

# CONNECTIONS

“... Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19).

December 2025

Dear Friends in Christ,

The Christmas story is familiar to all of us. Each year, we remember the angels as they sang their praises and lit up the night sky. We recall the excitement of the shepherds as they rushed to Bethlehem to see the long-promised Messiah. We retell the account of the Wisemen and their long journey to see the newborn king.

Compared to such stirring scenes and emotional passages, the quiet little verse about Mary treasuring everything in her heart can easily be overlooked. Yet later on in the gospel, the verse is repeated. When Jesus was a boy, he stayed behind at the temple to talk with the elders without Mary and Joseph realizing what he was doing. Following that story the Bible tells us “... his mother treasured all these things in her heart.” (Luke 2:51).

There is a great deal of activity and noise this December. We’re well past the quiet of the Covid years and the town and county are bustling with Christmas fairs and concerts, gatherings and plays. Plus there are lots of presents to buy, decorations to put up, and events to attend. We sing as the angels sang, we proclaim Jesus’ birth as the shepherds did, and we even rush around with presents like the Wisemen but we often forget to take time to ponder what is happening and to treasure it in our hearts.

For Christmas is really about the new beginning that God gives to us through Jesus Christ. All the songs, the activities, and the presents are not Christmas. They are simply ways we celebrate the arrival of Jesus among us. So in this season, let’s take a bit of time for quiet. To ponder what God did that night long ago in Bethlehem which changed our world. To consider what all of this means for us as this year ends and a new one begins. To treasure the great gift God has given to us in Jesus, a gift not merely for a single day of the year, but for every day of our lives.

May God continue to 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



## Christmas Eve

**Wednesday, December 24, 2025**  
 4:00 pm Family Christmas Eve Service at St. David's  
 7:00 pm Family Christmas Eve Service at St. James  
 9:00 pm Christmas Eve Communion Service at St. James

## Christmas Day

**Thursday December 25, 2025**  
**12-2 pm**  
**A Community Christmas dinner will be held in the hall at St. James. Anyone who is looking for a place to go on Christmas Day is welcome to come and enjoy a hot turkey dinner.**



And the angel said unto them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.'

Luke 2:10

## C CH CHA CHAN CHANG CHANGE

January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026 is just a few sleeps away. A new year, fresh and full of anticipation that change is coming. In all our lives there are things that need changing. Some as simple as picking a new colour paint for the living room. Deciding if my car will make it for one more year, or do I have money for my mortgage or rent, can I buy groceries or oil this month are a little more difficult. Some decisions in the world are made without any action from us.

St. James, also has decisions to make for 2026. Salaries must be paid, the building kept warm and bright and our front door kept open and welcoming. These decisions we have some control over. Many of us, give our weekly offering by envelope, PAR, e-transfer and Canada Helps. It is something that we do and often give little thought to. When was the last time you looked at the amount of your offering and thought "hmm that is what I have been giving since I started."

Budget season is upon us and at Finance and Stewardship, we are looking at the programs and day to day expenses for the upcoming year. PAR givers just need to place a note on the offering plate or drop it into the office to ask for your donation to increase. Other donation forms can be adjusted at your home. One person alone cannot make a large difference, but together we can make CHANGES.

## A Broader Look at the Pilgrimage

I was recently given a copy of Someone Else's Saint by Matthew Anderson (Pottersfield Press) for a birthday present. It is a book about pilgrimage and comparing a traditional Scottish pilgrimage to a journey from Pomquet to Antigonish by foot. In it he compares much of the traditional literature on these travels to his observations and encounters on the way with a spiritual journey and scholarship about the landscape, history, people and reasons for the undertaking. Although personally I have a number of minor criticisms, on the whole his interpretations are quite accurate and it is well worth reading especially as Saint James does figure in the analysis as do the founding groups of the larger Antigonish community. His appreciations are remarkable for one who has not lived here for decades. In book he writes about Saint Ninian's Scottish and Neo-Scottish associations.

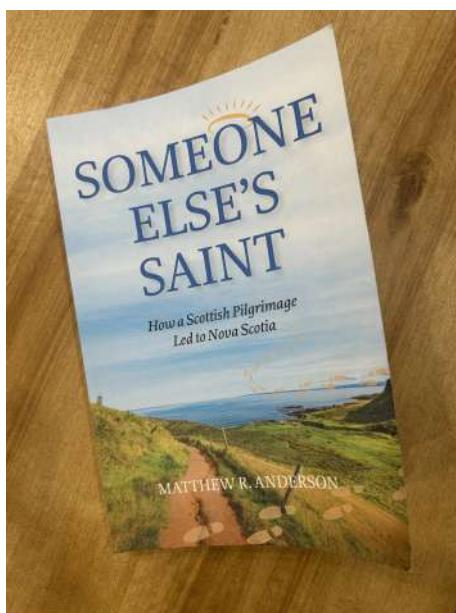
Usually, in our tradition, pilgrimages are associated with Roman Catholicism with the great traditional routes to Jerusalem, Rome of Santiago coming to mind. These were created by the early church and have influenced Islam to a great degree as well. Most of the world's major confessions have some form of pilgrimage whether it is to Mecca, Varanasi in India, Kataragama in Sri Lanka and elsewhere. The Christian ones have a cultural effect down to our present day in surprising things as the name Palmer which originates from someone who undertook the route to Jerusalem and could therefore bear a palm branch, scallop shells (*coquilles Saint Jacques*) on a coat -of-arms indicating an affiliation with Santiago and so on. In Ireland the pilgrimage to Loch Dearg or Iona in Scotland have traditionally been important. These all have to do with expiation of sins and an opportunity for spiritual "reset" or erasure of accumulated sins. Chaucer's Canterbury Tales is an extension of this with a cross section of late medieval society travelling from London to Canterbury with in a group of people who would not normally have been together, each with his or her tale to tell and their observations about life and the human condition. Piety was an aspect but not an overwhelming one. These great pilgrimages were the tourist packages of pre renaissance Europe and were not undertaken lightly but did give rise to considerable prosperity in those communities on the better travelled routes offering services to an international religious tourism clientele. The object was, however, much the same as Luther's criticism of the sale of indulgences: a transactional effacement of pardon for sins.

The Sacrament of Penance was considered insufficient for the complete expiation of sin and a corporeal price had to be paid as well, thus the requirement for a difficult journey. As well there was the aspect of Purgatory where atonement would be meted out but was finite as everyone who professed Christianity and had been baptized would be eventually be received into Heaven. Tetzel, the Dominican friar who was also the Grand Inquisitor for Saxony and Poland, produced a scandal by the sale of indulgences whereby people could buy certificates to release their relatives from Purgatory and for the purposes of the church, help finance the construction of Saint Peter's Basilica, incurring the wrath of Martin Luther in his celebrated 99 Theses on the Wittenburg Church door on Hallowe'en, 1517. In his insistence on biblical doctrine, followed by Jean Calvin, that the only sacraments biblically justifiable where baptism and communion radically changed much of the theology about salvation. Furthermore, Luther's theology of justification by faith alone and not by acts was

further amplified by Calvin's development of Saint Augustine's idea of predestination and grace. Pilgrimage in the old sense was therefore no longer effective or efficient.

Then along comes the radical Puritan: John Bunyan, who writes what is probably the first novel in English: Pilgrim's Progress. A book explicitly about pilgrimage but not as a journey to expiate sin but as a personal spiritual struggle about overcoming adversity and temptation. Aspects echo still to the present day even in Hollywood: John Wayne's references to Pilgrim in many of his movies derive directly from Bunyan. Thus, the idea of pilgrimage was revived but removed from particular sites or relics. No more wormholes in the spiritual firmament!

Nevertheless, we have some traditional small pilgrimages locally which are hidden but locally revered. The spring at the end of the Stations of the Cross at the Monastery in Monastery is one particularly favoured by many local people and many Mi'kmaq, Father Archie MacLellan's grave in Broad Cove is another and there are others. The investment is not in the physical structure but rather spiritual one and we should not hesitate to explore.



### Adopt-A-Highway

The autumn Adopt-A-Highway clean up took place Saturday, 27 September, under clear skies and ideal temperatures. A strong wind made things rather interesting, but it was another successful "de-littering". Seven participants, two hours, eleven bags of trash and two bags of refundables. We continue to nag the Adopt-A-Highway organization about our missing signage. So far to no avail. It disappeared before COVID hit. It's not that we're doing this for the "glory" or recognition, but it would be nice to at least be acknowledged! This fall clean up marked our **20th** effort. Thanks to all who keep participating on a job well done! We will happily welcome some new hands. Perhaps younger ones?

## Fillings

It is Friday afternoon, the day before the Holly Tea and Sale. Into the kitchen at the church come seven or better yet eight determined women to get the sandwich fillings ready for the next morning's sandwich making. The counter and fridge are full of ingredients such as ham, eggs, BBQ chickens, forty loaves of bread, cherries, onions and celery.

Step one – wash your hands and find an apron. Let us start by mixing the egg mixture. Thanks to a very devoted elf, 9 dozen eggs minus one, have been boiled and placed in the fridge. First peel, peel, peel! Then grate, grate, grate! The 6 bunches of green onions are washed and cut up, chop, chop, chop, amid the lively discussion of just cut up how big is the right big to cut them. The kitchen is filled with laughter and stories. Oops, someone sneezed back to the sink to wash your hands. Miracle Whip, salt, pepper, and a big thorough mix – do not forget the corners and box one is into the fridge.

Hands are rewashed. Six delightfully smelling, BBQ chickens are then stripped and chopped. Another discussion on size of the pieces, various chicken stories, soup suggestions, remembrances of those who did this same job years ago and are no longer here. Two of the women washed their hands and started chopping the two bunches of washed celery. Another size discussion! Some of the women that are setting up in the hall are in and around so the noise level in the kitchen is rising, topics change and we spend time helping find special dishes, flatware, cups and saucers. Wash your hands again. Finally, we hit the mixing stage and box two of the filling has gone into the fridge. But, not before several of the tasters give their approval, more salt, its needs more tang, still think the celery is too big and on it goes.

Then it is wash your hands again and it is time for tea and more stories. The chopped ham is next on the list and after washing one's hands again in goes the relish, mustard, miracle whip, no salt, pepper, and the big spoon to stir it all up. Too much pepper so more sneezes and more hand washing. Now box three is in the fridge.

Wash your hands again, drain the cherries and dry them, time to chop. The banter again continues on size and pretty soon it looks kind of suspicious as each one has very red stained fingers. The biggest job of all remains -all those dishes we dirtied have to be washed and put away. The bowls and such do not fit in the dishwasher so it is woman power that gets them clean. The kitchen echoes with the sound of where does this go and do we want this left out for the morning.

The kitchen is never quiet. We use this time to connect to the lives of the others, with laughter, support, hugs, discussion and friendship. One last time hands are washed after everything is clean and ready for the morning, home we go. As for the sandwich making that is a different story for another day.





## International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

On 17 October a Community Gathering & Poverty Policy Video Launch was held at St James. Approximately 40 people attended from a variety of local organizations plus interested individuals. Representatives of our Social Justice Collective also participated.

The event included screening of six videos developed by the Antigonish Coalition to End Poverty (ACEP), (formerly the Antigonish Poverty Reduction Coalition (APRC)), exploring the policies that impact poverty in our community. The videos covered the following topics: Income Security, Poverty Impacts and Sr Marion (Sheridan) Perspectives. Wyanne Sandler, (National Network Director of For Our Kids), opened the day with a welcome, land acknowledgement and introductions. Lucille Harper, (former director of the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre & Sexual Assault Services), provided an introduction and background for the video project. Following the video viewing breakout groups worked on what they felt were the most impactful actions that could be taken. Then a group discussion was moderated by Colleen Cameron, (Board Chair of the Antigonish Affordable Housing Society), and a presentation of all the suggestions – most of which dealt with holding politicians, (local, provincial and federal), accountable for what they're doing to reduce poverty. Representatives of both the Town Council, (Diane Roberts), and the County Council, (Adam Baden-Clay), were present and participated in the discussions.

Following the formal discussion there was an option to view three further videos in the series that dealt with: Housing, Energy and Education.

All six videos are now available for viewing via the ACEP website <https://www.endpovertyantigonish.ca/>

### **Christmas Cruising (Michèle Ashby)**

It's hard to believe that a year ago we were preparing to head off to South America and Antarctica for a month. What an amazing "bucket list" trip it was! We were kept busy with all sorts of activities on board – excellent entertainment, craft lessons, and lectures on the places we were visiting – history, geography, flora and fauna.

We started out in Buenos Aires where we spent a few days acclimatizing. A truly picturesque city of colonial architecture, lots to do and friendly residents. We were introduced to "asadas", meaty meals which Tim in particular loved! And of course, the amazing Argentinian tango.

Reluctantly we headed south with several more stops – two in Uruguay. Another fascinating country. Beautiful cities and rugged countryside. A stable government, healthy economy. Forward thinking – ahead of most of the world on acceptance of gay marriage, abortion rights, legalization of marijuana, etc.

We enjoyed a brief visit to the Falkland Islands. Interesting history. Fiercely British. Whereas in Argentina there are references to the *Guerra de las Malvinas*, here it is the Falklands War. We enjoyed a closeup of a Gentoo penguin colony, known as a “waddle” of penguins. Saw a few King penguins, dolphins and all sorts of fascinating bird life.

Then there was an amazing week cruising around Antarctica. Massive glaciers, (sadly melting), all sorts of awesome icebergs, (bigger than anything we ever saw up in the Arctic), some apartment block sized and many of unique shades of grey to almost black, and a gorgeous azure. We listened to humpback whales singing and were delighted by orcas spouting and flipping their tails at us. We saw hundreds of Adelie penguins “porpoising” alongside our ship, lots of chinstrap penguins, and even a leopard seal hauled out on an ice floe.

Eventually we headed north again following the Chilean coastline. Multiple volcanoes were appreciated – some smoking slightly menacingly. We finished up with a few days in Santiago. It's not as tourist friendly a city as Buenos Aires, but nonetheless had its charms.

So what's Christmas like on a cruise ship? This is the second time we've spent the holidays cruising. The first time was almost ten years ago, transiting the Panama Canal. Same cruise line, but we noted several changes. Whereas previously there had been a “ship's minister”, this time Sunday morning services were “congregation led”. These were pleasant enough, but tended to be quite “fundamentalist” – testimonies and “choruses” as opposed to a sermon and actual hymns. Our first cruising Christmas there was a lovely traditional carol sing, this time there was a plethora of Christmas “songs” starring characters like Rudolph and Frosty. Not as enjoyable or meaningful for us. Interestingly, both cruises coincided with Hannukah. And each time, when I asked the rabbi if I could attend, I was warmly welcomed. I was not alone either. There was a Christian couple and a Buddhist gentleman, who like myself, were simply interested in learning more about other religions. Because this was not that long after the first anniversary of the Hamas led October 7<sup>th</sup> massacre in Israel, we said the prayer for the dead – the Mourner's Kaddish. This prayer asks for divine compassion, peace for the departed's souls, and strength for the community to support the mourners. Parts of the service were conducted in Hebrew, but most of it was in English. Of course, Hannukah celebrations appeal to me because they involve a lot of food ... sufganiyot, (jelly filled doughnuts), latkes (potato pancakes), etc are all consumed communally upon completion of the service!

On Christmas Eve a Roman Catholic priest surfaced to hold a well attended traditional Midnight Mass. Knowing non-Catholics are not always welcome at their communion table, we explained that we were regular attenders in a United Church and asked for permission to partake. We were given a bit of a wink and told we could, provided we didn't “broadcast” our presence. It was a lovely service and made us feel a little less distant from all of you, our church home at St James, at this important time of year.

## Visit to Hunters Mountain (Michèle Ashby)

On a beautiful, warm, autumn afternoon, I had the pleasure of visiting the Land Protectors at the Hunters Mountain blockade with two well known, local activists. Paul Strome and Jeff Parker, (both with *Seniors for Climate Action*), were making a supply run to call on the Mi'kmaw group blocking logging efforts on the Cape Breton mountain since early September. When it became clear we were allies who wished to support and become educated, we were given a warm welcome. The supplies Paul provided, including water, flour, a large ham, propane, etc were appreciated. My home baking was half finished before we left the site!

There were approximately a dozen folks there when we visited, but the number fluctuates depending on the time of day and the day itself, as many of the Land Defenders work. At any given time there may be children and/or elders present. They are united in opposition to clear-cutting operations on their ancestral lands. JD Irving Ltd had subcontracted multiple companies to conduct logging on the mountain.

While Paul officially interviewed several of the Land Protectors, I spoke informally with a knowledgeable woman, Kukuwes Wowkis, who was happy to share her perspective on the issue with me. She stated that after receiving government "promises" three times that there would only be "selective, sustainable logging", locals became concerned upon seeing up to 90 fully loaded logging trucks departing the area each morning and evening. Drones sent up to take aerial photographs

provided irrefutable evidence of grievous clear cutting, what the Mi'kmaw consider a traumatic "rape of the forest". They are concerned about impacts on the moose population, and the destruction of areas where they forage for traditional medicines. So they are asserting their treaty rights and jurisdiction over their territory. A checkpoint, (complete with a "cedar line"),

allows locals to travel through for recreational activities, but will continue to prevent access by logging trucks.



The atmosphere is extremely peaceful and supportive of nature. No alcohol or drugs are allowed on the premises. Wowkis collects native plants and makes traditional medicines. We sampled some of her clover juice – which had a very delicate flavour. There is a teepee – a place of ceremony where a sacred fire burns – which is treated respectfully. A long house is under construction. Tents and RVs are present, and Wowkis had a "tiny home" brought in

that she has made extremely comfortable. A children's area is used for play and creative activities. A kitchen, stores tent, etc complete the well-organized camp.

Some of the people we spoke with have been there since the barrier was first erected and are prepared to stay as long as there is potential for the loggers to return. Certainly through the winter, but for a few years if necessary. Many of the Land Defenders and Warriors have participated in similar actions such as with the Alta Gas Ltd water protectors on the Shubenacadie River, and in other areas where there is concern for the environment and the erosion of Mi'kmaw traditional rights.

One section of the recently passed omnibus Bill 127, (the *Protecting Nova Scotians Act*), amended the Crown Lands Act – making it illegal to block forestry operations and authorizing law enforcement to remove encampments and any obstructions. This has Mi'kmaw chiefs concerned for several reasons. Although ostensibly about public safety around logging operations, the leaders say there was not enough consultation, that it targets their picketing, and is escalating tensions both on Hunters Mountain and elsewhere throughout Nova Scotia.

Another recent omnibus Bill 137, (the *Making Business Easier Act*), which is supposedly intended to speed up mining project approvals, is also problematic. This act purports to cut red tape in the natural resources sector, but Mi'kmaw feel it erodes environmental protection of their lands and waters.

Ironically these bills were rushed through in the same time frame as Treaty Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Criminalizing peaceful protest is seriously damaging to the democratic process.



All photos were taken by Jeff Parker



## Religion in Antigonish Open House

Rev. Peter, Chad Brazier, and Fran Wittgens took part in an open house organized by Religious Studies Department Professors Dr Linda Darwish (pictured with us at our table) and Dr. Gerjan Altenburg. The afternoon was an opportunity to answer questions from students about St. James and the United Church of Canada. Students and other folks around St. FX and community members came out and enjoyed seeing and hearing about our congregation and other places of worship and spirituality around Antigonish. Thanks Linda and Gerjan for the invitation and thanks to Chad and Fran helping to share our life and mission with others!



## Highlight Sunday

The Outreach and Communication Committee tried a new design to display the activities and range of 12 different groups from St James. Thanks to Anne Camozzi's skill and artistry, all the major info for each group was seen on large autumn leaves gracing a tree at the head of the display. Each group had a place to attract attention and to allow individuals to sign up for more information or to volunteer. Each group had a contact person ready to answer any questions. Judging from the numbers browsing and engaging in talk, the display did its job of highlighting the goings on at St James. Those groups were: Choir, Children's Worship, Coffee/Tea Hr, Connections, Gardening, Hot Meal, Meditation, Prayer Circle, Prayer Shawl, StFX-St James Links, UCW



## A Memorable Family Reunion

Gerrit & Marlene Groenenberg went to the Netherlands for a family reunion of siblings during the last two weeks of August 2025. WestJet has a direct flight from Halifax to Schiphol Amsterdam. We used the excellent train & bus systems to get us from the airport. Breukelen, Rotterdam, Akkrum, & Middenmeer were the main destinations.

Breukelen is a city from the 1600s. We travelled the river Vecht with a local tour guide. Along the river, we saw large, beautiful house estates. However, the wealth displayed was due to the slave trade and the spice trade. There were small posh teahouses, where the ladies could show off their dresses drinking very expensive teas.

We also toured Zuylen castle with moat & grounds. Everyone needs to see a castle at least once in a lifetime.

The port city of Rotterdam is large. There are so many skyscrapers with a lot of people, but the cable cars easily enabled us to visit relatives in opposite ends of the city. We are definitely not city people, but the general public was quite helpful to us and polite.

Friesland was very nice for us, being former dairy farmers. Every cm of ground & water is used. A village turns into farmland, then immediately, back to a village. It is a very compact country.

A highlight of Akkrum village is Canadastreet, where there is a maple leaf made into the cobblestone street. A house is signed as a Canadian army residence.

Upon leaving Friesland, Gerrit's sister took us via her all electric small car to Middenmeer polder (land reclaimed from the sea) to their former farmstead. All cars are small, with bikes everywhere. Bike lanes, narrow roads, lanes for farm equipment and canals are in abundance. It's not unusual to drive under canals. We had to cross the large dyke in front of the North Sea.

We passed by many windmills in the water. We stayed with family in a thatched roofed old farmhouse with large beams at our bedsides. We also visited Zuiderzee museum village. The trip was quite rushed, but a good experience. Both of us got stomach flus, which is not pleasant when staying in other peoples' homes, so bear that in mind when travelling. We







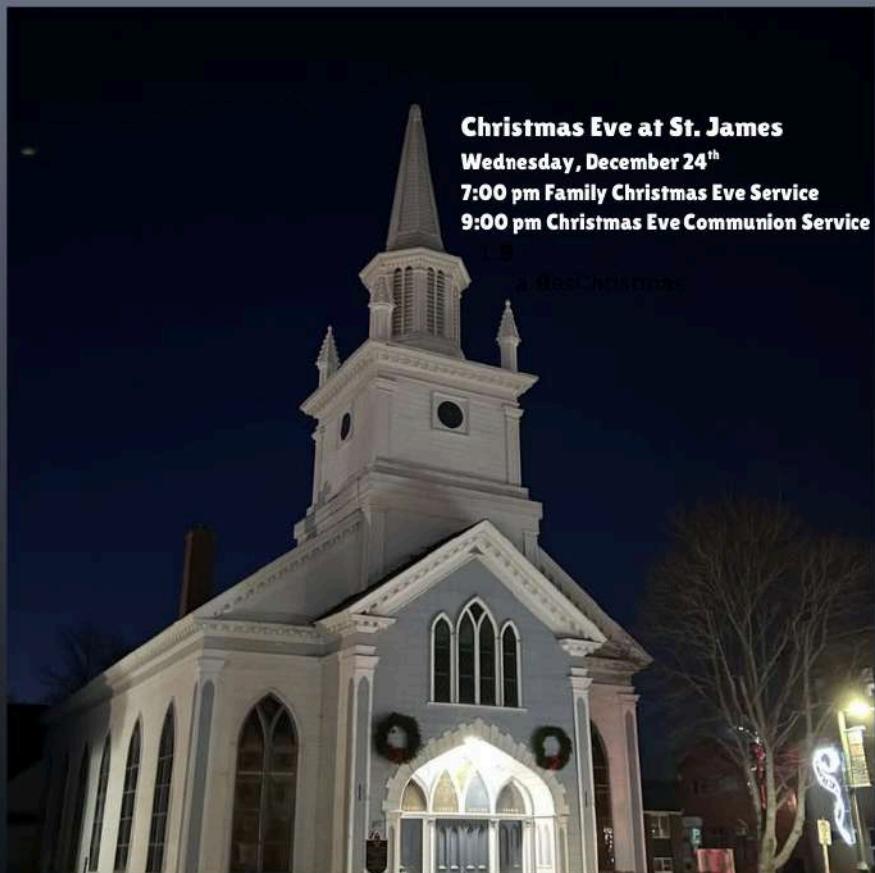
## Antigonish Community Fridge and Pantry

The congregation of St. James United Church continues to support the Community Fridge and Pantry with food donations. This is just one of the many ways in which we are able to show true caring and kindness toward people who are less fortunate than ourselves. Although we tend to emphasize the ongoing food insecurity crisis in our town and county only at certain times of the year - October and December - it is important to remember that people are hungry throughout the year, and not just during these targeted months.

Donations may be placed at any time in the wooden box located at the entrance to the church, and they will be taken over to the Community Fridge & Pantry either on Sunday after service or on Monday morning.

“How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”

1 John 3: 17 - 18



**Family Christmas Eve Service  
at St. Davids in Cape George**  
Wednesday, December 24<sup>th</sup>  
4:00 pm