

Advent~Christmas Newsletter

St. Paul's United Church | November 1st, 2023



This is an odd time of year to be writing a newsletter, Fall Kickoff, and Thanksgiving have passed, and Advent won't start for a month. By all regular calendar accounts, it is an in-between time, where not much is happening. Yet that isn't true! We chose this time to send out a newsletter because so much was happening that we didn't want you to miss out on.

November starts with the celebration of St. Paul's 191st Anniversary on November 5th and from then to the beginning of Advent there are special services each week – check out the calendar of events on the last page for details of our worship and other activities!

The surprisingly busy calendar, to me, is an example of how God works. So often we try to put God in a box, defining when and how we will encounter God. You know like only on Sunday Morning in the church sanctuary. Yet God constantly defies human expectations.

As we head towards the end of the Christian year, where we crown Jesus as king, and the season Advent, where we prepare our heart to receive the gift of Christ in our midst, let us not forget that God is not bound to our remembered history. That this in-breaking of God into the world is not just something that happened long ago. God still shows up in surprising ways. So, keep attentive to the big and little ways, every day – even today, that God makes Godself known. May we have ears to hear and eyes that see, the glory of God that is right before our eyes.

And having seen what God can and does do, let us continue to enthrone him in our hearts so that we may reflect Christ in the world. Amen.

May God richly bless not only our high seasonal celebrations of Advent and Christmas but also the in-between time that we find ourselves in today.

Rev.
Michelle



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Food Outreach Programs



Two of the Outreach programs for St. Paul's are the Pantry and the Brown Bag lunches.

The Pantry

The Pantry is located in the basement of the church just off the GYM. It is open Wednesday mornings from 9:00 to 11:00. Anyone in need of help can visit the Pantry once a month. We have non-perishable items only. These include canned goods, soups, meat, spaghetti and sauces, Kraft dinner, cereals, granola bars, cookies, crackers, mayo, molasses, and several other condiments. We also have laundry and dish detergent, cleaning supplies, bathroom tissue, paper towels, facial tissues, hand soap, toothpaste and brushes. Items are given out according to the size of the family.

There are 11 volunteers working in the Pantry. Three work each Wednesday. I make out a schedule for 3 months at a time.

We are currently serving 110 clients. Some are single men, single women, families. We have about 25 immigrant families who have between 4 and 8 children. Most of them cannot speak English so we let them point to what they want. We get new clients nearly every Wednesday.

We use a point system. We give 10 points to a single person; a family according to size can get a maximum of 22 points.

The congregation supports the Pantry very well. We are given gift cards monthly by one very kind person.

Every one who visits the Pantry expresses their gratitude for what they receive as they leave.

Brown Bag Lunches

The other outreach program at St. Paul's is the Brown Bag Lunch.

I make up lunch bags containing a can of protein (soup, meat) with a flip top lid, a juice box, a pudding or fruit cup, a granola bar and a napkin with a plastic fork and spoon.

Meghan hands out the bags from the office. She gives out as many as 10 a day to people who can't afford to buy their lunch. They all show their appreciation for the lunch.

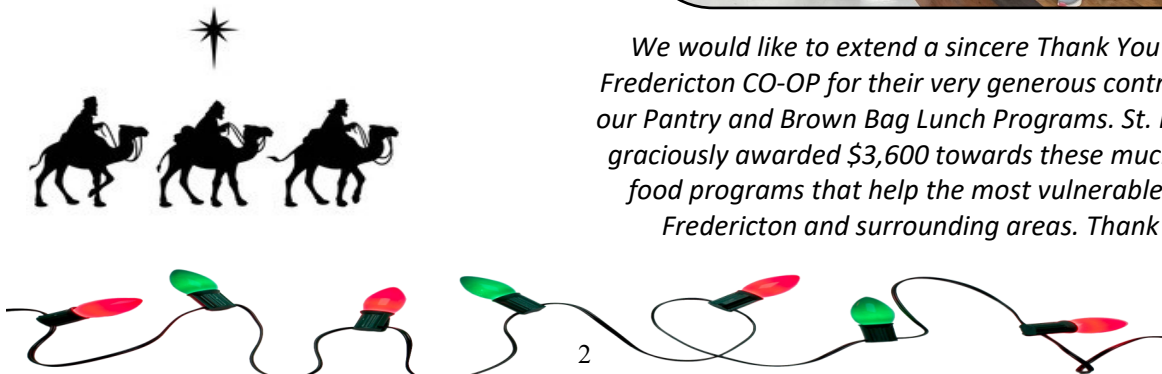
We have given out 742 bag lunches to 161 individuals to date this year. Much gratitude to everyone who supports this extremely important community outreach program!

All of the volunteers working in the Pantry and including me are thankful for the support given to these two programs by the congregation.

Sincerely,
Lois Walker Gillin



We would like to extend a sincere Thank You! To the Fredericton CO-OP for their very generous contribution to our Pantry and Brown Bag Lunch Programs. St. Paul's was graciously awarded \$3,600 towards these much-needed food programs that help the most vulnerable folks in Fredericton and surrounding areas. Thank you!





Worship Committee

Fall is upon us with all its vibrant beauty. Some may feel sad that the summer is over and that Nature is decaying into a dead winter. Not so! Nature is preparing for renewal. Seeds, insects and various small creatures are protected under a blanket of snow. The Worship Committee is heartened by the vibrancy of the season and knows God will be with us this winter as we prepare for renewal.

We are excited to plan for the celebrations, events and Services that will be offered to prepare for His birth: Thanksgiving, our Congregational Meeting, Remembrance Day, Memorial Hymn Sing AND Advent Carol Service! We hope that you are excited too.

Your Worship Committee is working hard but we are less successful if we make plans without our Congregation's insight and input. Positive and negative input are both welcomed. By working together we can make continue to make St. Paul's a vibrant, faith filled church.



The Worship Committee members are Debbie West (chair), Chris Grant (secretary), Roger Miller, Tammy Coughlan, Mary Stickles and Ann Raper. Our ears are open!

***Please join us for worship
Sundays at 10:30 am.
Coffee and conversation to follow!***

Ministry & Personnel Committee

St. Paul's M&P Committee has been busy with their responsibilities, meetings and decisions over the past few months. We have three distinct roles: (1) the consultative and support role (2) the healthy relationships role and (3) the supervisory role.

We check in regularly with our staff members and the community of faith on matters concerning their welfare and interests. Job Descriptions for the various roles at St. Paul's have been thoroughly reviewed and updated if necessary.

New Office Hours

The office is open:

Monday to Thursday from 8am to 3pm
and Friday from 8am to 1pm.

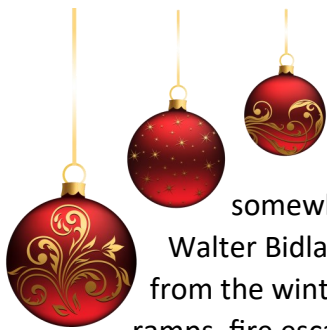
Looking to Volunteer?

We have upcoming opportunities to write a grant requests to help fund our outreach programs and summer students. If you have writing skills and a few hours of time to help out, please reach out to Meghan in the office.

St. Paul's United is blessed to have a staffing team that is dedicated to working hard and helping St. Paul's achieve its goals and outcomes.

M&P Committee: Lois Walker, Blaine Irving, Ann Krause





St. Paul's Property Committee has had a somewhat quiet summer after Walter Bidlake finished his many repairs from the winter (two collapsed wheelchair ramps, fire escape repairs, etc.)

However, we were struck with a major door repair on the Manse rental unit and the concrete steps to the sanctuary. Then, bad luck struck again when several steps on the George Street fire escape disintegrated and needed expensive repair to meet fire regulations. Consequently, our financial situation is dire and we pray that the furnace start-up yields no problems.

Kyle Mathers works diligently to find us competent contractors and we thank him many times for his expertise.

Property Committee

Over the summer, Rusty Blakely and summer student Logan Curtis kept the grounds beautiful, painted some doors inside and did a thorough cleaning of the sanctuary... we really appreciated their dedication to making St. Paul's family proud.

Sometimes we have small jobs that we could use some extra help with like calls to contractors, painting doors throughout the hall, giving the heavy mats a good cleaning for winter, preparing the flower beds for their winter sleep, being on the call list for after hours emergency calls... if you are interested for any one of these, please call Patty Trail at 506-457-2273 or Meghan at 506-458-1183 who will put you in touch with Rusty... he has the materials and the keys.

The word "Advent" can have three related meanings. It can mean "arrival;" it can mean "presence;" it can mean "coming, on the way." For Christians, the liturgical season of Advent means all three.

Coffee & Conversation

Jesus ate with people all the time. There is something so biblical about breaking bread together, sharing food and drink. To welcome people into a time of fellowship after service is to extend God's hospitality. It is living out being God's people. It is a time for people to connect and not feel lonely, to share stories and develop deeper relationships, and to practice serving one another.

We are shifting how we provide this ministry opportunity so that more people can be involved and to provide more freedom and flexibility for those who serve. Historically, committees of the church have been assigned a Sunday, but starting November 19th we will move to a sign-up method of providing Coffee and goodies after church.

This means three things: you get to choose the day you serve, anyone can be involved serving this ministry, and if nobody signs up there will be no coffee! We hope this shift will allow more people the opportunity to participate in this ministry and that by serving with new people we will expand our connections within the congregation.

If you used to help through a committee, or if you like to bake or welcome people, sign up for your date today through the office or on the sign up sheets in the hall today!



Congregational Update



A congregational meeting was held October 15th, at which members of the Board and Trustees spoke about the challenges that our congregation faces. While the challenges mentioned are common across the wider church, and not actually new to us, this meeting cast light on our specific current situation. We clearly heard the short-term financial challenges in front of us, we budgeted a deficit and are on target to hit it.

The Trustees presented the results of a building condition report they commissioned for the sanctuary, which highlighted the need for close to two million dollars of work to the sanctuary in the next 5 years. These financial challenges were discussed while also considering qualitative challenges like the societal changes that have left us with an older and shrinking congregation. There was also an update on what could be expected, or not, from Kindred Works. The full presentation is available on our website under the resources/publications reports tabs or by contacting the church office.

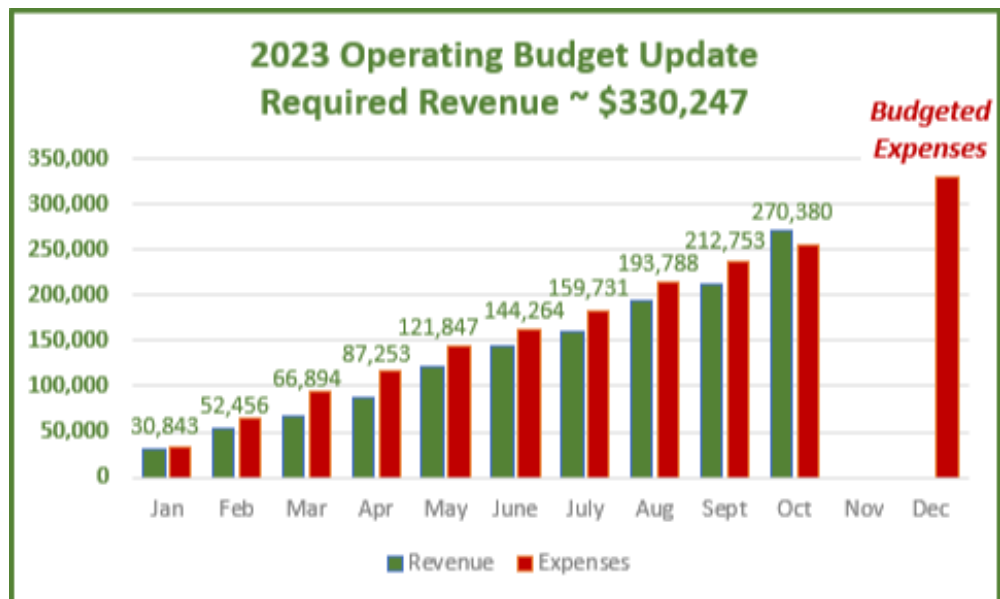
Reflecting on the wide and overlapping challenges we face, the words from 2 Corinthians 4:8-10 comes to mind: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We carry in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body”.

We are in a critical time as a congregation, the courage to be honest about what we can do and the bravery to do things in new ways will be required. It is important for us not to get depressed or despair because as Paul reminds us, we are not abandoned or destroyed. It is a time to be open and attentive to the moving of the spirit, opening possibilities and showing us the way. With the help of God, our congregational body can embody Christ’s resurrection to new life which is yet unknown.

You are invited to look at the presentation from October 15th, to reach out with any questions to members of the Trustees and Board, and to be part of the ongoing discussions about how we will face the challenges ahead of us.

We hope you will join us on November 15th for worship as we give thanks for 191 years of faith and service. Following worship there will be a soup and bun meal and celebration, and an update on where the leadership team is on

addressing the challenges raised on October 15th. As we celebrate what has been and look forward to what will come next, please hold our congregation and it’s leaders in your prayers.



Board of Trustees



The Trustees are responsible for managing the financial and physical assets of the Church, acting on behalf of the congregation. The financial assets include several Trust Funds and other accounts. The physical assets include the sanctuary, hall and two social housing properties.

Activities since the last newsletter:

The Trustees and Property Committee have continued their efforts to keep the church's buildings in good condition. A significant concern is the sanctuary roof. Unfortunately, we have been unable to find a contractor to do the repair. Fortunately, we were able to fund the rehabilitation of the George Street fire escape.

The investment sub-committee met with our investment advisor to review our investments and returns. The sub-committee's review affirmed our investment policy.

We reviewed and discussed the future repairs and financial needs of the physical properties. With the latest round of roof and bell tower repairs the investment account will fall to about \$75,000. We face further major expenditures over the short and medium term. For example, the repair and rehabilitation of the York Street façade of the Sanctuary has been estimated at over \$1,000,000.00.

Trustees have investigated options to generate revenue for operations, repairs and maintenance. In their search for a solution to our needs, Trustees and the Board have agreed to work with UPRC and then Kindred Works (KW). Recently, KW has changed its operations and as a result is not a viable option for creating a revenue stream for our congregation.

Meetings of the Board and Trustees. In recent months the Board and Trustees have reviewed the challenges our church is facing, including:

1. A lack of reserve funds for maintenance,
2. Financial resources available on our operating side,
3. Human resources, and
4. Building maintenance and use while considering our congregational dynamics post-COVID.

The Trustees have called upon the Board to respond to these concerns urgently, which has led to a process facilitated by Rev. Rose-Hannah Gaskin that will help us decide on a path forward and plan for our congregation.

The Trustees continue to work diligently and prudently on behalf of the congregation. We are currently considering a review of the St. Paul's 250 Vision that has guided our work over the last 8-10 years.

What is Christmas? It is tenderness for the past, courage for the present, hope for the future. ~ Agnes M. Pharo



Sunday School



Autumn always feels like a new beginning and a fresh start when you have young children in your life. It's time to put away all the summer toys, bathing suits, camping gear, etc. and settle back into the routine of a new school year. It was with this sense of excitement and the anticipation of a fresh start that I joined the Sunday school team and started teaching Sunday school this September. Teaching the children in our church family is something I now look forward to – it is a time every Sunday filled with joy and has become a way I have been able to find some purpose in my own day to day activities again.

I would like to share a bit about my story in hopes of inspiring some joy for you too!

It's been nearly two years since our family were called back to church. We were dealing with the loss of my beloved Grampy, who had been a long-time member of St. Paul's. My husband and I quickly realized we were not well equipped to help our four-year-old son with the spiritual part of his grief journey. Questions were coming up like, "What do you mean Grampy is in Heaven? Where is that? Can he ever come back? Why is he with God and who is God? Why can't I see him?" We knew it was time to find our spiritual home and help our son understand that we are all children of God, and through Jesus we know we will someday be reunited in heaven with those we have loved here on earth. It was time for Sunday School!

Fast forward to November of last year when I personally went through a health crisis when I suffered a stroke unexpectedly. I am so grateful that I came out if it with very few lasting physical impacts. However, a serious medical event like that does change everything. I had a real moment of clarity in the hospital – I had not been prioritizing what was most important! I had been caught in the loop of being a manager at a highly stressful corporate job. My focus had been too much on work, and not enough on my well-being, and thus the overall well-being of my family. As I was moved to my hospital room from the ER, I noticed in my window a cross made of palm had been placed. There were no other crosses anywhere to be seen. I was filled with a deep sense of peace, and the knowledge that I am God's child, he is always with me, and he is directing me to where I need to be. I am currently on an extended leave of absence from my job and trust that God will guide me in the next steps of my healing journey.

During this time of recovery and healing I have spent many hours praying on how I can be of service to my church community with some of the limitations I have now – dealing with post-stroke fatigue and other cognitive issues limit my day-to-day activities. Then the call came out that teachers were needed for Sunday school. I immediately felt God's call in that message. Although I was a bit nervous as I do not have a teaching background, I knew this is something I can do! This is a way I can be of service to our church and our youngest members! That idea filled me with a joy and excitement I have not felt for some time.

Teaching Sunday school is an absolute joy – I love being able to give of my time and my gifts! The children bring their own joy, curiosity, and creativity every week and we have a lot of fun! Going back to my family's original reason for coming to St. Paul's, I now understand it is essential as a Christian family that our son have the foundation to answer some of the tougher questions he will have throughout his life. There are so many valuable lessons for us in the Bible, and It is my hope that I can help the Sunday school children understand these lessons and think about how to apply them in their regular day to day lives.

If you know of any young people who are looking for their spiritual home, I hope you will encourage them to come join our little Sunday school with the big heart.

We have lots of joy to share!

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." ~ Matthew 19:14



Everyday Spiritual Practices

Christmas Baking Edition



Use this pattern with your favorite recipe while baking this holiday!

Give Thanks - *Gather and prepare your ingredients.*

Thank you for these ingredients (name each ingredient) and for every being, every place, and everything that has brought them here. Thank you, Creator of all things.

Bless and Break - *Create your batter.*

In the breaking, cracking, sifting, mixing, and kneading, I prepare each ingredient to work together to become something new. I give thanks for what the ingredients were and ask your blessing on what new thing they will become. May it bring joy.

Share - *Decorate, package, and share your creations.*

I marvel, celebrate, and give thanks for how ordinary ingredients from your Creation have lovingly been transformed into something extraordinary. I give thanks for the tradition and privilege of blessing, breaking, and sharing your gifts with your people. May the sharing of these treats be a blessing. Amen.

~ Adapted From Advent Unwrapped



Quote to Ponder for this Season of Hope

“Optimism and hope are radically different attitudes. Optimism is the expectation that things—the weather, human relationship, the economy, the political situation, and so on—will get better. Hope is trust that God will fulfill God’s promises to us in a way that leads us to true freedom. The optimist speaks about concrete changes in the future. The person of hope lives in the moment with the knowledge and trust that all of life is in good hands.”

~ Henri Nouwen

Behind-the-Scenes

Meghan continues to work on getting our membership database up to date. Did you know we have over 600 members of all ages in our database? If you have moved or changed your email or phone number, please contact the office to provide updated information.

Weekly we send eNews with a reflection, prayer, and list of upcoming events. If you are not receiving these, please contact the office to ensure you do not miss out! Not interested in receiving our emails, eNews or newsletters? Please contact the office to be removed from our mailing list.



Our Incarnate God



Soon the familiar Christmas Carols will start to spring forth. Touching our radio waves, blasting through the stores, signaling the shift in season. Almost unnoticed, some deep and powerful theology becomes the background noise of the season. I marvel at Hark! the Herald Angels Sing and Charles Wesley's ability to take such grand statements about who Christ is and what Christ does and wave them into song. Just take a moment to ponder some of its words:

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold him come,
offspring of a virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;
hail, the incarnate deity,
pleased with us in flesh to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel!



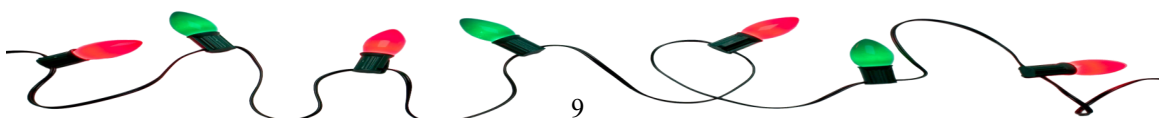
Nobody in today's world would ever consider putting "virgin's womb" and "Godhead" in a song, yet Wesley made it work, and his song has endured since 1739. As highfaluting as the words of this hymn are, they point to a timeless truth and the humble mystery at the heart of this season. That God came "veiled in flesh", a simple human child, to be with us.

The question I have been wrestling with as I approach this Advent/Christmas season is, where does God continue to be incarnate in the world? Too often I talk about God in many disembodied ways. Yet, here in the Christmas story, the physical human body is the holy residence of the Almighty. What does it mean if God's holy presence can and is made known, not just through this one person long ago, but through our flesh too? We are the body of Christ after all.

To start, it means that the bodies that we have been told are too old, too ugly, too broken, and too different are not nothing, they are the location of divine manifestation in the world. It is these bodies of all shapes, sizes, and abilities that shine forth divine light and love into the world.

If we truly took the theological stance that God is incarnate within each of us, so much of the violence and atrocities that we see in our world would stop. The way we relate fundamentally changes when we look at each other and see God's face and God's eyes looking back. When I know the person across from me to be part of the great divine mystery, I do not let them starve, I do not let them suffer at my hands and, I do not forget them, neglect them or abandon them. This season, as we celebrate Christ being birthed into the world again, let us picture that birthing not just into a stable but also into each and every human body and soul.

***This advent prepare room in your heart for Jesus.
For once born in your heart he will live through you.***





Upcoming Events

'Tis the season!



- November 5th ~ Anniversary Sunday Service at 10:30am & Congregational Meeting
November 6th ~ Christmas Chocolate Orders Due by 3pm!
November 12th ~ Remembrance Sunday Service at 10:30 am
 ~ Deadline to Return Christmas Angel Gifts
November 13th ~ Office Closed
November 18th ~ Christmas Bazaar from 9am-12pm
November 19th ~ Memorial Hymn Sing Service at 10:30am
November 26th ~ Downtown United Joint Service at St. Paul's at 10:30am
 ~ Downtown United Project Presentation to follow service
December 1st ~ Carols by Glowstick at 6pm
December 3rd ~ Advent 1 Service at 10:30am
December 6th ~ Advent Carol Festival at 7:30pm
December 10th ~ Advent 2 Service @ 10:30am
 ~ Songs of Jubilee Organ Concert at 2pm
December 17th ~ Advent 3 Service at 10:30am
December 21st ~ Longest Night Service at St. Paul's at 7pm
December 24th ~ Advent 4 Service at 10:30am
 ~ Family Christmas Service at 3pm
 ~ Candlelight Christmas Eve Service with Optional Communion at 7pm
December 23rd-Jan 1st ~ Office Closed for Holidays
December 31st ~ Christmas 2 Service at 10:30am



Contact Us!

St. Paul's United Church

224 York Street

Fredericton, NB E3B 3P1

Tel. 506.458.1183

Email. stpaulsoffice224@gmail.com

Web. Stpaulsunited.ca