

WHAT IS COMMUNION?

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of the United Church to emphasize the equality of the uniting denominations.

Why little cups with grape juice and pieces of bread? The tradition of using little cups and pieces of bread is from our Protestant heritage. The reformers argued that every person was invited to share in the bread and cup. The distribution of the same bread and grape juice was seen as a representation of the gift of the same Spirit to each individual (1 Corinthians 12). The tiny cups also came about for hygienic reasons.

Grape juice is part of our temperance heritage (the church historically has encouraged "voluntary abstinence") and has a history of being a controversial topic in the United Church. The social justice emphasis in the church to include as many people as possible at the table, including recovering alcoholics, has led many United Churches to substitute unfermented wine (grape juice) for wine.

What do we believe happens when we eat the bread and drink the cup? In the United Church, we believe that as we celebrate communion, we are participating with the disciples in the Upper Room. We believe that the risen Jesus is with us as we celebrate, making the event spiritually nurturing and strengthening to us. For us, it is the action of celebrating together the Lord's Supper, not the elements of bread and cup, which are the most important part of the service.

FOR A CEASEFIRE IN GAZA

In mid-October, after service, Chad, Linda D, and Sarah shared between themselves the grief and horror of the most recent—on still ongoing—bombing of civilians by Israel. Together they formed Antigonish4Gaza which has organized weekly rallies around Antigonish.

The group participated in the St James Info Fair finding much interest from the congregation in learning more about the history and ongoing violence. Linda spoke at the First Gospel Assembly Hall on the issue of religious persecution, tying in the current targeting of Christian churches and Mosques in Palestine.

If you'd like to learn more or get involved, you can join the Facebook group Antigonish4Gaza and find links and more information at Linktr.ee/Antigonish4Gaza.

- Sarah Armstrong



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CONNECTIONS

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

By the Outreach & Communications Committee

Winter 2023

*“Listen! Your sentinels lift up
their voices, together they sing
for joy;*

*for in plain sight they see the
return of the LORD...”*

-Isaiah 52:8



Winter 2023

Dear Friends in Christ,

Christmas is coming. We know that because we're in December, there are decorations in our homes and buildings, and the stores are filled with people shopping for presents. We are working our way through the Sundays of Advent and enjoying the music and events. We know Christmas is coming because we can see signs of the season all around us.

Yet we also know that Christmas is more than just the sights and activity which fill this month. The lights and trees, the carols and cards, all help us to celebrate but they're not the reason we rejoice and give thanks on December 25th. For the truth is that even if there were no candles, no decorations, no presents, and even no special music that Christmas would still be coming. For at Christmas we celebrate the arrival of Jesus into our weary and needy world.



For Jesus is why the angels sang, the shepherds rushed to see, and Mary treasured everything in her heart. Jesus is the reason that all the things we love about Christmas are so important to us. For this season we celebrate the love of God coming as a child to change the world forever. We rejoice because God is with us now and always. We give thanks for the peace of God which touches the earth and shows us a better way.

This season, I would invite you to enjoy all the things you love about Christmas as together we hear the familiar story of the nativity and sing carols and hymns about what God did so long ago and what God continues to do for us in Jesus.

May God bless our worship and witness as a church and may you and your family have a blessed and meaningful Christmas and New Year.

Yours in Christ's Service,

The Rev. Peter A. Smith



HOLLY TEA & SALE

For the first time in four years the Holly Tea and Sale was held on Saturday, Nov. 18, 2023. The lineup was right out to Main Street when the door opened and the hall was immediately filled with smiling faces enjoying our delicious lunch, picking up bargains on the new to you and jewelry tables, goodies at the bake table and bidding at the Silent Auction.

Our church storeroom was once again transformed into the Christmas room, much to the delight of the many shoppers. The children in the well-supervised kid's corner always have fun decorating cookies and making a craft while eating their lunch in a corner of the sanctuary. This lets the parents shop and enjoy their own tea and sandwiches.

Of course, as we say every year, we couldn't have done it without the dozens of volunteers. As well, we wouldn't have had a sale at all if we hadn't received all the donations of like-new and Christmas items, jewelry, baked goods, squares for our tea table and silent auction contributions.



The tea and sale is the UCW's major fund raiser for the year so a huge thank you to all of you who helped out in any way.

Merry Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.

- Barb Gardiner



HOT MEAL

The 2023 year of serving Hot Meals on Tuesdays and Thursdays is coming quickly to a close. Looking back on the year it did not start out with a bang but instead a storm day so no meal was served. During the winter months we averaged about 30 meals a day, plus a few takeout meals as well. Gradually, the numbers started to rise and then it was June. As we prepared to close down for the summer several of the groups volunteered to serve one meal a week on Thursdays for July and August. Again the numbers grew. This Fall we now serve more meals than before.

On the average if we say we serve 80 meals a week for 50 weeks that results in at least 4000 meals being served. This is accomplished by volunteers and funded by donations of cash and food from the church and community. This is a testament to the dedication and purpose of our mandate to help others where and when we can.

A special thank you to all those who volunteer, those that come to serve,



converse and/or cook. We have 10 teams (at an average of 6 people per team) sharing the work, it makes getting all those dishes washed and potatoes peeled a much easier task. With the rising costs for energy, housing and food it is not hard to imagine that in 2024 our numbers and costs will be rising again.

The friendship, camaraderie, and caring we see each week reflects the joy of this Christmas season all the year through. May it continue for us all, in the year to come. Merry Christmas.

- Pam Cunningham



You can make a tax-deductible donation to the St James Hot Meal Program by cash, cheque to St James UC with the memo "Hot Meal", or by donating online through CanadaHelps.org. Scan the QR code with your phone's camera to go directly to the donation portal.

CHURCH BELL RESEARCH

There was considerable interest in the history of the church bell following the repairs of the steeple. It's so wonderful to hear the bell ring again on Sundays and to see the joy of the young people in our congregation taking on the responsibility of the 10:25am ringing.

Dale Archibald is working on some research to find out more about the history of our bell. What we know is that the bell was likely delivered while Rev. Trotter was leading the congregation in the former church building.

Dale sent an email with photos to the Whiting Society of Ringers, Dunblane, Scotland.

They had compiled a list of bells produced by a Glasgow foundry where our bell was produced by David Burgess in 1853.

Our bell—Bell No.386— is listed as 'location unknown' on their website.



Stay tuned for our next issue as we trace the history of this key component of St James United Church.

If you are interested in learning more about the art and history of bell-ringing, the Whiting Society has an incredible collection of articles, video, links to antique books and more! You can check it out at: whitingsociety.org.uk.

- Sarah Armstrong and Dale Archibald



GROWING UP

The Polson family is proud to share that Ben Polson has been accepted to the Mechanics Program at NSCC at the Pictou campus. The congregation wishes Ben the best in as he steps into a new phase of life. Ben is pictured below with Rev. Peter Smith at four consecutive Remembrance Day services.

- with files from Wally Polson



CHRISTMAS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Have you ever wondered exactly what we as Protestant Christians believe about Jesus' birth and why we believe what we do? Rev. Peter Smith answers your most common Christmas questions here.

Where is the story of Jesus' birth in the Bible?

The story of Jesus' birth is found in the second chapter of the Gospel of Luke (Luke 2:1-20). The Bible story tells of Joseph and Mary travelling to Bethlehem, and Jesus being born in a stable and visited by shepherds who had been told the news of his birth.

Why was Jesus born in a stable?

The Bible says nothing other than there was "no room for them at the inn" (Luke 2:7). Presumably, there was such a crowd in town because of the order to be registered for the census that there were no free rooms anywhere for them to stay.



Where is the story of the Wiseman and the star?

The story of the Wisemen is found in the second chapter of the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 2:1-12). Although we are not actually told in the Bible how many Wisemen there were, traditionally it has been assumed there were three since there were three gifts presented to the newborn king.

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CHRISTMAS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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Was Jesus really born on December 25th?

None of the Gospels actually record the date when Jesus was born. Early Christians celebrated it at different times of the year until about the 3rd century AD. December 25th was chosen as the date for Christmas by many churches because that is when days stop getting shorter and begin getting longer. An appropriate time to celebrate the arrival of Jesus, the "light of the world."

- Rev. Peter Smith



HOLY COMMUNION IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

The United Church was formed through the union of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregationalist Churches in 1925. As a result, the theology and practice of the United Church around the celebration of the Lord's Supper are rich in their diversity and application. There are a number of different methods of celebrating the Sacrament that reflect the diversity of the founding denominations. In the United Church, the Session or Council of each congregation is entrusted with the responsibility for overseeing the administration of the sacrament.

The service of worship follows the same order whether communion is celebrated or not. The "Service of the Table" section is excluded on Sundays when Communion is not celebrated. This follows the reformed practice of using a common order of worship for all Sunday Services. The service of the table follows what Jesus did in the upper room in that he "took" the bread, "gave thanks" to God, "broke" the bread, and "gave" it to his disciples. The celebration of Holy Communion always takes place in response to the word section of the liturgy, and the tradition of St. James has been to celebrate at special times of the year.

Invitation The invitation to Communion begins the Service of the Table section of the liturgy. It fulfills a similar function to the Call to Worship in the Service of the Word part of the liturgy. The Invitation is

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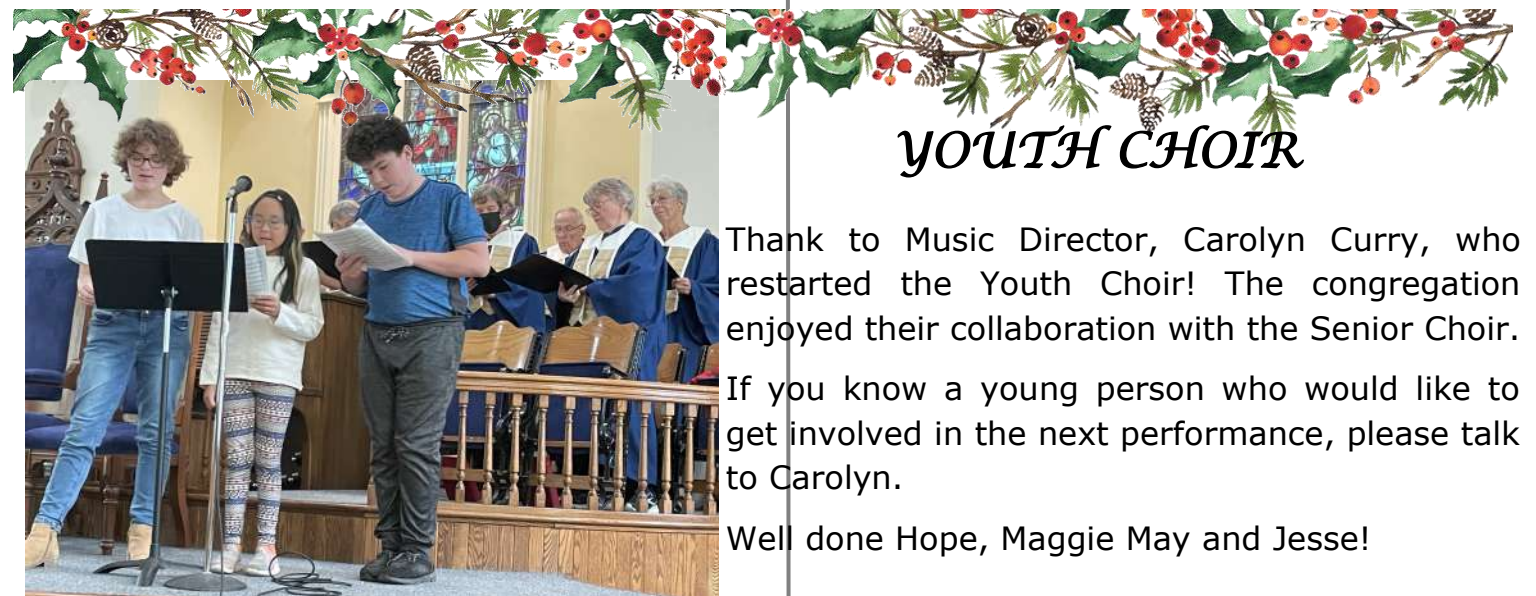
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Prayer after Communion After the elements have been distributed and taken, the service of the table ends with prayer. This ends the service of the table and usually moves us to the closing hymn. In the prayer, we give thanks for the table itself.

Frequently Asked Questions about Communion

Who is invited to partake? The Basis of Union of the United Church states that "All may be admitted to the Lord's Supper who make a credible profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus and of obedience to His Law" (Article XVI). In recent years there has been a discussion within the church on whether or not to allow children (who have not been confirmed) to share the sacrament. The decision at St. James has been to permit children to receive the elements.



YOUTH CHOIR

Thank to Music Director, Carolyn Curry, who restarted the Youth Choir! The congregation enjoyed their collaboration with the Senior Choir.

If you know a young person who would like to get involved in the next performance, please talk to Carolyn.

Well done Hope, Maggie May and Jesse!

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MID THE WINTRY ICY BLAST

Mid the wintry icy blast
Branches hung with snow downcast.
Long ago the robin fled
All the maple leaves are dead.

Yet I see the Gracing Tree

Tree whose needles evergreen
Dressed in jewelry like a queen.
Star that leads to Bethlehem
Follows to Jerusalem.

Oh so lovely Gracing Tree
Saving tree of Calvary.

About the poet:

Betsy Bramhall, mother of Fran Wittgens.

Both Betsy and her husband Jacques were writers although Betsy didn't discover her gifts until after her four children left home. That afforded her the chance to fulfill her own dream of going for a higher degree.

At the local community college in Morristown, NJ. Betsy took a rich curriculum of liberal arts, but creative writing was her favourite. When she graduated, she was awarded the English prize. She was a grandmother figure in a sea of young students. In the years that followed she wrote many poems, some marking historical or personal subjects, but most being of a spiritual nature.

- Fran Wittgens



Betsy Jane Bramhall
1919-1995

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just that, an invitation to the people to come to the table of Jesus Christ to receive the gifts of bread and cup. It is seen as an invitation that echoes the many calls of Jesus to the disciples to follow him.

Hymn There is then a hymn sung as people prepare themselves for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. At this time the servers prepare themselves and the table for the distribution of the elements. The hymn usually recounts the actions at the last supper or mentions the celebration of Holy Communion but at certain times a hymn reflecting the liturgical season may be used in place of the communion hymn.

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving The Great Prayer of Thanksgiving commonly begins with a responsive introduction and then moves through a series of sections which may include praise and Thanksgiving, Sanctus (Is 6:1-3) and Benedictus (Mt 21:9), Words of Institution, memorial acclamation, offering, and calling of the Holy Spirit

(epiclesis).

Breaking of Bread and Pouring of Cup (Fraction) At this point, the bread is broke before the people and the words used refer to Christ's death for us on the cross ("The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, broken for you"). The cup is either filled with grape juice or lifted at this point, and again words are said which remind us of the death of Jesus for us. ("The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was poured out for you".) After the fracture, there is commonly a short invitation before the distribution reminding the people that the gifts on the table are for them "Come for all things are now ready" (Lk 14:17).

Sharing of the Bread and Cup There are many different methods for receiving the Lord's Supper. In some churches, the people come and kneel at the rail, others come and dip the bread in a common cup, and still others are passed the elements by the servers. The common practice at St. James is for the people to remain seated and the elders to pass the elements to them, first bread, then cup. Everyone waits for the whole congregation to receive the element and the word of distribution before partaking.



An unusual Communion was recently held in the hall when the heating system failed.



PHOTO GALLERY

