

# CONNECTIONS

A Newsletter for St. James United Church • 197 Main Street, Antigonish, NS

By the Outreach & Communications Committee

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*"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."*

-Luke 2:20

## Dear Friends in Christ,

This Christmas is very different for Meredith and I now that we have a three year old in the house. People wonder if Hope is excited and there is no doubt that she is thrilled by this season. She danced with joy when we put up the decorations outside and every night when we turn them on she wants to go and see them. She loves the Christmas tree and the ornaments on it get moved regularly. She is excited by all the events that are happening this December. Yet when anyone asks what she wants for Christmas she just shrugs her shoulders because she is enjoying everything in the moment and not waiting for anything.

I like that approach to this time of year. I think the month can feel like a burden if we spend too much time worrying about what will happen next or stressing about things being perfect instead of enjoying the wonders and possibilities of the season. For indeed in the Christmas story the arrival of the Saviour as a baby did not provoke anxiety from the shepherds about when Jesus would be fully grown and how their salvation would come. Instead the shepherds felt joy that God had richly blessed them and excitement that they were seeing what God was doing in front of their very eyes.

So this year let's all focus on what God is doing for us through Jesus. Let's be thankful for the blessings we know and embrace the love and grace which come through Christ. Let's be open to the new life which God brings among us because a child is born in Bethlehem.

May God bless you and your families this Christmas and may God continue to bless our congregation in the new year.

*Your in Christ's Service,  
The Rev. Peter A. Smith*

## Christmas Eve Services

Wednesday, December 24th

- St. David's, Cape George, 4:00 pm Family Service
- St. James, Antigonish, 7:00 pm Family Service  
9:00 pm Communion Service

*Come as we celebrate the birth of Jesus with special music, familiar carols and the stories of the Bible.*



At St. James we are fortunate to have a beautiful set of ceramic figures which each Christmas are placed at the centre of the sanctuary, usually on the Communion table. We have watched small children stand and look at the figures of Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, the Kings and shepherds and the animals with a look of wonder on their faces.

These figures have been carefully unwrapped and put there each Christmas for 33 years. But there are many in the congregation who do not know their origin. It was in 1981 when a member of the congregation who at the time was a teacher of ceramics created them and presented them to St. James.

We want to take this opportunity to acknowledge this gift and to thank Anna Ross for her beautiful work. They will continue to be treasured for many years to come.

# Sunday School & Youth Group News

Sunday mornings the 'Big Kids' have the blessing and joy of spending time with the younger members of our congregation. We spend our time singing songs, learning about God, reading Bible stories, sharing important things that have happened since we last met, doing crafts and of course sharing our cookie time.

The Sunday School has been busy over the last couple of months. On November 23rd we had the privilege of providing leadership for the morning worship service. As always the children and youth shared with the congregation a meaningful and joyful time of worship.

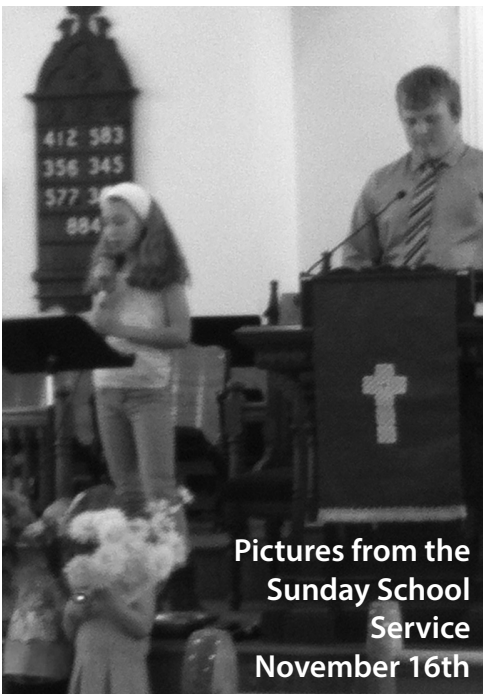
December 7th was our White Gift service and the annual packing of the Christmas gift bags for the food bank. This is one of the ways our Sunday School shares God's love with others. The children and youth would like to thank the congregation for their continued help and support with this very important outreach ministry.

On December 14th we welcomed St. Paul's Sunday school. Together we enjoyed making a special Christmas ornament and decorating gingerbread cookies.

Each year we look forward to this time of shared fellowship with our friends from St. Paul's Anglican Church.

December 21st, 28th and January 4th will be intergenerational Sundays. There will be no Sunday school classes. This is an opportunity for all of the Sunday School children and leaders to enjoy the morning worship service with the rest of the congregation. Sunday school classes resume January 11th.

The children, youth and leaders wish the congregation a wonderful and blessed Christmas. We pray that the New Year will bring comfort, peace and happiness to everyone.



Pictures from the  
Sunday School  
Service  
November 16th





# Did You Know . . . that December 14th is World Choral Music Day?

An international choral event to extol the values of solidarity, peace and understanding! The theme for 2014: Integration (A minor but important holiday for those brave enough to sing in public and bring joy to those who just lip-sync.)

A major unifying attribute of the world is music. It brings together people from diverse cultural backgrounds which as a result enhance peace and social cohesion. The World Choral Day, launched in 1990 at Helsinki by Alberto Grau, provides a great platform for music enthusiasts to participate and interact.

There are numerous activities that take place such as seminars, festivals, workshops and concerts. Apart from being televised, the activities are also recorded and uploaded online for the viewing pleasure of those who missed. The day is observed by the international community particularly schools, churches and professional bands.

There are different themes for each year like solidarity (2012) and integration (2013). The highlight of the event is when choirs from Europe, America, Asia and Africa sing simultaneously. Nothing can truly be compared to the delight of singing for a just cause. Thousands of choirs have joined in the celebration of World Choral Day on or around the 2nd Sunday in December in the past twenty years. Millions of singers across the globe have been involved in World Choral Day concerts, festivals, sing-alongs, choral seminars, Days of Friendship and other events.

"The world is living through severe and continuous crisis of self destruction. There are no possible reasons that can justify these actions. The majority of the human race wants to live in peace with dignity. It is time to show, with more power and strength, that our choral family contributes,

*continued on page 5*



*Rev. Kenneth MacLeod, guest minister for the Anniversary Service, cuts the cake along with the youngest member of the St. James congregation, Sam Theuerkauf (held by his mother Bethany).*

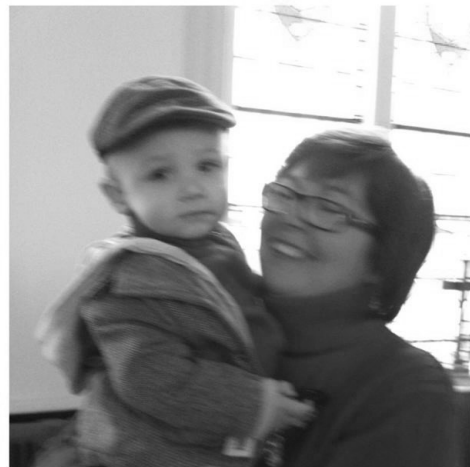
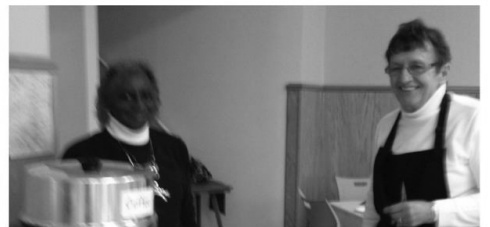
## *Remembrance Day,*

*and a plaque containing the names of Antigonish citizens who gave their lives during World War I.*





# Holly Tea 2014





# *A few of Santa's Holly Tea Helpers*



*Continued from page 3*

**Did You Know . . .  
that December 14th is  
World Choral Music  
Day?**

through music to break down the artificial barriers product of politics, different ideologies, religious differences, and racial hatred that separate human beings. We must be able to show that MUSIC, the divine art, is more than the mere search of formal perfection and interpretative beauty, music should serve to extol the values of solidarity, peace, and

understanding . We cannot work isolated, we have to make all possible efforts to have our voices heard and to let music work its own paths of communication. “

These are the main goals of the World Choral Day.

# Breaking the Silence:

## The Work Continues

The first time I heard about the Maritimes-Guatamala Breaking The Silence Network (BTS) was when Kathryn Anderson spoke during a Sunday service at St. James. While I was listening to her heartfelt talk about the suffering the indigenous peoples of Guatamala endured and survived, I was moved to take some action to help. After the service I spoke with her and she said, "You should go there with a delegation." I said I would have to think about it.

Later I discussed it with our former minister, Rev. Keith Hagerman, and he said he felt the same way so we decided to pursue it. We soon found out it wasn't just a matter of saying, "We have the money for a ticket and we want to go." Far from it! Once we were accepted, the orientation was lengthy and intense. There were several week-end sessions at ACTC in Tatamagouche for the whole delegation. We studied the history of the Civil War in the 1990s and the actions of the army against the indigenous Mayan people, as well as their culture and what to expect when we arrived there. We also kept our congregation up to date on what we were doing. Part of our commitment was to speak to different organizations about all that we had learned both before and during our tour there.

The group included three people who spoke fluent Spanish, Kathryn and Mary Corbett (our 2 leaders), and Terry O'Toole, another volunteer from Antigonish. There were people from New Brunswick as well as other parts of Nova Scotia including three ministers and a married couple. This group set out in October 1999 and our first stop was Guatamala City. We spent a couple of days there meeting with various groups of indigenous people who were struggling to try to regain some

of their farmland seized during the war and others who were testifying at the hearings set up to hear of the actions of the army against the Mayan people. Members of their families had been tortured, raped and killed, often in front of them. Even with all of these atrocities there was no hatred or desire to get even - instead they spoke quietly and only wanted the truth to be heard

This is why our group is called "Breaking the Silence". This part of the trip was very disturbing and each evening we met together with Kathryn and Mary and they let us talk it out, which helped us to deal with what we heard. They reminded us that this is what we were there for and when we returned to our communities we would be "breaking the silence".

The best part of the trip for me was visiting the villages. Some we had to walk into and others we visited by travelling on an old half ton with the baldest tires I had ever seen. We rode on the back with rails to hold onto. The roads were so bad that sometimes we had to get off and walk while the driver drove through the ruts. Wherever we went the people were so welcoming and were content with so little - it certainly brought home how materialistic we are in Canada. The women showed us their beautiful weaving done without the use of a loom - their threads tied to a railing and the other end around their waist. We learned to make tortillas in the community cook house - a large wood fire surrounded by large stones where the cooking was done. This way their homes wouldn't be full of smoke. Usually we ate black beans and tortillas. Occasionally there would be a peeled boiled egg in the middle of the bowl of beans. When I noticed that the family had no egg I realized this was meant as a special treat for their guests. I never had such a hard time eating anything in my life but we knew we had to do it or we would hurt their feelings.

I can tell you truthfully it was a life changing experience. To see people with no water or sewer carrying their washing on their heads to the nearest

brook or lake and laughing and talking together while their children played around them and then carrying the much heavier wet wash uphill to their village. They were always so happy to get the school supplies or first aid kits we brought and never once did anyone ask for something else. In all our visiting I never once heard anyone raise their voice in anger to another person or a child.

We ended the trip back in Guatemala City and most of us left all our clothes except what we were wearing with a group of Roman Catholic Sisters who worked with the people who lived around the dump and rummaged through it for things they could sell, use or eat. The Sisters were so excited.

Our last visit was to the Canadian Embassy where we met the ambassador, who was very interested in our experiences.

We returned home as great friends and still keep in touch. The Antigonish delegation got together and made picture boards and displays of weaving for our talks on our experiences. We contacted all the community and church groups in the area and spoke to all who would have us and did a series of articles for The Casket. Groups at St F.X. were also very interested in our experiences and now they send service learning students through the orientation and on delegations.

We in BTS do three or four fund raising activities a year. Lately we supplied snacks for the Antigonish

International Film Festival and had a table of weaving from Guatemala at the mall. We also have a table at the Antigonish Farmer's Market. We write letters in support of any of the work the indigenous people there are doing to right the wrongs that have been done to them either by government or large corporations. Whenever we can we bring over a community leader to speak to groups here about their work to correct wrongs or improve their lives.

In this way, Breaking the Silence reaches a new generation of people that we hope will continue the work that our chapter began.

Carol Kell

## *Fundraiser*

*On Nov. 8th, many people attended a variety show put on by the Coady community and several local performers. Money raised by this benefit will go toward the surgery needed by Hagar's cousin in Ghana. Lazarus (left) and Hagar (next to Lazarus)*





# PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY

Most of the congregation are aware of the Prayer Shawl Ministry at St. James, but because we have a number of new people, it was thought we should give a review of the work of this ministry.

The purpose of this ministry is to make shawls and lap robes which are then given to people who may be bereaved, lonely, ill, struggling with difficult problems in their lives and for people who sometimes simply need a hug. They are also given at a time of celebration such as for special birthdays or a graduation.

We have seven ladies who attend the monthly gathering and two knitters who knit at home. When a shawl is completed it is brought to the meeting and the ladies form a circle with their hands placed on a shawl or in the case when there is more than one shawl, then our many fingers manage to touch each shawl and a prayer is given by each person. This time is known as the blessing of the shawls. Then on a Sunday they are brought to church and each of us carry the shawls forward so that Rev. Peter can dedicate them.

Prayer is what makes these shawls so special. They are never sold, they are always given in the name of the Prayer Shawl Ministry of St. James and not in the name of an individual. We have received so many notes of appreciation and I would like to quote from one. "It brings me great comfort and peace as I wrap myself in it and pray. It is a constant reminder of God's grace." We, the knitters, feel so blessed in being a part of this very special ministry. We came to realize this as we gave out the shawls and heard the stories of both sadness and joy and what it means for the recipients to know that people care.

We are always pleased to receive names of people whom anyone thinks would benefit from the receiving of a shawl. They may be from another congregation or denomination, local or further afield. I don't remember any time of dedication that we have not given out at least one shawl. Since January 2011 when the Ministry began, we have made 239 shawls/lap robes and given out 219. The following is one of the prayers that we include in our cards.

Knitted by hand and threaded with  
prayers of peace and love  
this shawl is a gift to you  
May it bring blessings of comfort  
Gifts of warmth  
and the knowledge  
that you are loved

Mavis Murray



*Monthly services held at the R.K. MacDonald Nursing Home are always well attended. Why not make a point of attending one (or more) in the coming year? The R.K. residents are always overjoyed to have visitors, and your participation would be gratefully appreciated.*



# Are You Passionate About Social Justice?

The environment? Poverty? Food security? Equality for all? If so, please consider volunteering with St James' "Social Justice Committee". We are a small but active group interested in promoting Social Justice issues and awareness. As of this year, in our latest incarnation, we hold no meetings unless urgently required for planning purposes. We work mostly via email. We are continuing our involvement with and organization of the following projects:

- the Antigonish Gift Book (currently available!), promoting an alternative way of gift giving – charitable donations
- twice yearly Adopt-A-Highway cleanups of "our" adopted area – Interchange 32
- sponsorship of appropriate films at the annual Antigonish International Film Festival
- education about and promotion of important issues by distribution of a Social Justice calendar and through periodic Social Justice

"Minutes"

- an annual Environmental Service, usually held close to Earth Day
- participation in other local social justice projects and organizations such as the Antigonish Poverty Reduction Coalition and the Antigonish Emergency Fuel Fund

On a personal note – an update on the fall Adopt-A-Highway cleanup. Once again our group collected 12 large bags of garbage and improved the overall appearance of our interchange at Highways 104 and 7 – all in two hours! We were joined this time by two Tim Hortons employees and hope to have other fast food organizations participate in the spring. Much thanks and appreciation to Tim Hortons!

If you would like more details on any specific project, there will be updates in church bulletins and announcements. If you are interested in supporting these outreach projects or suggesting others, please feel free to talk to any member of our committee: Michèle Ashby, Anne Camozzi, Barbara DeMarsh, Hope Graham, Judith Jowett, Muriel Kennedy or Rev Peter Smith.

Michèle Ashby

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

### Business of St. James 150 yrs. ago

The Session met in the Church on July 18th, 1864 and was constituted by the Moderator (Rev. Thomas Downie). Present a full meeting of the Session.

The Moderator brought before the Session the subject of the Minister's Widows Fund and collectors were appointed to collect subscriptions in aid of it.

It was agreed that Mr. Alex Chisholm get baptism for his child at a prayer meeting to be held in his own home.

Also that Mr. Henry Burnside get his child baptised by coming before the Session at their next meeting and confessing his guilt and submitting to the rules of the Church.

It was also resolved that the Church will not be given to Ministers of other Denominations without the consent of the Session.

Mr. Smith reported having had a conversation with Mr. Zephaniah Williams respecting the ordinance of baptism. The meeting was then closed by the Moderator pronouncing the Blessing.

*Robt. Trotter, Session Clerk*

# Therapy Dogs: Part of the Community



I would like to introduce you to a wonderful program we have available in Antigonish. The St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program is a community based service offered by certified St. John Ambulance Volunteers.

Traditionally a team consisting of a volunteer and their pet dog visit residents in nursing homes or hospitals. The program offers a chance for residents or patients to talk to the volunteers and pet or cuddle with their dog. Through regular visitation many patients can find peace in the gentle contact with the dog and in its quiet presence.

Many seniors in Antigonish have families who have moved away and are happy to have a visit from a friendly volunteer and their furry companion. Dogs are a great icebreaker for starting a conversation. Almost everyone has a story of a beloved pet they like to share. Sometimes a dog's unconditional love can even reach people that otherwise may not interact with the caregivers and staff around them. I know of a gentleman who had not spoken in years to any of his caregivers, but after a few months of regular visits from a volunteer and his dog, he began to speak to the dog. Eventually he spoke to the volunteer, and finally began to interact with the caregivers and other residents again. Animals

can be amazing therapists.

When I moved home to Antigonish I made inquiries about the local program and discovered that there were no volunteers in this area. Since then we have grown to 17 active teams in the Antigonish area. These teams have provided a total of 385 hours of service to people in need last year alone. Volunteers visit the RK MacDonald Nursing Home, High Crest Nursing Home, Sherbrooke High Crest Nursing Home and the Mental Health Ward at St. Martha's Hospital.

Last year we expanded the program to



include visits to universities. St. F.X. served as a pilot for this new venue when our presence was requested by their mental health centre. We offer an opportunity for the students to interact with the dogs by going to the university during times the students report being stressed, such as the first few weeks of the school year (when a lot of students are away from home for the first time) as well as during midterms and exams. Feedback from the counsellors at the centre was that the students definitely benefited from the time spent with the dogs.

In 2014 a team from Antigonish won the Nova Scotia and PEI Therapy Dog Team of the Year award for their outstanding volunteer work with the program. They were chosen from the 297 volunteer teams that are active in Nova Scotia. They traveled to Halifax last spring and received their award from the Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia. Congratulations to Bonnie Quinn (of Lochaber United Church congregation) and her dogs Millie and Sam for winning this prestigious award.

Our last local evaluation of new teams was held at our own St. James this fall, when we brought 7 new teams into the Antigonish program. Among them are Brenda Rose and her greyhound Fable. They have joined both the RK and St. F.X. programs and we are very happy to have them with us.

Anyone with a gentle kind dog looking a rewarding volunteer experience can contact me for further information or visit the N.S. St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog website at [www.sjatherydog.ca](http://www.sjatherydog.ca)

Merry Christmas and thank you to all our local volunteers for all the joy you bring this season and always.

*Tamara MacDuff,  
Antigonish & Area St. John Ambulance  
Therapy Dog Coordinator.*

## **The United Church Women** *prepare the Baskets of Love for distribution during the holiday season*



## **Organizers of the annual** *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*

*event are delighted to see that more families with young children are taking part. They sincerely hope that even more families with children will sign up in future. It works!*



# THE MEDITATION GROUP

was happy to have both old and new friends come to share on the occasion of their 20th year of meditating. Pictures helped with the memories of that first year when the original group shifted from a study group to a meditation group.

“It’s time to learn with our hearts,” said Beryl MacIntosh, the group’s founder. The celebration featured a time to meditate followed by a film about mindfulness in the schools, ‘Room to Breathe’, originally sponsored by the meditation group at the Antigonish International Film Festival. This film and others on a similar topic are in the People’s Place library and available



to everyone.

Anyone interested in learning more about the meditation group can call Fran at 863 3546. Meetings are held weekly at 3 p.m. on Tuesdays in the Multi Purpose Meeting Room at St. James United.



*Bonnie Quinn of Lockaber United chats with St. James United Church members during the post-service luncheon.*



*Former St. James member Bertie Liem joins us for the Anniversary Service.*



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