

THE GOOD NEWS LETTER



FROM ST. JOHN'S STEVENSVILLE UNITED CHURCH

ISSUE: JUNE 2022

A Month of Sabbath

- Rev. Cheryl Wood-Thomas

Sundays are always thought of as days of worship and Sabbath. And some weeks, Sundays really are a wonderful combination of worship and sabbath time. Time after church is spent enjoying life with family and friends, long drives up the Niagara Parkway, or walks in nature. We feel content, happy, at peace. Other weeks, Sundays are busy days of go-go-go from start to finish. Time after church is spent cleaning or picking up groceries, doing all those things that there was not time to do during the previous week, but that need to be done before the next week. Sunday becomes a day like all others that as we wake in the morning, before our feet hit the floor there is sense that we are already behind schedule. It is no longer a day to cease working and relax in God's care for us, to participate in activities that nurture peace, relationships, and thankfulness.

We need a Sabbath rest. God did not rest on the seventh day of Creation because God was tired, God rested because it was good. God rested to set an example for the Creation that after six days of labour we are in need of restoration for our bodies and souls. The purpose of the Sabbath is to clear away the distractions of our lives so we can rest in God and experience God's grace in a new way. It is about establishing patterns that nurture intimacy with God. On the Sabbath we are invited to breathe deeply. We breathe out the frustrations and worries of life, and breathe in God's presence. Psalm 105:3-5 reminds us of the beauty of seeking the Lord. "Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always. Remember the wonders He has done, His miracles, and the judgments He has uttered." We don't want to be so busy with everyday things that we miss or forget the good things that God has done.

Author, Lynne M Baab, in her book *Sabbath Keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest*, talks about how the loss of the rhythm of time and seasons only works to dehumanize us as a society and individuals. That without a pattern of work and rest we become machines of production rather than the joyful children of the God who created and redeemed us.

She also talks about how Sabbath is best observed with others in the support of a community. And so, as a community of Faith at St. John's Stevensville United Church, we are going to observe a season of Sabbath this summer. We are going to shut down all of our programs and activities during the month of August, giving our Volunteers and Staff and Ministry Team, a rest for their bodies and souls. There will of course, still be Sunday morning worship, because worship and praise is essential to our spiritual well-being and mental health.

One author noted that with the increasing pace of life we are all in desperate need of five things: rest, refreshment, receptivity, release, and refocusing. And that is what happens on the Sabbath. The very heart of Christian faith is the reality that God made us, loved us enough to redeem us, and wants the best for us. And so, it is essential for us to take intentional time and grow in relationship with that God. So when we come back to full programming in September, we will be revived and refreshed and ready to bless others with the Gospel.

LOVE GOD... LIVE JESUS

Fort Erie PRIDE

- Rev. Bill Thomas

Mark the 25th of June on your calendar! That is the day when St John's Stevensville will be joining the LGBTTQq2Si community and other friends and allies for Fort Erie's first official PRIDE Day celebration. This is a celebration that has been years in the making.

I first heard about plans for a Fort Erie PRIDE celebration in the winter of 2019 and, plans were well underway for that first gathering to happen in the spring/summer of 2020 when the world, it seemed, was shut down by the global pandemic.

But, in those very early days, I knew that St John's Stevensville United Church was going to be a presence during those festivities.



My arrival back in The Niagara Region in 2012, as one of the ministers at Silver Spire United Church, coincided with the first PRIDE Niagara annual celebration of PRIDE In The Park. That first year was a small affair, and Rev Cheryl, who was serving The Vineland Pastoral Charge at the time and I walked around Montebello Park, enjoying the entertainment and the atmosphere. It was a joy-filled day.

The next year, Silver Spire had a tent and, was the only faith community represented amongst the vendors, service providers and other allied businesses in the area. And, they have been there every year since.

Perhaps this is stating the obvious but, The Church has not always been a positive force in the lives of people who do not fit into society's expectations around sexuality and gender identity. Indeed, many churches today remain unsafe spaces and, I have been challenged at The Embrace Centre by other "Christians" as to why a church sanctioned ministry would have a PRIDE flag in our window. And, let's not deny or try to minimize the effects of the "Pray the Gay Away" advocates or the fact that in many jurisdictions it took Human Rights tribunals and legislation to stop the practice of "Conversion Therapy."

At St John's Stevensville UC we understand God differently. We confess a Jesus who reaches beyond human biases, prejudices and judgments. We have an opportunity to be a bridge between the faith community and the LGBTTQq2Si community. We can share a Gospel of Love, about a God who is Love and, who celebrates love in all of its incarnations. We can share a God who not only accepts our differences but celebrates our diversity. And, we can be present, letting everyone know that not only do we have faith in Fort Erie ... we have PRIDE in our town!

PRIDE Fort Erie is taking place at 350 Bertie Street (across from The Fort Erie Racetrack) on June 25th from 11AM 'til 11PM and promises to be a colourful, joyful, fun-filled day for the whole family. I hope to see you there!

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On A Roll With God!

Vacation Bible School is coming back, and this time with a Food Truck spin! Come join us with "On a Roll with God!" We will learn all of the importance of breaking bread and eat our way through awesome bible stories! Dates are July 18 - 22 and will be happening _____. Ages 4-12 are welcome, and those older are more than welcome to join us as volunteers! Props are all starting to come together really nicely, and we're starting to get really excited about how the program is going to turn out.

If you're looking for more information, check out the website at www.stjohnsstevensvilleunitedchurch.com/sunday-school or send us an email at sjsprograms@gmail.com. Registration forms will be available in the fellowship hall after services, or by email. Please return to Victoria or Mikayla before the program begins. Leading up to the program, we are accepting donations of snack materials or grocery gift cards so that we can provide themed snacks for the children throughout the week. We thank each and every one of you because you are the ones that help make this ministry awesome!



Meet Us in the Community!



The photo you see may be from last year's community endeavours, but the people of our wonderful church are all at it again! We will be out and a-boot in the community this summer as a way to reach our neighbourhoods, get to know our locals, and learning the best way to minister. Because if they won't come to you, you have to go to them!

Come find us at...

PRIDE Fort Erie (June 25th) - The Embrace Centre will be set up at the festival all day, so come say hi and share your pride!

Ridgeway Summer Festival (July 9th) - The Church will have a booth set up during the festival, so come down and check out all the fun stuff going on!

Ridgeway Farmers Market (July 16th) - The Ukulele Club will be performing at the Ridgeway Farmers Market. Come share your support!

What Are the UCW Up To?

*- Submitted by Phyllis Booth
(CSC representative and UCW President)*

The purpose of the UCW is to unite women of the Community of Faith for the total mission of the church and to provide a means through which we may express our loyalty and devotion to Jesus Christ in Christian witness, study, fellowship, and service.

The 60th Anniversary celebration of the United Church Women will be held in Sydney, Nova Scotia, July 11-15 in 2022. The theme is "Continuing in Hope". Guest speaker will be Sally Armstrong Human Right Activist. The anniversary project Women for Change, Zambia will end in 2022, and a new initiative will be chosen for the next 5 years.

As many UCW are choosing to close up I am so glad that we continue at St John's to work towards the HOPE of the greater body of the UCW. I know many are not able to come to meeting but there is always Women in the church to be there in many capacities. Absolutely no shortage of getting the work done. I personally want to say THANK YOU ALL. On Aug. 14th the UCW will be doing the 60th Anniversary service at St. John's. I might ask support for everyone to come in person if possible.

Notes about Cave Spring Camp in Beamsville:

I was able to go up as part of a work crew to prepare the camp for a wonderful season including overnight camp, the first in a while. If you have children wanting to go to camp this summer here are some of the particulars.

- Camp runs from July 12-15 to Aug 22-26.
- Day Camp between the ages of 5-10 are presently full however you can put you name on a waiting list in case of cancellation. Price varies from \$220-275.
- Overnight camp if fully open ages 7-15. Price varies from \$535- 450.
- You can register on line <https://cavespringcamp.on.ca>
- If there is a financial need there is monies available. Please email Rev. Cheryl.

Church Programming Survey

We are already well into planning for the Fall at SJS, and as you can imagine there is a lot of time and energy and money that goes into such planning. So, before we waste any resources (financial / time / energy) we need some feedback from all of you as to how we might prioritize our ideas. So, we are inviting you to fill out this little survey called "I am Willing to Show-Up".

If a program does not interest you personally (or your extended family) then let us know. If you think something is a good idea, but you yourself are not willing to show up and participate than let us know. If you think it is a good idea and you are willing to show-up ... AND hope to bring a friend or two, then let us know that as well. The Ministry team and all the committees of the church strive to find ways that help you grow in your faith, that make you feel welcome as part of a community, and so we really value your feedback as we make decisions on future programming.

There is a paper version of the survey at the back of this newsletter, or you can choose to take the survey online by going to our website and clicking the link on the first page labeled "I am Willing to Show-Up!"

Thank you in advance to all of you for helping us build meaningful programs.



COMMUNITY ARTS AND PRAISE



When I was asked to write a few words about our upcoming Community Arts and Praise along with some reflections of the past 2 years Vesper Services, my first thought was, where did the time go!

I don't know about you, but for me, these past 2+ years brought forth some real challenges and it has also presented me with wonderful opportunities. I am grateful that through this journey I have witnessed growth in myself both spiritually and musically.

When Rev. Cheryl approached me with the idea of an outdoor Vesper Service, I was intrigued. It became more intriguing when she explained that due to covid restrictions and health Canada guidelines, we would not be able to gather inside. There would be a canopy set up in the parking lot where our techie-guru John, would set up a radio broadcast that was connected to microphones so folks could turn on their car radio to hear and "participate" while staying in their cars. She then asked if I would like to help out by playing my guitar and alongside Rev. Bill and/or Victoria, provide music for folks to sing along with.

As I had never heard of a "Vesper Service", she went on to explain its meaning was to offer an "Evening Prayer" Service. Each service would provide songs, scripture and a short message to invite folks to reflect on their day and settle into a peaceful evening of rest. I was very interested in taking part in this, to me, new venture, which quickly became that source of musical and spiritual growth.

For each service, Rev. Cheryl would provide me with a theme that would help determine what songs we would sing. I generally would pick a few selections and get in touch with her to see what songs she would like. Rev. Bill would also help in selections at times. Then I would practice! Here is where the musical growth comes in! I am a self-taught guitar player and through this journey I have even learned some new chords. As the saying goes, you are never too old to learn!

The first year, folks remained in their cars but by about mid-way through the second year, we were able to move the service to the outdoor Sanctuary! It was so lovely to see folks' faces and hear their voices being raised! We also were able to socialize a bit more and could finally enjoy some yummy ice cream treats together at the end of each Service.

And now the Summer of 2022 is fast approaching and I am dusting off the ole' guitar again as we prepare for another year of outdoor evening services!! This year we are offering some exciting new additions.

Each Sunday evening in July, we invite you to join us for Community Arts and Praise! There will be local vendors for you to support, You can visit our Art Gallery, have some ice cream and participate in the short Vespers Worship. There will also be a Children's Activity Corner. We are inviting local vendors to set up from 6:00-7:30pm. and the service will be from 6:45-7:15pm.

Mark your calendars for July 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 and come join us! Hope to see you there!

*In Fellowship,
Beth Reigle*

Fun Stuff

WHAT TYPE OF PLANT HITS PEOPLE BEFORE IT SCARES PEOPLE?

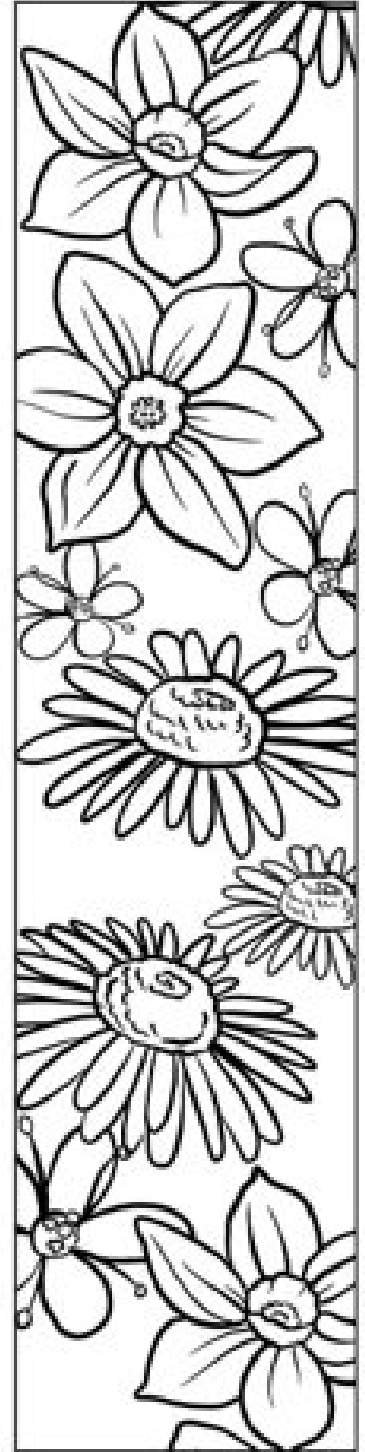
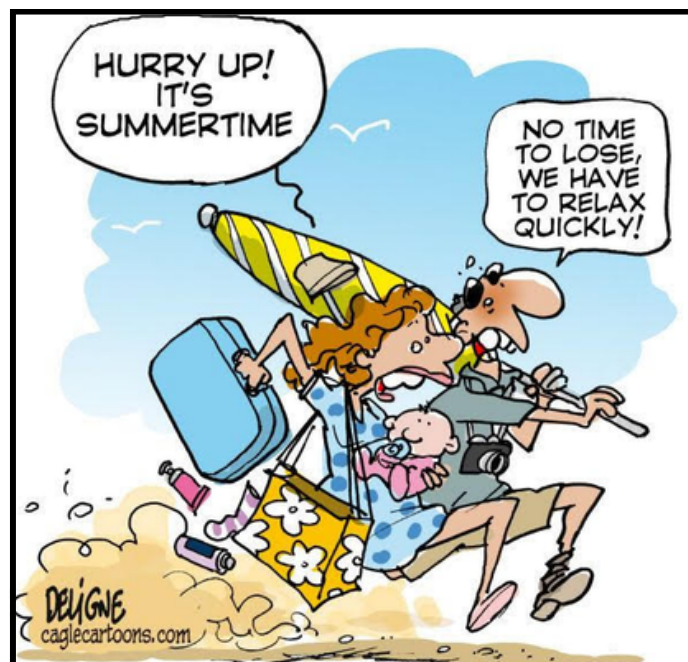
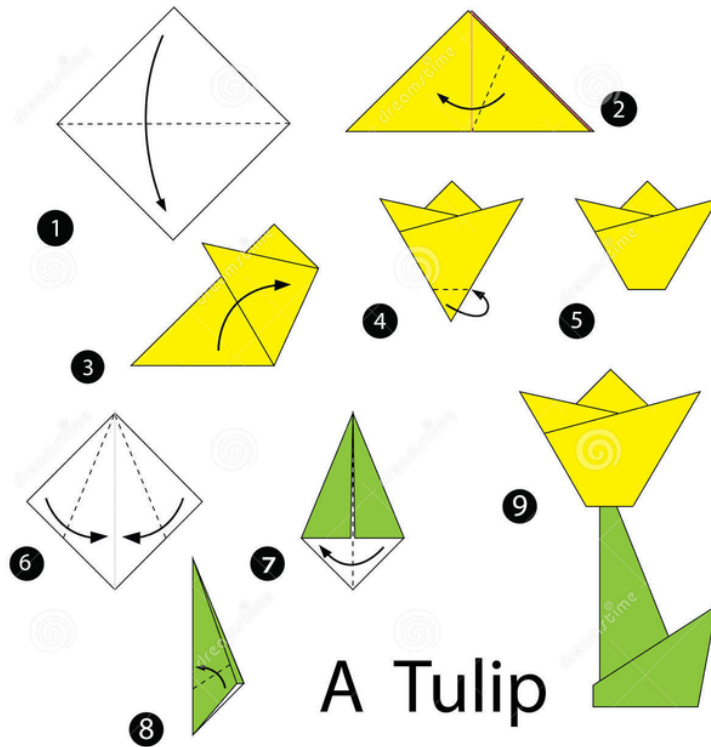
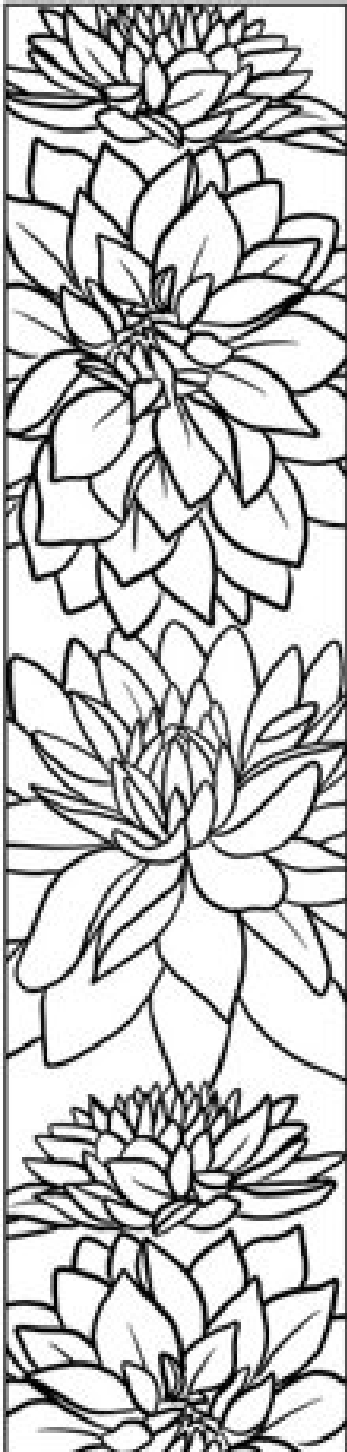
BAMBOO.

WHY DO PLANTS HATE MATH?
IT GIVES THEM SQUARE ROOTS.

HOW DO YOU CLONE A PLANT?
STEM CELLS.

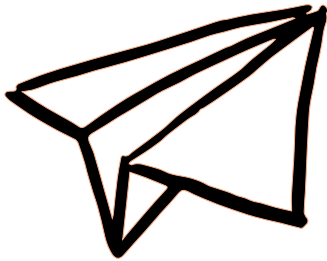
WHAT DO YOU CALL THE ARGUMENT BETWEEN TWO VEGANS?
A PLANT-BASED BEEF.

WHAT PLANT SNEAKS UP ON YOU?
AN AMBUSH



Announcements

Coffee time is back, and we will soon be moving back to Lemonade on the Lawn. Sense of community is the most important thing and we are grateful to have such wonderful volunteers to help maintain this ministry. If you're looking to join this team, just ask!



The children of the Sunday School have had an amazing year! Fun activities and lots of learning about the Old Testament while building our own flannel board bibles! We are inviting you to check out our photo gallery on the St. John's Stevensville United Church Website to see just how much fun we were having!

Vacation Bible School is back! We are going "On a Roll with God!" July 18th - 22nd! See the website for more details and email sjsprograms@gmail.com for registration!

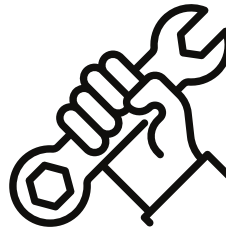


Special Services coming up: On August 7th, the service will be led by Victoria MacDonald. On August 14th, the service will be led by the UCW ladies. We are very excited for both!

Did You Know...?

PRIDE celebrations are held in June to commemorate the 1969 Stonewall Riots that occurred after the police raided the Stonewall Inn bar in New York's Greenwich Village, arresting staff, as well as gay, lesbian and trans patrons.

Before the Stonewall raids and arrests, members of the lesbian and gay communities were largely closeted, exercising tremendous discretion with regards to their sexuality out of a real concern for their safety as well as reprisals from law enforcement and legal authorities.



John Bedell and his team of volunteers will be going to Saugeen to participate in their first Habitat for Humanity Build! Pray for them as they go out in the community to learn and create.

Family Fun Fest! Join Cape Springs Camp on June 25th from 10-3 for a day of fun filled activities. Ever wondered what could be found at Cave Springs? Now is your chance! Only \$10 per person. See their website to register.



Want to get your name on our address list? Just let us know! If you miss a newsletter, we can mail it right to you.

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Check Us Out

Come worship with us Sunday mornings at
11:00am, in person or online at
www.niagaraonlineworship.com

Embrace Center Drop In - Monday to
Friday, 10am-4pm

Wondering where to find out even more
information about the upcoming events and
ongoing activities;

-  www.stjohnsstevensvilleunitedchurch.com
-  St. John's Stevensville United Church
-  The Embrace Center
-  www.niagaraonlineworship.com



"I guess we'll never know why they beach themselves."



"I just love how they come individually wrapped
to seal in the flavor."

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