



Newsletter

November, 2015

Immanuel United Church
755 Golspie Street
Winnipeg MB R2K 2V4
Phone # 204-669-0220/204-669-0221
Fax # 204-669-2374
Email: iuchurch@mymts.net
Website: immanuelunitedchurch.net

ADVENT WORSHIP AT IMMANUEL 2015

Our Advent season begins with the Pre-Advent Potluck Dinner

Saturday, November 28, from 5 to 7

(Please sign up on the bulletin board inside the sanctuary.)

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS EVE WORSHIP SCHEDULE

All of our Advent and Christmas Eve services
will include special seasonal music
offered by Eileen Metcalfe, Peter Fyne and the Choir

Sunday, November 29 at 11 a.m.

Advent One Worship
Lighting of the First Advent Flare
Sacrament of Communion

Sunday, December 6 at 11 a.m.

Advent Two Worship
Lighting of the Second Advent Flare

Sunday, December 13 at 11 a.m.

Advent Three Worship
Lighting of the Third Advent Flare

Sunday, December 20 at 11 a.m.

Advent Four Worship
Lighting of the Fourth Advent Flare

Thursday, December 24

7:00 p.m.

Christmas Eve Worship
Lighting of the Light of Christ

9:00 p.m.

Christmas Eve Worship
Lighting of the Light of Christ
Sacrament of Communion

The Advent of Advent

I can't remember Advent from my childhood years growing up in the United Church. I remember the candlelight of CGIT vesper services. I remember the choir's beautiful seasonal anthems, and their introduction of calypso carols. I remember the wonder of Christmas Eve. I remember going down to the church basement afterwards for the Christmas party, at which Santa would appear with a brown paper bag full of Christmas candies for each of the children. I remember straightening halos and angel wings for the Sunday school Christmas pageant. I remember the excitement of getting ready for Christmas. I don't remember Advent. Not a wreath, not a candle, not a mention of the season of preparation. We sang, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" and "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus," but I don't believe we called the season "Advent" or thought of it as a distinct season of preparation.

No doubt this was because I grew up prior to, and just at the beginning of, the so-called "Liturgical Movement," a time of intentional openness in which churches in the Reform tradition entered into dialogue with churches of other Christian traditions (remember the movement for Anglican-United Church union?), and brought back from the conversations some of the worship ("liturgical") practices of those traditions. Advent was one of those practices. If this is the *only* liturgical practice we learned during that time (and it certainly wasn't!), it was worth the entire movement, in my opinion. For me, Advent has become a season essential to my spirit and my spirituality, despite its busyness a gentle, reflective and restorative beginning to another year on my journey of faith.

The creative participation of Advent Planning teams over the years, and the openness of the congregation to new ideas and practices, has convinced me that Advent is a season of deep meaning not just for me, but for all of us. As the commercialism of Christmas has grown and Christmas increasingly has been co-opted for non-religious purposes, Advent has been carved out in the churches as a sacred space in time—a harbour from the frenzy of societal expectation—a port in the storm—a time for quiet reflection when all around us there is clamour. Add to the seasonal pressures the state of the world around us as violence and despair escalate, and Advent becomes both a journey and a refuge in time.

In recent years I've been heard to say that "Advent is the new Christmas Eve," and, as time goes on, I am increasingly confident in making this statement. The secularization of Christmas is a natural part of the general secularization of the wider culture, and our families and friendship groups are not immune to this trend. Gradually over the years, families have developed Christmas traditions that are more and more distanced from the faith-based celebrations of families of old, and those secular family traditions have begun to take precedence over faith-based traditions as practising Christians become the minority in family groupings. Christmas Eve becomes an opportune time for families to gather for meals and gift exchanges, and family members for whom worship is a priority find themselves either foregoing the service at the church or coming alone, torn by the choice and with the knowledge that there's a group of their loved ones gathering without them, wondering why they've chosen to be somewhere else. For some, this choice becomes unbearable, and Christmas Eve worship becomes an impossibility.

Advent, then, becomes the new Christmas Eve. Of course we'll still gather for worship on the 24th of December, now and into the future, and of course this gathering, with its candlelight and music and familiar words of scripture, will never grow old for us. But Advent allows us an opportunity to gather as well, not once but four times in a season, to contemplate the meaning in our lives of that long-ago Bethlehem birth. Following a different theme each year, we're guided in a month-long process of reflection. We gather; we greet one another; we sing; we pray; we listen to scripture; we sit in silence and reflect. And sometime we weep, without any pressure from those around us to dry our tears, put on a happy face and pretend that everything's fine.

Christmas Eve worship is such an institution in my life that I've grieved on the few occasions when something has caused me to miss it. But when all is said and done, the slow, steady pace of Advent, moving quietly along the road like a donkey bearing a holy burden, would be harder still for me to miss.

I hope that this Advent season proves meaningful to all of you, and if for some reason you're unable to join us at worship on December 24th, I hope you'll feel that still and all, you've had your faith-filled Christmas Eve.

Nancy

White Gift

*November 29, 2015 -
1st Sunday in Advent*

**This United Church Tradition brings an annual
advent
opportunity to prepare the way for Christmas and
reach out
to our community.**

Your Donations might include:

money
dry goods
holiday cookies, chocolates/treats
personal hygiene products
baby food
diapers especially larger sizes
gifts for children
(see St Matthews Maryland list)
blankets, mitts, hats, scarves

Your Donations will be shared with:

Winnipeg Harvest
North End Stella Community Ministry
Raymond Flett Memorial UC feast
LITE (inner city employment opportunities)
Agape Table
(inner city kids breakfast/family hot lunch)
Interfaith Immigration (refugee needs)
Canadian Food Grains Bank
(global farming)

**Please bring, as you are able, Sunday November 29 to share with our
neighbours the abundance and joy in our lives.**

St Matthews @ Maryland Ministry

The third Sunday of each month is an opportunity for us to share with our inner city community. Our donations make a real difference in the lives of the those folk who gratefully benefit from our generosity.

Along with many thanks, Caryn Douglas, who ministers at St Mathews Maryland sent us a wish list in the hopes we would continue our support.

The goods we provide are used for on going programs, special events and emergency supplies. Below is part of Caryn's message to us:

WISH LIST

Coffee
Canned proteins (fish, chicken)
Mayonnaise
Baked beans
pasta/pasta sauce
cheese
Cheez Whiz
feminine sanitary products
diapers (especially larger sizes)
Dry goods such as lentils, rice, barley
chick peas, kidney beans, black beans
canned tomatoes

We would love to get fresh fruit and veggies, but in modest amounts since our storage is limited. Frozen products, such as meat are also always welcome.

Note for White Gift

We are also collecting new toys and other items for children/youth for the Christmas Store, as well as small gift items a child could give to a caregiver.

A Room with a View

The office continues to be busy and I always look forward to seeing and hearing from people.

As the holiday season approaches, I look forward to spending time with my family and friends.

Wishing all of you a peaceful, joyous Christmas and best wishes for the New Year!

Sharon Vandenberg, Office Administrator

Just Christmas

MANY THANKS to everyone who supported the "Just" Christmas event at Gordon King Memorial on November 15th. For the cookies, for attending and for your interest in the many worthwhile projects that the vendors support. This is the highlight for them. The leftover cookies have been taken to Rossbrook House and the Outreach ministries. They also say thank you.

Muriel Kenyon, on behalf of the committee from the neighbouring United Churches.



If *The Mark Project* does what we hope it can do, our worship services in the new year will challenge us to engage scripture in a whole different way and at a much deeper level. Several creative and courageous folks from the congregation will be taking on the dramatic *telling* of the stories of Mark's Gospel, rather than the traditional *reading* of them. This not only will offer us a new and more participatory entry into the world of ancient Christian scripture, but it will be a way of hearing the stories that actually is truer to their origins than the straight reading of the text. This is one of those cases

in which the *new* turns out to be the *old*—and in fact, the *very, very old*, as the stories in the Bible originated as tales that were told orally by various storytellers—and for quite a long time—before they ever were written down. And it now appears that they were written down as scripts, in order to be performed by a storyteller.

For some time now, historians and anthropologists have been presenting proof that the vast majority of the population of the Mediterranean world in Jesus' time, including Israel, was, in fact, illiterate. As much as 97% of the population of Galilee may have been unable to read or write. Not even all of the *elite* could read—they had slaves to do it for them— and some slaves could read and write for their masters, but within a limited sphere—say, to keep their accounts and write out bills of sale—but that was it. There was no such thing as recreational reading.

The printing press was not invented in the western world until 1440, so any manuscripts prior to that were painstakingly hand-copied. In the first-century C.E. Mediterranean world, manuscripts were copied on various kinds of materials, such as papyrus, which was made by pounding together the fibres of a particular reed. So the materials with which people wrote were hard to come by, especially in a culture in which the vast majority was very poor. A town in the Israel of Jesus' time might have had one set of Torah scrolls, but no one who was able to read them. They would still be held as a sacred symbol, but they wouldn't be read because they couldn't be read. The story in Luke, of Jesus reading from the scroll in the assembly of the people, has begged the question, "Was Jesus literate? How would he have learned to read and write?"

Also, reading was not a private matter, and apparently no one "read silently" to him- or herself, with a flashlight under the blanket, until St. Ambrose, who lived 400 years after Jesus, stunned those who *saw* him reading without *hearing* him. Reading was a communal enterprise until well beyond the middle ages; there was no need to read silently or alone.

Anthropologists also have shown that ancient Mediterranean cultures were oral cultures. Traditions were handed down in the form of stories, which were not so much just *told* as they were *performed*, and good storytellers told their stories in a dramatic fashion that engaged the audience in a remarkable way. Storytelling was a highly popular form of entertainment that everyone could afford. People told stories in market places, around camp fires, in the town square, at family gatherings, to little children, etc. And those stories formed their identity as a people.

Although the basic story may have remained the same, in an oral culture, there's a huge margin of error—or perhaps we should call it a margin of grace—and lots of room for your own take on the story. Folks would listen, not to make sure the story was identical to the last time they'd heard it, but to hear how that particular storyteller told it, and what interesting new twists they'd add to it.

It now seems very likely that the New Testament stories about Jesus were told and performed—probably many times, by many different people--*before* they were written down—and, if they were written down early in the process, they were written down like the script of a play, for performance purposes, and with the full expectation that the storyteller would take liberties with the written word.

Because the biblical stories were performed before they were written down, and the stories got modified from storyteller to storyteller and from region to region, it makes sense that, when they finally *were*

written down, the wording of the same Gospel might vary from manuscript to manuscript. Also, language differences and translations accounted for a large number of differences from text to text.

All of this pushes us to a new understanding of the biblical stories, and how they came to be written down, and how they ought to be studied and interpreted. If they were written to be *performed*, then they engaged the audience in a much different way than they would if they were written to be *read*. And, more to the point, if they were written to be performed, then they were intended to be much more fluid—much less fixed—than they are in our minds and our Bibles today. And the question also is begged: is it truer to these texts to be *performing* them in worship, rather than *reading* them?

Lately, there's a renewed interest in telling the biblical stories that make up the overall story—that's what the Narrative Lectionary is about—the alternative lectionary we started using at Immanuel a year ago. And folks involved in interpreting the New Testament have got into a whole new area of study called "Performance Criticism," which goes beyond looking at the *words of the text* to considering how the story might have been told before it was written down, and became a fixed, physical text. Aided by what anthropologists have learned about how stories are told in oral cultures, people have begun to learn the stories and tell them in a dramatic fashion—to perform them—and they've often started with the Gospel of Mark. Some of them tell the entire Gospel in a single performance that takes about two-and-a-half hours.

Mark's Story: A Gospel is a testimony to the *meaning* of the life of Jesus. The Gospel stories weren't told to give you an accurate history or biography of Jesus, but to suggest *what it meant* that Jesus lived, and *what it means*. We like to think of Bible stories as nice, pious little tales that package up faith neatly for us, tying up all the loose ends that might make us uncomfortable. But the Gospel of Mark is not a "nice," pious story.¹ It's not a story to which you can go to escape the hard realities of life and of the world. It's a story in which someone gets crucified. It's a tough story. At times, it's an extremely painful story. It's a story that responds to great trauma and unbearable loss. As Maia Kotrosits and Hal Taussig have said, "There are broken bodies everywhere in Mark's story, and Jesus heals in response to this embodied brokenness." And so, above all, it's an *honest* story. And sometimes it's a *brutally* honest story. It tells the truth of the world and of people's lives in Mark's time, and—here's the clincher—it tells the truth of *our* world and *our* lives these days. And so it has the potential to meet us where we are, and there to challenge us, and even heal and transform us. In other words, it has the potential to *save* us.

But it's not all doom and gloom in this Gospel. Mark's story is not a *nice* story, but it *is* a story with humour in it, and the humour is part and parcel of its resilience. So much as we need to be aware of the context of pain, we do well to watch and listen for ways in which humour might have been used to testify to the hope of resurrection.

And so the Immanuel storytellers who have taken on the telling of the stories of Mark's Gospel are courageous individuals. Good News though Mark's Gospel is, and honest as it is, and potentially transformative as it is, it's a tough story to tell. Telling the stories of this Gospel in dramatic ways may draw the storytellers into the Gospel world in ways they can't now see, and have consequences they can't now anticipate. But here's the deal: their telling of the stories bears the possibility of drawing the rest of us into this Gospel world along with them. Transformation lurks in abundance in the world we are about to enter together, and it promises to pounce on storyteller and listener alike.

And so, as we engage Mark's Gospel in this challenging way, do not look for neatly tied up stories of perfect healing and happy endings and complete resolution. Look for true stories. Look for honest stories. Look for tough stories with the potential to transform. And risk opening your heart to them.

If you would like to be one of our storytellers, it's not too late! Please talk to one of our Guiding Elders for Worship, Lynne Strome or Leslie Donnelly, or to the Minister—that's me:

Nancy Sanders

¹ This interpretation of Mark's Gospel comes from "Jesus Seminar on the Road" lectures by Hal Taussig and Maia Kotrosits at the Lutheran Campus Ministry in Grand Forks, N.D., in the spring of 2015.

Finance Team Report

As of October 31, 2015 our Operational Income and Expenses were as follows:

Income	\$47,899.69
Expenses	\$57,897.20
Deficit	\$ 9,997.51

At the same time last year our Operational Income and Expenses were:

Income	\$55,465.80
Expenses	\$56,818.63
Deficit	\$ 1,352.83

As you can see, our year to date deficit is over \$8600.00 greater than it was at the same time last year. While our expenses are up by a little over \$1000.00, the biggest driver to the increase in our deficit is a decrease of over \$7400.00 in our envelope givings.

The financial support of the congregational members is vital to our functioning and is greatly appreciated.

If you hate spending Sunday mornings looking for your envelopes and then trying to find cash or your cheques to put into the envelope, you may want to consider going on PAR. PAR stands for Pre Authorized Remittance and means that your offering will be deducted from your bank account monthly and sent to Immanuel. You designate the amount of the deduction and where it is to be applied (Local, M&S or Other Fund). If you are interested, see Pat Schulz or Connie Kryschuk and we can get you the necessary forms to set this up for you.

Tax Receipts for 2015 will be issued for all donations made to December 31, 2015. Just a reminder - the last Sunday in 2015 is December 27, 2015.

Your Finance Team

Pat Schulz, Connie Kryschuk, Debbie Bilous

Guiding Elders: Bob Kenyon, Judy Gierys

STAFF

Nancy Sanders, Minister
Sharon Vandenberg, Office Administrator
Jim Goldrup, Caretaker
Eileen Metcalfe, Choir Director
Peter Fyne, Organist
J. Douglas McMurtry, Minister Emeritus
William Hickerson, Minister Emeritus