



Christmas Eve Services

On Christmas Eve we celebrate the birth of Jesus with special music, familiar carols, and the stories of the Bible.

Join us in-person at St. James United Church on Friday, December 24:

- 7:00 pm Christmas Eve Family Service
- 9:00 pm Christmas Eve Communion Service

Masks are required for all the in-person Christmas Services. Proof of Vaccination is not required for these services but we encourage everyone to get vaccinated in order to keep each other safe.

Join us online on Friday, December 24:

An online service will be available after the 7:00pm service and will be posted at www.stjamesuc.com and linked through our facebook page.

The Christmas Eve in-person services will be by **reservation only** again this year and seating will be assigned. Please call 902-863-2001 or email the church office at office@stjamesuc.com before 1pm on December 23th to reserve your seat. If you email or leave a voice mail someone will respond to confirm.



St. James United Church • 197 Main Street, Antigonish, NS
Phone: (902) 863-2001 • Email: st.james@ns.sympatico.ca

www.stjamesuc.com



CONNECTIONS

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

By the Outreach & Communications Committee

Winter 2021

*“But the angel said to them, ‘
Do not be afraid; for see—
I am bringing you good news
of great joy for all
the people”*

-Luke 2:10 NRSV



Christmas 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,
Life is tough for the shepherds and for the communities they come from in the Christmas story.

Times are difficult and there is not much hope of things getting better. Their world is bleak and scary and they worry about holding on to the little they have. The Bible tells us that they are sitting in the fields watching over their flocks when the angel of the Lord appears to them. The glory of God shines around them and they are terrified by the heavenly visitor.

Yet the angel tells them not to be afraid, and announces that a Saviour has been born for them. The promise God sends into their lives and their world is that change is coming. The angelic message is a pronouncement that they, and all people who are struggling, are not forgotten and that God is going to make things better. The good news of great joy is that into their lives the Saviour of the world has arrived.



The response of the shepherds is one of excitement and joy. They rush from the fields to see for themselves. They answer God with praise and celebration, which overflows when they see the promised child with their own eyes. Their lives change forever when they are able to hear the good news and then witness for themselves the newborn king.

I know this past year has been difficult, and that there are fears and worries both in our personal lives and in the world around us. The good news for us is that God has not forgotten us in our troubles. For God answers our need with the hope, the peace, the joy, and the love which we see in the baby born in Bethlehem. Jesus is the one who leads us through his life, death, and resurrection to the better days which God has planned for us and for the world.

My hope and prayer this Christmas is that all of us hear that good news of great joy so that our lives are transformed once again. May God bless you, your families, and our church as we move through this Christmas season and into a new year.

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



Clan Thompson Pipe Band Performs at St. James

On November 28th, St. James United Church hosted a rousing performance by the talented members of the Clan Thompson Pipe Band, their first since before the pandemic began. Attendees this Sunday afternoon were delighted to take in a selection of traditional Scottish musical numbers, featuring bagpipes, small pipes, and big bass drums, led by founder and longtime Pipe Major Scott Williams. Skilled Highland Dancers also showed off their well-practiced dance moves, to thunderous musical accompaniment.

Proceeds from the days' events were generously donated to, and gratefully accepted, by the St. James Church Choir. Thank you very much for your sharing and promoting of the gift of music!



Gentle Hikes

Although most people manage to remain active through the summer months, many slow down or stop outdoor pursuits as soon as the more wintry weather arrives.

This is unfortunate, because our area offers so many pleasant hikes for people who would like to remain active, but for whom the more adventuresome hikes could prove to be a problem.

With this in mind, Leslie Klapstein has prepared a list of hiking trails in Antigonish and Guysborough counties that would be suitable for even the most winter-phobic among us. Why not give one or two of these trails a try?

Take a friend or two along for company and you're bound to enjoy the winter landscape!



Thank You!

To Laura, the skilled seamstress who did such a speedy and good job on a charming new set of curtains for our Sunday school classroom. What a difference they make!

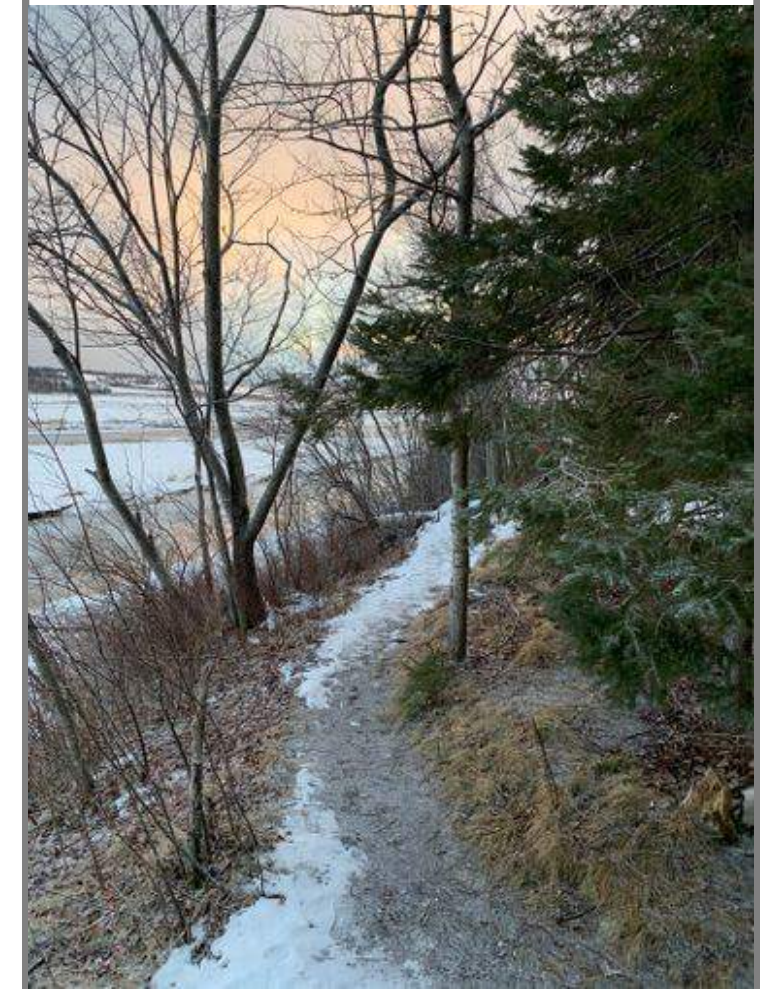


Guysborough

- Sherbrooke Village Sawmill woods
- Port Bickerton Lighthouse trails (and road into Lighthouse)
- Tor Bay Provincial Park beaches
- Rail trail Guysborough
- Boylston Provincial Picnic park
- Mulgrave community trail
- Port Shoreham beach
- Black Duck Cove - Little Dover

Antigonish

- The Landing Trail (see below)
- Pomquet Beach
- Arisaig Provincial park
- Bayfield Beach
- Beaver Mountain
- Keppoch
- Bethany trails and gardens



Dr. Ron Charles, who over the years has often so generously shared with us his gift of beautiful violin music, is in the process of relocating with his wonderful family to Ontario. Dr. Charles, a professor of religious studies, has accepted a position at the University of Toronto. The St. James congregation has been truly blessed to have you join us in worship. You will be a cherished part of your new faith community, we are sure. *Thank you!*

The Holly Tea and Sale

Our beloved Holly Tea and Sale, among other landmark events in the life of our church, has not gone ahead since the pandemic has come.

Besides the obvious restrictions on all gatherings of this type, the organizers of the wonderful and festive Holly Tea and Sale event have found increasing difficulty in hosting them due to a generational turnover. These events have, until present, fallen on the shoulders of the hardworking and dedicated United Church Women of St. James.

If community events and popular church fundraisers such as the Holly Tea and Sale and the Old Stump Frolic have been important to you in the past, and if you would like for these wonderful traditions to continue to enrich the life of our church community and the fabric of our town, please reach out to a UCW member or to the church office.



UCW Meeting Minutes

On Tuesday Nov 16, 2021 at 1:30 St James United Church Women held a special meeting to decide the future of our organization.

We were fortunate to have 21 members in attendance; all vaccine IDs were checked in accordance with COVID Phase 5 requirements.

During the 20 months since our first COVID lockdown, the UCW held no meetings or any events at the unit or general membership level. At this meeting, it was decided after much discussion that our UCW will continue as one large group. The units are disbanded.

General meetings will take place every two months. During the winter months of December through March the meetings will take place following Sunday service, to accommodate for issues with weather



and night driving. For the months of April to November the meetings will take place on weekday evenings, with a summer break.

Conversations were held about the focus of the UCW in the future. There is much interest in keeping the group going as a women's group. In January, our discussion will focus on which charitable giving we will retain and which fundraising events we will prioritize, as well as potential guest speakers for the 2022 meetings.

Rev. Peter will confirm if any shut-ins are interested in and able to receive Christmas care packages. If so, a few women will create and deliver the packages.

We are going to be getting a list from Rev. Peter of Ladies in Care homes and shut-ins and we will do up Xmas gift bags for each one. Also if the Benevolent fund needs a boost we will do our gift cards to restaurants and Sobeys.

St. James Hot Meal Project

Twenty-one months, give or take a few days, is the amount of time that Hot Meal at St.

James has been on hiatus. BUT WE ARE BACK. Things look a tad different this time around as we are trying to find our footing amid the new rules and regulations from Covid-19.

When we had to close down due to Covid, in March of 2020, we had been serving meals two days a week with six teams set up for Tuesdays and eight teams for Thursdays. This works out to about seven meals a year each team provides. The average number of meals served was around 50 per day including some take out meals for those who are unable to get out and around. Starting up, now into the fall of 2021, we have only seven teams who are back and ready to roll. This lower number of teams had us decide to only serve meals on Tuesday for the fall with the hope that we can recruit a few more teams and be able to return again to two meals a week after the holidays.

The one major change is that everyone who comes into the hall to eat or work must have had their vaccinations of which proof needs be shown each week. To those wishing to have a meal but have not had a vaccination a take out meal will be provided instead.

Our teams are not just made up of members from St. James but from the entire community. Some volunteers can come every time their team is on for lunch others only for part of the time. We also have a core group that turn up every week. They stay on the floor with our friends who come to eat, to chat and provide a social interaction for all. Feeding the body is only one part of our mission but feeding the soul is just as important.

Hot Meal is funded 100% from donations to the program of food and money. The teams get to

set their own menu for their week. Some examples are hamburger stew with potatoes, veggies and rolls as well as dessert, or a hearty soup, chilli or spaghetti. The team on deck comes in early in the day and peels, cooks and prepares for lunchtime.

Serving is started by 11am and goes until 12:30pm. Since we began this fall the numbers of people coming to eat have been down but each week we notice it increasing.

We have put out an appeal to anyone wishing to volunteer and have been blessed with many names coming forth. We always have room for more. Several businesses or service groups in the town have provided a team as well to provide meals. Anyone interested may contact the church office during the week.

This fall we have also have had to say good-bye to Betty Webber who was very instrumental in having this program set up and running successfully. We do know that she will continue to peek in on us and provide guidance when we get stuck. Betty, for all you have done, we thank you.

This project is for anyone who needs a home cooked (church cooked) meal some conversation, fellowship, laughter and a place to feel accepted and at home.



Totemic Event

I have been reading a book, and one phrase has been stuck in my head like a songbird in a cage: Totemic Event. The author discussed an event in his life that was foundational to his character and life experience. This got me thinking of the events in my life that have shaped me.

When I was 10, I stayed in a house in Halifax for a weekend. Make no mistake, this house was in a struggling part of the city. Our neighbours were a tavern and a Salvation Army. My family had all gone back-to-school shopping, and I was left alone. I am likely ageing myself by saying that when I was 10, this was not uncommon. There was a knock at the door, and a man in his forties asked me if my Mom or Dad were home. I said no. He held out a can of Zoodles. I don't even know if they make that canned pasta shaped like animals anymore. I was, at 10, very used to the sight of the can. The man asked if I knew how to open the can and if I would do that for him. My 10-year-old mind was a little frozen.

Why is a grown-up asking a kid for help? Why is this man in such a rush to eat Zoodles that he can't wait until he gets to his own home and his own can opener? Again the man asked for me to open the can if I could. I took the can and closed the door. I opened it while he waited, and then I went running back to see if he wanted it in a bowl, heated, with a glass of milk and a slice of bread. That was how you would eat this lunch. He smiled and said, "No, Thank you." I assured him that I was old enough to use the stove and heat it if he wanted. But no, he just wanted an open cold can of pasta. So I returned the can, and the man pulled an old dirty spoon out of his left pocket and asked if it would be okay if he sat on our stairs to eat his food. I said yes then closed the door.

I was not yet old enough to sort through what had just happened, but I closed the door and cried

about all the things I did not understand.

Since then, what I have learned about myself and the world has undoubtedly shaped my place in it.

I ask that each of you reading this take a moment to reflect on your lives and the moments that shaped you. What are the totemic events in your lives? Events as viewed by yourself - such as my private moment with homelessness, or events considered by the community - weddings, births, deaths, etc. which are the moments that form the shape of your life. Once you can identify those events and what you felt or learned in those moments, I challenge you to determine if you are living your life in the way that honours those lessons.



As I write this, details of the tornado that hit the southeast United States are still coming out. We hear about the devastating loss of life and see images of homes and communities lost. There will be articles and opinion pieces about this natural disaster in the coming days. Fundraising and relief efforts will start. All of that is vital. There may even be a few articles about the increased frequency of natural disasters, how environmental and climate crises are now the norm, not the exception.

"The universal brotherhood of man is our most precious possession."

- Mark Twain

FUNDSCRIP: Support St. James without spending any extra money!

FUNDSCRIP is a gift card fundraising program where you buy gift cards and a percentage of your purchase is donated back to St James. You can order through the church by submitting an order with payment on the second Sunday of each month and pick them up the following Sunday, or you can order online anytime and get your cards mailed to your door in just a few days!


WHY buy Fundscrip cards?

As gifts: you can buy e-cards, reloadable cards (that you can give and top up whenever you want), and cards for stores across Canada for family and friends who live away.

As a budgeting tool: If you plan your spending, you can buy gift cards to budget your expenses.

As way to help St James: If you know you will be spending money on groceries and other items, you can make that spending more meaningful by using Fundscrip cards that donate to St. James.

HOW TO ORDER FUNDSCRIP CARDS ONLINE:

- ◆ Go to Fundscrip.com and register for an account
- ◆ Browse e-cards, reloadable cards and physical cards
- ◆ Search by Category or Type of Card; or,
- ◆ Search by Retailer in the Search Bar
- ◆ Indicate how value and quantity of the cards you want and click "Add to Cart"
- ◆ When you are ready to checkout, there are a few steps to complete..
- ◆ Check your order details to make sure they are correct
- ◆ Under Shipping click "EDIT" to choose your shipping method
- ◆ Select "Direct Shipping" from the Shipping Method menu (left hand menu)
- ◆ You must click the  to proceed to the next steps.
- ◆ Add the shipping address
- ◆ Select "Lettermail" as your delivery.
- ◆ If your order is over \$200, you will get a rebate on shipping costs at checkout.



There are more cards available online, and in more denominations, than the paper order form. If you want to order through the bulk order and don't see a store that you want cards for, talk to Sarah Armstrong. You can avoid high shipping costs and the bother of having to sign for your package by ordering your cards in small batches so they can be sent in regular lettermail in normal envelopes.

Lettermail orders must be 4 cards or less, totally \$500 or less.

Using this option you may have to place multiple orders, but the savings are worth it.

You can pay by electronic funds transfer (by logging into your bank account online); by adding Fundscrip as a bill payment (they will provide an account number) or by credit card (the donation amount is reduced if you choose this method).

Sarah Armstrong is happy to help anytime! You can call or text 902-870-6519, email her at sarahclaudette@gmail.com, or Facebook messenger @dazzled.by.the.beauty

Church and State: Better Apart

Why I am troubled by the singing of the national anthem during worship services

The hymns we sing and music we make during worship service helps us to open our hearts in praise, using the whole of our God-given bodies. By raising our voices together, we are drawn closer to God and to each other. However, twice a year this core element of our practice is confronted with an interloper; the national anthem.

The Sunday services closest to Canada Day and Remembrance Day incorporate a communal rendition of O Canada into the worship service. While I see that the majority of the congregation raise no eyebrows with the tradition, my moral opposition drives me to either avoid these services, or to leave the Sanctuary while the anthem is sung. I'd like to briefly outline my reasons for my strong opposition.

Further, I personally believe that Christian values are in direct opposition to both the State and to the systems that Canada upholds. Despite what we want to believe about the country we live in - it is a violent and oppressive state that victimizes the poorest and most vulnerable among us. We live in a country - and indeed a province - where police attack the and arrest the homeless; where families are living in RVs in backyards because they cannot afford somewhere to live; where a national opioid crisis sees twelve people die per day; where 1.2 million kids go to school hungry every day; and, where there are still over 5000 missing or murdered Indigenous women whose cases have yet to be investigated. As a country, Canada neglects its responsibility for the wellbeing of its population - then puts the onus on the provinces and municipalities, who in turn abdicate responsibility for the social problems that their spending

choices create or allow to continue.

In my view, our worship should move us to contribute our energies to improving the world around us. That we should look critically at how we act out our praise and where our focus falls. I do not believe that we should be taking uncritical beliefs about what Canada is and inserting them into a religious service that is fundamentally based on teachings of brotherhood and love.

I believe we should be asking ourselves how, as this country seeks security in a new era of rising international tensions, we as a church can take a lead role in shifting the narrative from that of nationalism and militarism and walk the path of humanitarianism and peace. There are alternatives that seek to please both those who see the singing of the national anthem during service as valuable, and those like me who find it wholly inappropriate.

Some United Churches arrange Canada Day and Remembrance Day services so that the national anthem is sung before service, and while its performance takes place in the Sanctuary, it is markedly separated from the worship service itself. I see this as a lovely way to bridge a chasm between differing views within the congregation, and a demonstration of unity and spiritual accommodations in practice. A beautiful compromise, don't you think?

*Yours in faith,
Sarah Armstrong*



For unto you is born this day
in the city of David a Saviour,
which is Christ the Lord.
And this shall be a sign unto you;
Ye shall find the babe wrapped in
swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
And suddenly there was with the angel
a multitude of the heavenly host
praising God, and saying,
Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, good will toward men.
Luke 2:11-14

I find myself thinking about how we could be over 2000 km away, yet we impacted those people. Despite the weather warnings, it was clear that at least two companies kept staff working in overnight shifts to keep up with the demands of Christmas orders. It indeed cannot be lost on us that those Christmas orders were made by people just like you and me. It is easy to get caught up in the consumerism that spreads so quickly and exponentially this time of year.

There is a great impulse in trying to turn off the sadness of our world. Right now, we face Covid outbreaks including family illness with our local bloom, flooding with displaced neighbours both here and across the country, political in-fighting and civil unrest in every corner of the world. We try to ease our minds a minute by watching Christmas movies—classics like *It's a Wonderful Life* or newer films like *Elf*. Movies like these were made to remind us that Christmas is a spirit and feeling of love of the souls with whom we share this earth. Christmas is the message of Jesus coming to humanity. As we see in 2 Corinthians 13:11: *"Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."*

The news around us may be bleak, and there is still much to be done to build the community and the world we strive to see. There is still reason to hope. I am sure I can say it no better than the nephew Fred in a Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens. *"But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time... as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!"*

Let us find the time in the coming weeks to support one another as best we can. Somewhat more importantly, let us, as we enter 2022, hold close to our hearts the idea that all souls need love and support, not on the 25th of December but all year long.

Christine Briand

Come From Away

"I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me."

Matthew 25: 31-40

In recent years I have often found it difficult to maintain pride in my country. It's not difficult to understand why, given Canada's mistreatment of so many groups throughout its history. In the past, I would see various acts of discrimination unfold in other countries and somehow fail to see that similar injustices were being perpetrated within our own borders, but since my retirement I have been afforded the luxury of time and I've used this precious commodity to read more broadly, and I haven't been comfortable with what I've learned. I wanted to feel better, to hold my head up, to sing O Canada proudly and wave my Canadian flag again, but the pathway leading to national pride was strewn with too many historic and current wrongs. But some of my shame began to dissipate in 2017 when the Canadian musical *Come From Away* opened on Broadway.

The play, written by the husband and wife team of Irene Sankoff and Derek Hein, deals with the aftermath of the 9/11 attack that brought down the Twin Towers in New York City, an event that plunged the world into a maelstrom of suspicion and recrimination,

heightening tensions between countries that all too often resulted in military action. But the co-creators of this play were not writing about global conflict. Instead, they concentrated on the U.S. president's directive immediately following the attack that closed American air space and forced all planes heading toward the United States to land at airports that were outside of U.S. borders.

Come From Away focused on the 38 trans-Atlantic flights that set down at the airport closest to their mid-air location: Gander, Newfoundland.

At the time, Gander and surrounding communities had a population of close to 9000 people, and without warning they were faced with the arrival of 7000 international strangers, passengers who were afraid and angry and who, for the next 25 - 40 hours, were confined to their aircrafts and not told why their flights had been diverted to such a remote outpost.

The play itself is based on real events that took place in Newfoundland over the five days following the terrorist attack while the 'plane people' were guests of the town, and the characters depicted in the play are composites of real people, both local Newfoundlanders and unwilling visitors. But every encounter, every tense moment, is based on fact. Sankoff and Hein attended the tenth reunion of the Gander passengers help in Newfoundland and spent



the week interviewing everyone with a story to tell. *Come From Away* didn't attempt to gloss over anything, nor did it offer pat solutions to the many interpersonal dramas that developed when too many people under too much pressure were forced to remain in a strange place against their will.

There were confrontations, acts of racial discrimination, relationship strains, misunderstandings, and angry outbursts. In other words, life as we know it. But there was also love, acceptance, generosity, and above all attempts to understand 'the other' that mark the evolution of our better selves. We are shown genuine desire to hear and understand another's point of view. And yes, there was laughter.

I have seen this play more times than I am willing to disclose, and each time I watch it I come away with the hope that perhaps I'm wrong. Not wrong about our past - that can't be changed - but wrong in the feeling that we can't do better, as a nation and as individuals. Wrong in believing that we will never become a kinder, more accepting nation. Wrong in assuming that we are doomed to keep repeating our past mistakes. *Come From Away* has begun to restore my faith in man's humanity to our fellow man,

and it has gone a long way toward restoring my pride as a Canadian.

The uncertainty surrounding travel of any kind will prevent most people from travelling to Toronto or New York to see this play. However, Apple TV recently released a televised showing of the Broadway cast production, timed to reach the public on the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, and filmed before a live audience of medical workers and first responders in New York City. If anyone is fortunate enough to either have the Apple TV streaming service or to have a friend with Apple TV, I urge you to reach out and ask if you might be able to watch this 146-minute Tony award-winning musical with them. If there is no one within your circle of friends with Apple TV, then reach out to me and if you are vaccinated I would be happy to have you watch this play at my house. The actions of ordinary Newfoundlanders - ordinary Canadians - at this time of crisis and uncertainty are to be admired. And emulated.

Brenda Rose

