

The Spirit of St. Mark's

Parish Newsletter
December 1, 2019

It is the beautiful task of Advent to awaken in all of us memories of goodness and thus to open doors of hope.

Pope Benedict XVI

FROM THE RECTOR'S DESK

A common theme identified by one commentator amongst the five books shortlisted for the recently-announced Scotiabank Giller Prize, Canada's top literary award, is *Belonging*. It is one of the deep hungers in our heart Jean Vanier names in his book *Becoming Human*, which Rev. Margaret and Canon Bob explored with us earlier in November. If we as a people are yearning for a sense of belonging, it suggests that many of us are feeling lonely, isolated, even lost – disconnected from ourselves, from others, from creation... and ultimately from God.

What we celebrate at Christmas is God's choice to respond to this universal human condition of alienation and provide the means for each and every one of us to receive and discover a sense of belonging, of coming home, of being connected. God's decision was to enter this world as one of us – in all the vulnerability and tenderness of a baby, born to a teenage unwed mum forced to flee her homeland as a refugee. This infant of course would grow into a man, God/man, one who was both fully human and fully divine, whose life work was to announce and enact a new way of being with God, with each other and with ourselves. His mission was to overcome all that separates and disconnects us, so that each and every one of us could become the best version of ourselves, the kind of person God has created us and intends us to be.



Of course, this new order of love Jesus introduced was one that challenged and threatened the old order, founded on dominance and control, on 'might makes right.' It led to his death in a state-sponsored execution. Only, as we know, death could not contain him and Jesus rose again on the third day, ushering in a new way of being together – a way of being together, inspired and empowered by Jesus'

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During the holiday season, if you or a family member are unable to attend one of our Christmas services and would like to receive communion, please contact the church office at 519-752-6451 so that we can arrange for our clergy to visit with you at home.

Advent increases our hope, a hope which does not disappoint. The Lord never lets us down.

Pope Francis

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spirit. It's a way of being together, which we call the kingdom of God, or the new creation, where everyone belongs, where no one is left behind, where we can lead lives of peace and of hope, irrespective of what is happening around us. It's a way of being together which finds its primary expression in these fragile communities we call the church, Jesus' body on earth. As members of these often small and struggling communities, God works through us to achieve his plan for the healing and restoration of this beautiful and broken world which God loves so much.

That's the reason 'Christ' needs to be in 'Christmas' and longs to be in us, partnering with us as we play the small but important role. God has assigned us in the outworking of his perfect plan. As we enter the season of Advent, as we await expectantly Jesus' Second Coming and prepare to celebrate his First Coming as a baby born in a feed trough, may Jesus' Spirit instill in us a strong sense of belonging – belonging to God, belonging to the church, belonging to one another. May we know in our hearts this Christmas, that here at St. Mark's God has brought us home and that God calls us to extend the same welcome to others that we ourselves have first received.

A blessed Advent, Christmastide and Epiphany to you all.

Tim +

Companion Diocese of Amazonia

Nigel Challen

We have had two meetings of the committee down in London. A lot of what we have been discussing is on stewardship, partnership and praying for the Amazonians. The committee would like to work on three ongoing projects at present. St. Mark's would like to partner with The Lord's Annunciation in Icorarci. They have an afterhours music programme for under privileged children.

In the future, we are looking forward to Bishop Marinez's arrival for the Consecration of Todd Townshend, Bishop Elect, in January.

The next meeting of the committee is in the new year. We are a growing committee and our intention is to have one person represented for every Deanery in the Diocese.

We are sisters and brothers in Christ around the world in fellowship with one another.

**The next Baptismal dates are
January 12th,
April 19th, May 31st
and
November 22nd.**

Both the January and April dates have a full complement of Baptismal candidates. If you are interested in the May or November dates, contact the church office (519-752-6451) for more information.

A little child, a shining star, a stable rude, the door ajar.
 Yet in that place so crude, forlorn, the Hope of all the world
 was born.

Communion from
 the reserved
 sacrament will be
 available at the
 altar rail after both
 services on
 December 22nd for
 those who are
 unable to join us
 on Christmas Eve
 or Christmas Day.

Please go to the
 altar rail following
 the Lessons and
 Carol service and
 one of our clergy
 will be available.

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS SERVICES

December 1st	<i>1st Sunday in Advent</i> Holy Eucharist (BCP) 9:00 am Holy Eucharist (BAS) 10:30 am
December 4th	Midweek Eucharist 10:00 am
December 8th	<i>2nd Sunday in Advent</i> Holy Eucharist (BCP) 9:00 am Holy Eucharist (BAS) 10:30 am
December 11th	Senior's Christmas Eucharist 11:00 am <i>(A lunch will be provided following this service.)</i>
December 15th	<i>3rd Sunday in Advent</i> Holy Eucharist (BCP) 9:00 am Christmas Pageant 10:30 am
December 18th	Midweek Eucharist 10:00 am
December 22nd	<i>4th Sunday in Advent</i> A Service of Lessons and Carols 9:00 am A Service of Lessons and Carols 10:30 am <i>(Reserve sacrament available following each service.)</i>
December 24th	<i>Christmas Eve</i> A Family Eucharist 4:00 pm Christmas Eucharist 7:00 pm Candlelight Eucharist 10:30 pm
December 25th	<i>Christmas Day</i> Christmas Eucharist (with carols) 10:00 am
December 29th	<i>First Sunday after Christmas</i> Holy Eucharist 10:00 am <i>(There will be anointing at this service.)</i>
January 5th	<i>Epiphany</i> Holy Eucharist (BCP) 9:00 am Holy Baptism (BAS) 10:30 am
January 12th	<i>Baptism of the Lord</i> Holy Eucharist (BCP) 9:00 am Holy Baptism (BAS) 10:30 am

We will continue to offer the rite of anointing for healing with oil at both the 9:00 and 10:30 services. The sacrament gives the strength, courage and peace to fight through the sickness and see the healing of God. Anointing Sundays will be December 29th, January 19th, February 16th and March 15th.



The best way to spread Christmas cheer is to sing loudly for all to hear.

AN UPDATE FROM OUR WARDENS

Jt's been a busy Fall at St. Mark's and the Wardens have been working hard. We have some important items to share.

We would like to acknowledge Reverend Tim's efforts in the Episcopal election in Huron this past fall. Tim approached the election in the way that he approaches all of his work - with dedication, strong effort, and trust in God's leading. We recognize that Tim would have made an excellent Bishop for Huron, and we are thankful for the opportunity to serve God under Tim's leadership.

The Wardens were approached earlier this year by Mary Ogilvie to consider a land acknowledgement statement for St. Mark's. A land acknowledgement is an act of reconciliation that involves making a statement recognizing the traditional territory of Indigenous People who called the land home before the arrival of settlers. With the guidance of a local consultant knowledgeable in Indigenous issues and the sensibilities involved, Tim, the wardens and parish council agreed upon a simple statement that acknowledges the prior occupancy of the land and expresses gratitude for the sharing of this land for our ministry. The plaque has been placed in the entrance hallway beside the Indigenous timeline. The statement will appear on the screen before each of our Sunday services. Thank you to Mary for this thoughtful suggestion.

In late spring, the Diocese of Huron recommended that all churches commission a hazardous materials investigation and report in order to be compliant with the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act. This survey was conducted during the summer by T. Harris Environmental Management and the report has been received and reviewed. No surprising issues arose. As expected, asbestos-containing materials were found in the floor tiles and black mastic tile adhesive in the older areas of the church – these areas were deemed priority 2, which means they may remain in place until those areas require upgrading or renovations. By law, our obligations are to inform any contractors of the presence of any and all designated hazardous materials before they bid on a project. Also, we are required to inform anyone doing maintenance or cleaning in the church of the presence of these materials. If you would like to read the report in full, hard copies are available in the parish office for review or an electronic version may be requested from Christine Fournier. If anyone is doing routine maintenance and/or renovations in the church, they will be asked to review and sign off that they are aware of the hazardous materials and their location.

As always there are so many people who bless our congregation with their efforts

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CHURCH ENVELOPES

Offering envelopes for 2020 will be available for pick up early in December.

If you would like envelopes or would like to change your method of giving, please contact the envelope secretaries, Dan and Anne Walker at 519-756-3685.

May you never be too grown up to search the skies on Christmas Eve.

Thank you to our St. Mark's congregations for their wonderful support for our backpack/lunch bag drive for the children at Northland Gardens. It was a great success with over 50 backpacks received.

ROCK SOLID YOUTH

Jody Ogilvie

Rock Solid youth has seen a steady increase in the number of youth coming out each week. The past few months consisted of getting to know one another and learning how to deepen our prayers. We looked at God and images of Jesus in many popular movies and video games, since we are living in a digital world as teens. We have instilled the concept of giving back to our community by manning a special table at Messy Church each month and by being servers at the Murder Mystery Dinner which resulted in \$243 in tips which was split between our cost to attend Clay and the Youth Resource Centre of Brant for youth homelessness.

Thank you to everyone who supported our Macmillan's fundraiser. Until December 2nd, we will be selling poinsettias after Sunday services to decorate your home or to help decorate the church. Order forms are available in the church office. We have also taken on the Christmas Basket programme for St. Mark's.



Looking ahead, we are having a Christmas gift wrapping week to help those who don't have time or are not into gift wrapping. Time slot signup sheets can be found on the Information Table. For all of us who can't stay awake for the New Year to come or don't want to spend it alone, we are having an early countdown (with a balloon drop at 8pm) on New Years' Eve from 6:30 - 9:00 p.m. for all ages. If you are planning to attend, please sign the sheet on the Information Table so that we know how much food to provide.

CHILD AND FAMILY MINISTRY

Pat McMillan

Thank you to the St. Mark's congregations for your faithful support for our children throughout the year.

Friday, December 13th

Please join us at Messy Church from 5-7:00 p.m. for a spiritual celebration of God's love for us. Each family attending is asked to help us prepare a 'Warmth For The Holidays' mitten tree as part of a good neighbour outreach for the children at Northland Gardens. There will be many special activities including preparing some lovely Christmas decorations to give as gifts of love for family and/or friends.



We are excited to offer a 'Traditional Christmas Potluck' with a favourite Christmas dish brought in by each family. Our 9:00 and 10:30 a.m. families are

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Gifts of time and love are truly the ingredients of a truly merry Christmas.

CHILD AND FAMILY MINISTRY

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welcome to join us!

Tuesday, December 24th

A Family Worship Service will take place beginning at 4:00 p.m. This is a traditional service geared for all ages.

Wednesday, December 25th

St. Mark's Family Worship will begin at 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, December 29th

There will be one service beginning at 10:00 a.m. and a Sunday School class. The children will enjoy a Veggie Tale movie and popcorn. A New Year's breakfast hosted by the Youth Group will be available following the worship service.

Sunday, January 5th

The Sunday School theme will be 'Celebrating Epiphany'.

Friday, January 10th

Please join us at Messy Church from 5-7:00 p.m. to hear some of the 'Wonder Stories' of Jesus. Through our faith we learn about Jesus' Love as He performs three exciting miracles. There will be lots of sensory crafts and a chance to participate in story time!

Sunday, January 12th

Our new unit 'Jesus Leads the Community' begins with learning about Jesus' Baptism. The children will be involved in preparing a baptism card and being part of a baptismal service taking place on this day.

A Sunday School Teacher's meeting will be held from 7-8:00 p.m. in the lounge on Thursday, January 9th to discuss plans for the winter unit.

CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

Pat McMillan

Pageant Dress Rehearsal - Saturday, December 14th from 10:00 - 11:00 a.m.

Our pageant dress rehearsal will take place from 10:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m. in the church. Please have your child present around 9:45 a.m. Following the rehearsal there will be a supervised snack and Christmas craft session offered to the children in St. Mark's Hall until noon.

Pageant Presentation - Sunday, December 15th

The children of St. Mark's will present a Christmas pageant 'What Is Christmas?' at the 10:30 service as their gift of love to the St. Mark's family. Please have your child present at the church around 10:20 a.m.

Immediately following the pageant, families are invited to stay for a soup and sandwich lunch and a special visitor in Munro Hall.

We are excited to hear about our new foster child, Sresto from Bangladesh, through World Vision.

Jamin Hossein, our former foster child for over 10 years and his family, are now happily deemed self-sufficient.

The joy of brightening other lives becomes for us the magic of the holidays.

The 2020 flower and candle charts will be available on Sunday, December 8th, 2019. At that time, please feel free to write your name and phone number on any available date.



All submissions for the Vestry Report need to be e-mailed to Anne Walker no later than January 15th. Our Vestry Meeting is on February 2nd.

MUSICAL NOTES

Alison Clark

We have some exciting news about our Children's Choir! Our children have been invited to sing with The Tenors at the Sanderson Centre on Sunday, December 22nd in the evening. Rehearsals for the children are on Thursdays at 4.30 p.m. There will be a Pizza Party for them on December 19th.

On Friday, December 20th at 7:00 p.m. at the church, we will be presenting a Christmas Concert featuring choral and organ music, especially featuring our Children's Choir, Praise Choir and Worship Choir. Refreshments will be available following this concert.

Thanks to all our musicians for being so willing to work hard, laugh a lot, and enrich our lives with your musical talents.

HOLLY JOLLY FAIRE

Vicki Corke & Laurie Murray

Holly Jolly 2019 was an absolutely wonderful community event. There was a wonderful vibe in the halls all morning as people stopped to shop, play the Penny Table, participate in the silent auction, have coffee or lunch and just enjoy each other's company. The Holly Jolly Faire made around \$5,000 for St. Mark's. I am very proud of the outreach that happens as a result of this event: \$132.10 went to the Food Bank plus a couple of bags of food; hats, mitts and gloves were sent to Christmas Baskets; approximately \$550 to the Stedman Community Hospice; and our Youth Group made \$210 over and above our profit. Exact numbers will be in the Vestry Report.



Holly Jolly is successful because of the hours of work that the different teams give. I'd like to thank the area organizers: Gord Evers (Kitchen); Mary Ogilvie (Bake Table); Pat Murray (Silent Auction); Brenda Cochrane/Olga Collett (Penny Table); Vicki Corke (Gifts Baskets and Crafts); Bob Strople (Flowers); Wynn Allen (Black Friday); Sylvia Learn (Wool); Janet Vickerman (Chocolate); Christine Hazell/Kathy Dunning (Preserves); Jody Ogilvie (Youth Group); Steve Collett (Greeter/Doorman). I'd also like to thank all those who helped by baking, creating, setting up tables, selling, cooking, washing dishes, cleaning up, and other areas that were necessary to make our sale successful. Many of you were at the church a good part of Friday and worked the Faire all day Saturday. I'd also like to thank all of you who came out to eat and shop!

Christmas is a season not only of rejoicing, but of reflection.
Sir Winston Churchill

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This year we also had four parishioners who had their own tables. It's nice that we were able to support them as well. They were a welcomed addition to our Faire.

One of the reasons we are so successful is because of the community support we get. We had many wonderful items on our Silent Auction and our Penny Table because of our community support. When shopping, please think of supporting the following vendors who have supported St. Mark's. When you are there, mention that you know that they supported us. Many of the following have been supporting us for years!

Brantford Honda	Kidtastic Adventures
Bulk Barn Brantford	Brantford Nissan
Michael David Fine Art Photography	Red Lobster
Home Building Centre - King George Road	Forest of Flowers
Home Hardware - St. Paul	Metro - Brantford
Montana's BBQ & Bar	Canadian Automobile Club
Strodes BBQ & Deli	Patricia's Ladies Wear
J.H. Young Jewelers	Wine Kitz Brantford
Stillwaters Plate & Pour - Paris	The Gospel Lighthouse
The Duke on Park	Walter's Greenhouse
The Sherwood Restaurant	Dunsdon Auto
Long & McQuade	Beachcomber Culligan - Lynden Road
Echo Bowl	Grandview Flour & Feed
M & M West St.	J.D. Hill Jewellers
Joey's Restaurants	

Once again, thank you for making the 2019 Holly Jolly Faire successful. We certainly are the Christian family of St. Mark's. God's hands are extended through us to serve the community and beyond.

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on our behalf. We would like to send out a special thank you to those who have organized fun and fellowship for us during 2019. It has been great to attend many different events where we have had the chance to have fellowship with old friends and acquaintances, and to meet new people.



Thank
you!

Wishing you a blessed Advent and Christmas season,

Neil, Christine, Sheri, Brenda

**The Brant County
Singers and the
Brant Men of Song
present The Twelve
Days of Fa La La
on Saturday,
December 14th at
Hope Reform
Church beginning
at 7:00 p.m.**

**Tickets are
available at the
door.**

Seeing is believing but, sometimes the most real things in the world are the things we can't see.

If you or your group would like an announcement in the bulletin, it should be submitted to the church office by Tuesday evening for inclusion in the bulletin the following Sunday.

If you would like an announcement highlighted at the end of the 10:30 service, please see the designated announcer for the day at the Information Table prior to the service.

CHRISTMAS EUCHARIST FOR SENIORS

All seniors are invited to join us on Wednesday, December 11th for a Christmas Eucharist and luncheon. The service will begin at 11:00 a.m. followed by a delicious lunch provided by members of St. Mark's.

If you are planning to attend, please RSVP to the church office at 519-752-6451 or sign the sheet on the Information Table.

MESSY CHURCH POTLUCK DINNER

For the next Messy Church on December 13th, we are inviting members of our parish family to contribute to the meal by providing a traditional dish that you might serve at Christmas. This would be a great opportunity for you meet our Messy Church congregation by joining us for the evening. If you are able to contribute to the dinner, please sign the sheet on the Information Table.



CHRISTMAS BASKETS PROGRAMME 2019

The Christmas Baskets programme relies on the generosity of our community to keep them running. Last year, toys were provided for almost 2,000 children who may have otherwise gone without on Christmas morning. In total, over 1,500 families (about 4,500 people) received a Christmas Basket. Financial support is always crucial to provide, not only toys and food, but hope and smiles. All funds raised in our community stay in our community.

Each year, hundreds of volunteers donate their time to help. How can you help?

- Volunteer at the Christmas Baskets location
- Assist on the day the food hampers are pre-packed
- Become a 'Mother's Helper' and help moms find toys for their children
- Deliver food hampers
- Make a monetary donation

Items most needed include: canned fruit and vegetables, cranberry sauce, boxed stuffing mix, bottled or canned juice, new toys for boys and girls from newborn to age 14, new books, games, puzzles and knitted items.

Boxes for your donations of toys and food items are available in St. Mark's Hall. A basket for colouring and activity books is under the mail slots by the parking lot door. For more information, please call 519-751-0000 or 519-751-4357 ext 226.

SOME NEWS AND NOTES

Tim Dobbin

Thank you so much once again for your care and support following the recent Episcopal election, and especially for the very yummy gift basket! It is a relief to have the process behind us and we are so thankful now to be able to focus again on our life in God together here at St. Mark's. Bishop-elect Todd is an eminently well-qualified, wise and compassionate leader, who will serve well our beloved Diocese. I urge your prayers for Todd, Stacey, Tyne, Seth and Samuel as they prepare for Todd's consecration and installation as the 14th Bishop of Huron at St. Paul's Cathedral on January 25, 2020 at 12.30 p.m.

I am very grateful too for the generosity of Canon Bob Schroeder and Rev. Margaret Shortell in having shared their considerable gifts with us on Tuesday afternoons in October and November. It was encouraging to hear such positive feedback on their sessions unpacking Henri Nouwen's *Return of the Prodigal Son* and Jean Vanier's *Becoming Human*.

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude all those who prepare and participate in our Sunday morning liturgies. Worship is central to who we are and what we do as Anglicans. A number of people have told me how meaningful they found our All Saints' and Remembrance Sunday services this year. The risk in naming people is that I leave someone out! To all those involved in varying capacities – setting up, greeting, reading, interceding, assisting with communion, serving, playing and singing – our heartfelt thanks! I am delighted to report that Shirley Marsden, Kim McClelland and Willa Pierce will be joining our roster of intercessors for the Sunday 10:30am service, following our training session. It was also gratifying to see the number of folk who turned out for our Communion Assistants' workshop on Saturday, November 16th and we welcome Norm and Krystyna Mills, Ron Pierce, Sylvia Steele, Cindy Taylor, Dave Bailey and Donna Terdik who will be assisting with the chalice at Sunday worship.

A small adjustment to our Sunday services has been the offering of the rite of anointing for healing on the third Sunday of the month. As I mentioned in our last newsletter and in the bulletin, we will trial this rite for six months and then re-evaluate. Given the challenges a number of us are facing, I am very pleased we are able now to offer this practice and thank Rev. Margaret Shortell and Canon Bob Schroeder for their assistance.

The Reconciling Circle, an ecumenical group focused on building bridges with our Indigenous sisters and brothers, hosted a number of initiatives in Brantford during Treaties Recognition Week in the first full week of November: a public

SUNDAY LUNCHES

The dates for the next Soup and Sandwich lunches are December 15th, January 26th, February 23rd and March 29th.

Volunteer help is needed to provide soup and make sandwiches. Check the signup sheet on the Information Table for more information.

It's the most wonderful time of year!

Thanks goes to Jim Howarth and his hard-working crew who collected the shoe boxes for Samaritans Purse, packed them into shipping containers and loaded them into the truck for delivery to the processing centre.

This year, 2,283 shoe boxes were collected from our surrounding community.

concert at Ohsweken on Sunday, a public lecture at Laurier on Wednesday and a screening of a documentary at St. Mark's on Thursday. As you may know, as rewarding as it is, reconciliation can be a long, challenging and painful journey. It takes time and effort to get to know each other and to build trust. I am grateful for those willing to travel the road together.

Sylvia Learn and her group established the Seniors' Communion and luncheon some 20 years ago. We host our seniors for a service and lunch afterwards four times a year. It is an important time of connection and fellowship and the food is great! A big shout out to Sylvia and the members of her team over the years as Sylvia now steps back. A great job well done. I am also thankful to the Wednesday Holy Communion group who have stepped up to further the legacy Sylvia and her team have left us.

Our work with Rev. Ryan Sim, our missional coach, continues. Ryan has met with staff and lay leaders, and has presented the results of his findings and his recommendations to Parish Council in both October and November. It is a gift to have someone of Ryan's faithfulness, experience as a church planter and competence to engage in this process with us. I am both excited and hopeful about some of the priorities and directions which are emerging. The staff and wardens are planning to meet in January to review the short-list of recommendations and identify areas of focus for the next two years. We hope to present these at Vestry for your input on February 2nd.

Daily Bread, the community meal programme which operates out of Grace Church on Wednesday evenings, celebrated its 20th anniversary on November 23rd, having served 151,006 meals across that period. It is an outstanding effort and one which has made a significant difference in the lives of some very vulnerable folk right here in our city. The initiative could not run without the dedication and commitment of volunteers, many of whom have been and are members of St. Mark's. Thank you so much to all those who have participated over the years and to those who still do. Lil Paul has been acting as coordinator in the afternoons and will be stepping back at the end of the year. She has made an enormous contribution to the running of the programme, especially in the last 18 months. We say thanks and wish her well as she continues to care for Wayne.

As I write, I am mindful of how much happens in our life in the Fall. I do want to thank the Christian Generosity Team for their intentional giving initiative, and especially for producing all the resources and monitoring our responses; our thanks too to Mieke Schroeder, Rev. Ron and Willa Pierce and Bob Langfrey for sharing with us what they value about our life at St. Mark's. I am very pleased that we are walking once again to Bethlehem and am grateful for the thought and creativity that has gone into the various events. Of course, no Fall at St.

It is Christmas every time you let God love others through you, it is Christmas every time you smile at your brother and offer him your hand. *Mother Teresa*

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Mark's would be complete without the Holly Jolly Faire. It is a massive undertaking – it really does take a village to put one on! It remains the major fundraiser for St. Mark's. Our thanks to Laurie Murray and Vicki Corke and their team for another highly successful bazaar.

It is a privilege to be serving a parish family who respond as generously as you do to those in need. I am deeply grateful for all the ways in which we have supported the Bhebhe family as they make a home and a life for themselves here in Brantford after ten years as refugees in Namibia. I wish to acknowledge the significant contribution of Mieke Schroeder and her team as they assist the newcomer family with the many tasks and adjustments they face. I am also delighted to report that we have raised \$ 7,500 in support of the parish of the Lord's Annunciation Icoaraci in our companion diocese of Amazonia. They have embarked upon an ambitious project to renovate a house to serve as their church and a permanent home for their after-school music programme for children at risk in their neighbourhood. I am amazed by how much they offer these kids when they have so little themselves. I look forward to building a relationship with Rev. Elias and members of his small church, particularly through Nigel Challen's faithful correspondence with his friends in the Diocese. Please let me know if you are interested in finding out more about what is happening there.

Of course, your generosity too is more than evident at this time of the year as we fill shoeboxes for Samaritan's Purse. Packing boxes line the passageway and Munro Hall as I write. Thanks to those who have filled boxes and to Jim and Terry Howarth and their team, who so faithfully oversee the collection of the boxes each year. It is a big undertaking, and even more so this year, with the closure of a distribution depot in Kitchener/Waterloo. It is a valuable ministry, blessing those whom we may never meet.

No Advent newsletter would be complete with some acknowledgement of the noise, laughter and creative energy which fills both halls on the second Friday of each month at Messy Church. At our last gathering on November 15th, we welcomed 29 children along with their adult companions and our own volunteers. More than 70 people sat down for another sumptuous meal, care of the Walkers, Fredenburghs and Garabedians. Messy Church remains one of our primary vehicles for connecting with children and families for whom Sunday morning may not be the best fit. It takes an extraordinary amount of time and effort to host each event, and I wish to thank Pat McMillan, the core team and all those involved in various capacities who so faithfully roll up their sleeves month by month.

It was great to see a number of families who attend Messy Church and other families besides gather in Munro Hall on Sunday, November 24th to create banners and paint wooden nativity sets which Sharon Symington had cut out herself. It was a fun afternoon and a wonderful way to move into the Advent Season. Our thanks to Sharon for her initiative and generosity in sharing a special family memory with us.

I am very mindful too of those members of our community who are struggling with significant illness. It is a painful and difficult time for a number of families at St. Mark's. I would urge you please to be in prayer for our beloved sisters and brothers, their medical teams, their caregivers and their families. Please be attentive to ways in which we can offer support and please be respectful too of the need at times for space.