

News from

New St. James Presbyterian Church

A Mission Church

Following Christ, Worshipping God, Serving Others

January 27, 2019

From the Interim Moderator

I used to worry that the Church in Canada isn't 'relevant'. I worried that the Church failed to meet people's needs or address their concerns. People said they couldn't 'relate' to the Church. They were leaving in droves or drifting away. I was not alone. Many Churches are wracked with anxiety about their future. Will they have one?

To quell this worry, Churches began to roll up their sleeves and change how they did things. Church leaders thought: "Those odd stories in the Bible, the old prayers and hymns, the symbols and sacraments, the antique traditions: no one can 'relate' to these anymore. *That's* the problem. The Church is too strange, too different from modern life. Let's change the Church's style so it looks and sounds like the world. Let's erase these embarrassing differences so people will be able relate to the Church once again. Then they'll come back."

There's a point to this. There's always a need to clothe the 'old, old story' in the culture of our time and place. But there's also a danger.

The danger is that by changing the Church's 'packaging' we change the 'product' it holds. It's like "throwing out the baby with the bath water." We call it worship, but when it's re-styled it turns out to be entertainment. We call it outreach, but it turns into marketing. We call it faith, but it degrades into magical thinking ("God can make you rich!"). We call it gospel, but the strong teachings of the Church decay into weak self-help advice you can find on any talk show.

Being different and seeming strange is not the problem. The whole point of the Church is to be different, not a pale imitation of the world. The real challenge is not to find a popular 'style' for the Church, but to communicate its real 'substance'.

What the world truly needs is a Church that dares to be the Church. The Church needs to be a place where people patiently learn, through God's Word and Sacraments, how to speak and act in a way the world finds strange and different – by forgiving enemies, by loving neighbours, by becoming our true selves in Christ.

In other words, the Church needs faithful people to be bearers of God's gospel of grace to the world. Anything else, I think, is irrelevant.

Rev. Andrew Fullerton, Interim Moderator

From the Search Committee

The Search Committee has been busy quietly doing its work in the process for the search for a new Minister. Much of our work is carried out in confidence in order to protect the privacy of those ministers making submissions, so you may not see or be aware of this ongoing work. To remind the Congregation, the Search Committee, comprises the following members: Bruce Curtis (Clerk of Session), Steve Harris (Board of Managers), Charlene Beynon (Human Resources Committee), Frank Walsh, Susan McNair, John White, Rob McGugan, Monica Sass, Tom DeKay, and Tim Van Hees.

As many are aware, the Committee undertook an extensive process in the preparation of the required Congregational Profile and a Survey Analysis Report. The survey and analysis provided important information to include in the Congregational Profile that gives an overall description and explanation of what constitutes New St. James. All of our activities, statistics and background history are clearly explained so that prospective ministers may fully understand who we are. Both the Congregational Profile and the Survey Analysis Report have been posted on our website and are also available from the Presbyterian Church in Canada Ministry and Church Vocations website for those interested in considering our current vacancy. Further, while we listed our vacancy on the Presbyterian Church in Canada website, we also placed an advertisement in the Presbyterian Connection.

The Committee also spent some time considering what we want to know about the prospective ministry candidates and how we wish to discern that information. A series of possible questions was prepared and considered, and we narrowed that down to a final thorough list of questions that will form the basis of our interview questions for any candidates that we wish to interview for further consideration.

Expressions of interest from prospective Ministers have been arriving and have been reviewed to determine if they satisfy our requirements for further consideration. As you will be aware, New St. James is looking for a minister with good solid qualifications, appropriate strengths and interests in areas required by our Church, and they should have acquired sufficient years of experience to understand the needs of a mature well established large urban Church. While new or recent graduates commonly apply for many church minister vacancies, we are focusing our efforts on those candidates who possess sufficient experience to have developed their preaching skills, have acquired the wisdom and leaderships skills to lead us appropriately, and, those who generally fit the culture and needs of New St. James.

Needless to say, specifics of this work remain confidential, but our work continues on this very important process as we endeavour to complete our responsibilities as efficiently as possible and with the due care and diligence which is required.

Bruce Curtis, Clerk of Session and Convenor of Search Committee,

A Connection Reflection from the Director of Music

I am delighted to see our newsletter revived this winter and especially under the keen and experienced editorial eye of Rev Andrew Reid. Connection is important to a community such as ours. We want to connect by checking in and reading what folks in the community are doing. We want to meet and get to know the new people in our community. We want to read about our community projects and the special projects that those in our community have taken on by themselves – we want to cheer them on and support them. We want to think ahead on themes and ideas that will be part of upcoming Sunday services as well as big ideas and projects that guide our life as a congregation.

I think that music functions as a connection too. Not only do we try to connect the themes woven through the service on Sunday mornings but we also try to connect with each other and with those to whom we minister each Sunday morning. Rev. Dr. Thompson and I must connect each week to make sure that the music connects to the readings and the themes of the service and through that exercise WE have formed a strong connection. Making music together week in and week out also forms an intimate connection – there are deep joys when old friends make music together. There are also deep joys when those old friends welcome new friends to forge new connections... if you have any inkling at all that you would like to get connected in the choir, please do not hesitate to speak with me and join us for our Thursday evening rehearsals. The choir makes it easy to connect, easy to sing and fun!

I recently had the pleasure to greeting a former chorister who still feels deeply connected to NSJ. Lucia Cervoni (a Londoner!) was a chorister with us in the late 90s while she completed her undergraduate studies. She is now thriving as an opera singer in Germany and singing all over Europe. She was home this past month singing Carmen with a group in Kitchener-Waterloo – to rave reviews. I'll bet you remember our tenor chorister and singing janitor, Graham Thompson. You will be pleased to read that, after graduate studies at McGill and then three years in the Young Artist Studio with the Calgary Opera, Graham completed his law degree, articed, had two beautiful daughters and is now working full time as a lawyer in downtown Toronto. We had a lovely dinner together last year and reminisced about his fond connections with NSJ. This January we welcomed baritone chorister, David Stainton back from Scotland where he is studying musicology in Edinburgh and singing in the High Kirk (St. Giles' Cathedral) choir there. He had a short break between terms and one of the things he felt he had to do while home, was to sing again with the NSJ Choir! Likewise, Laura Nielsen, who sang with us for three years, came home this Christmas on her break from Yale University, and sang with us on Christmas Eve. Laura has a connection with a certain Christmas Eve bat, but that connection was, thankfully, NOT renewed this year!

There is deep delight in the connectedness of congregational life, and I am very grateful that our Connection is back up and running, and serves to foster connections past, present and future.

Torin W Chiles, Music Director

From the Publisher

The Session has agreed to my proposal to attempt to revive the newsletter which has been on hiatus for a while. This, my first effort, reveals the fact that I have neither the creative ability nor the computer skills which Cathy Urquhart brought to the task for so many years. But I hope to learn! I want to spell out some of my ideas and goals

1. I am reluctant to call this The New Connection, because it is a different entity in a different format. I invite your comments and suggestions for a name.
2. For this issue, I have not called on the team that helped make The New Connection so attractive, but I will do so from now on. That means that for this issue, I cannot blame anyone else for errors.
3. It is time to move into the digital era, and in the process reduce our carbon footprint. My goal is to make the newsletter available primarily by email, with a greatly reduced number of print copies. If you would like to receive it digitally, please let me have your email address.
4. My intention is to have the newsletter appear on the last Sunday of the month.
5. If you have something to contribute, please let me have it by the second last Sunday of the month.
6. I particularly invite photographs – the quirkier and more entertaining, the better!
7. Please contact me by email, with “Newsletter” in the subject line, at admreid@rogers.com

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And finally, . . .

New St James is good at inviting people in and making them welcome. But did you know how we keep 'em here? This is just one way the Board of Managers is working on the task.

