's introduction – when we were reminded that in a reading of Acts 10:1-33, we heard how God challenged, directed, affirmed, called, enlightened and transformed the early Christians.

In turn, those people **listened, dreamed, responded, protested**, struggled with the demand for change, came together, obeyed, quaked!, said “that’s not how we do it”; were set in their ways, searched, **went to new places, provided and accepted hospitality**, and responded to differences.

We finished the day challenged, enlightened and hoping to be transformed ourselves. Even as we know that like the people of that day, as well as listening and dreaming we can protest, struggle, and say “that’s not how we do it”, we seemed ready to consider how we can share God’s hospitality and go to new places where God leads.

Some of the rest of what we learned:

The values which have been central to this parish are important!

Some of the words we came up with to describe St. Mary Magdalene include: Welcoming; Prayerful; Generous (with time and support); Informed (theologically and relationally); Kind; Valuing of Outreach (committed to responding to physical/emotional needs of others); Non-judgmental (seeking to be accepting of diverse opinions, people, and life situations); Creative in worship; Honest/truth seeing; Joyful (in worship and in relationships); Generous without needing to be recognized.

We also made a list of new things we tried over the last two years: We learned to Zoom (for meetings, worship, meditation, book club and bible study)! We checked in on people with phone calls, upgraded tech skills individually and as a community, welcomed new people at meditation and at online worship, learned different ways to give offering, had a daily prayer service focused

on reconciliation for 10 days in 2021, tried choir practice before worship, continued to assist people in need, commissioned a new bus bench in front of the church, maintained beautiful gardens, decorated the outside of the church for liturgical seasons, and more!

What did we learn about ourselves? We can adapt, we want to hang together, we want to have a presence in the community, we want to know our neighbours (building use partners), we found fun ways to do things, we found a way forward. Resilience, Spiritual traditions and rituals are important, and we value connection to the larger church.

Of these new things, we want to keep some – that we are a worshipping community, that Zoom can still serve us, that there is more than one way to do things.

Over the next year, we thought we might like to fly a survivor’s flag, rearrange pews in a circle, rent the kitchen out to the community, and hold a sharing circle. (Plans are already underway for some of this!)

“When the church thinks it’s the destination, it also confuses the scorecard. It thinks that if people are hovering around and in the church, the church is winning.

The truth is, when that’s the case, the church is really keeping people from where they want to go, from their real destination. That destination is life.

Lucky for us, it just so happens this is what Jesus promised to bring us. (He did not say “I have come to give you church and give it to you more abundantly.”)”

*-Reggie McNeal,
Missional Renaissance*



Conclusion and Facilitator’s observations:

Based on the discussion and reflection from this workshop, the people of St. Mary Magdalene Anglican Church have a desire to be a community that worships together, while finding ways to stay in relationship with and be responsive to the needs of the external community. There’s a desire that anybody who connects with the parish feel welcomed, included, accepted and affirmed. Because of the pandemic, the community discovered a willingness and openness to innovation and flexibility that could be leveraged for creative thinking about future possibilities.

There’s a conviction and commitment to stay faithful to the foundational ‘things’ of faith and tradition. As the leadership continues to discern a path forward, it will be helpful **to be attentive to resources that are already available**, rather than fixate on resources that are perceived to be lacking. Through celebrating resources of people, time, energy, ideas, equipment, space, connections/relationships, etc, and being willing to experiment without guarantee of success, there is opportunity to reconnect with God’s presence and be surprised at how God might be inviting the parish to encounter each other and the needs of others in new ways.



We will be gathering for Christmas caroling around our outdoor Christmas tree on Sunday, Dec 18 at 5 pm. Dress warmly, and know that there will be hot chocolate and goodies afterward! Feel free to invite family or friends if you wish!



The Parish of St. Mary Magdalene is on Treaty 1 territory.

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