



THE GOOD NEWS LETTER

FROM ST. JOHN'S STEVENSVILLE UNITED CHURCH

ISSUE: FEBRUARY 2021



The Blessing of Working Remotely

I was as disappointed as everyone else when the news came just before Christmas that Ontario was going back into a lock-down situation starting on Boxing Day. After such a crazy year, I wanted to celebrate with my Friends & Family, and raise a toast to those far away. We did celebrate and connected through phone calls and zoom chats, and was blessed by those connections. And we then hunkered down to once again work remotely from home. The situation for me then opened up a new possibility to get home to Nova Scotia to visit with my Mother on the occasion of her 96th birthday. Since I had to work from home anyway, then why not work from my sister's home in Truro while I waited out my 14 day quarantine??? And so, I did!

Victoria and I packed the car and headed East on Epiphany. While in quarantine, I was able to preach twice and attend my week of online residency for Northeastern Seminary. By our 15th day in the province when we were released from quarantine, we were rearing to go. I did get to visit my Mom for 4 half-hour visits at the home. We got to sing and pray together. I also got to visit with our youngest daughter and oldest son, and get lots and lots of hugs from my grandson, Elliott (who grew so much in the past year). We packed a lot of joy, visits, and hugs into a few days before we repacked the car and headed home to Fort Erie. It was good to walk through my front door and see Rev. Bill and grandson, Logan. And then on Sunday February 7th it was so nice to be in SJS's sanctuary with John B. to record the prayers of the people.

I am sharing a few of my pictures of the province here with you, and invite you to watch on our Facebook page for our Lenten Psalm series to be read in front of waterfalls that I visited while away.

Blessings,

Rev. Cheryl Wood-Thomas



Letters to Marc About Jesus: A Lenten Study

Rev. Bill Thomas

Henri Nouwen is a name that might be familiar to some of you. Nouwen was a Dutch Roman Catholic priest who, after a distinguished academic career became the pastor to the L'Arche Daybreak Community in Toronto.

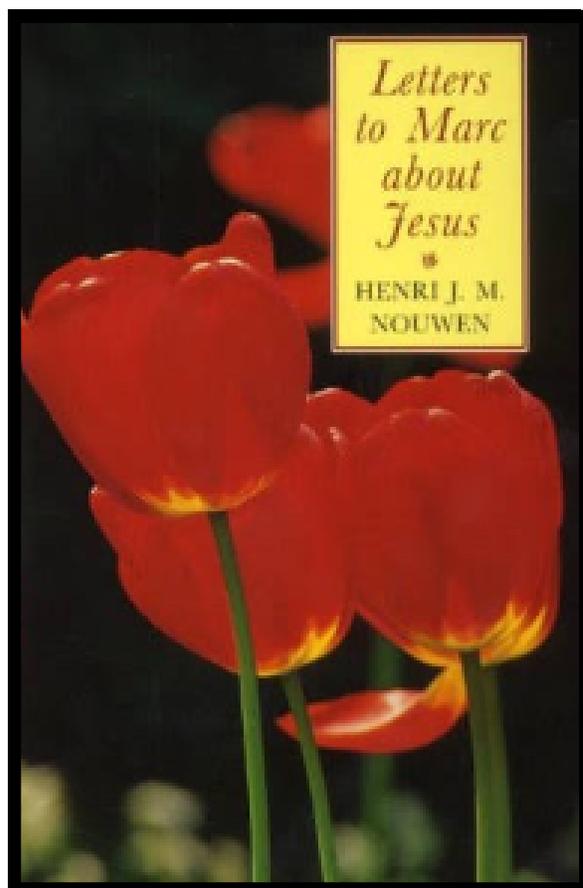
This Lenten season I will be leading a study Group focused on Nouwen's 1987 book *Letters To Marc About Jesus*. Originally written as the fulfillment of a promise made to his 19 year old nephew, *Letters* is a sharing of the joys and sufferings of Nouwen's spiritual journey but always from the conviction that Jesus is the centre of his life. The letters deal with deep questions facing us in the twenty-first century in the light of the Gospel message. Nouwen's stated hope is, "that those who are asking themselves what it means to lead a spiritual life will be helped a little by this book."

Each week, participants in the study will be provided with one of the letters to read and reflect upon in preparation for the conversations we will have during our time together. As has happened over the past 11 months, this study will happen virtually using the Zoom platform. If Covid-19 protocols permit, we may try a hybrid format with some participants attending in person at The Embrace Centre and others continuing on Zoom.

We will begin our study together with the first letter, "Jesus: The Heart of Our Existence," on **Thursday, February 18 th at 2:00pm**. Each session will last one hour with an opportunity for an informal check-in to start and further conversation after the hour has expired.

If you are interested in this study group please let Rev Bill know via email at rev.bill.thomas@gmail.com and he will email you the first letter.

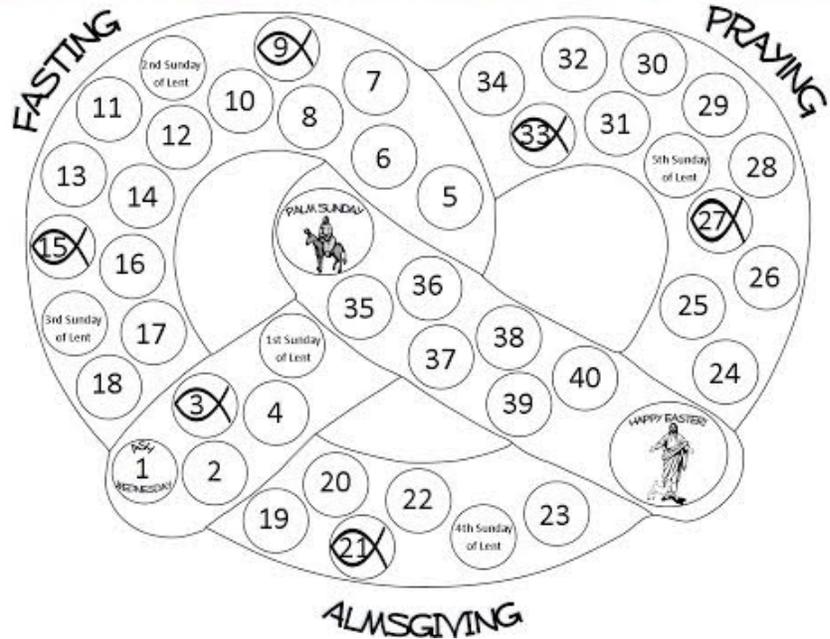
How do you answer Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" What is the state of your spiritual journey? Might Nouwen's experience and the lessons he learned be of benefit to us? To you? Join this study group and perhaps together we will find answers to the questions we have and new questions for which to seek answers.



Lenten Practice

Every year we are invited to participate in a Lenten practice or discipline that makes the season more meaning for us as Christians. One of the first ways we teach children to participate in such practices is through a Lenten Coin jar. It teaches the importance of prayer, fasting and giving. This year we offer this "Coin Jar" practice as a daily reminder to reflect upon what the season means to you and your family. Your cin can be a nickle or a twoonie, or whatever you decide as your intentional daily reflection.

LENTEN CALENDAR: THE SALT OF THE EARTH



Read Ahead for Lent!

LENT Begins on Ash
Wednesday, Feb 17th.

Sunday, February 21, 2021
COMMUNION
Lent #1 – Covenant of Water
(Baptism & Rainbow) Genesis
9:8-17 / Mark 1:9-15

Sunday, February 28, 2021
Lent #2 – Covenant of
Generations
Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
(Abraham & Sarah) / Mark
8:31-38 (lose your life for the
gospel will save it)
* Psalm 22 (VU#746, part
3&4)

Sunday, March 7, 2021
Lent #3 – Covenant of
Community Good
Exodus 20:1-17 (10
Commandments)
John 2:13-22 (Jesus clears the
Temple)

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Exodus 20:1-17 (10
Commandments)
John 2:13-22 (Jesus clears the
Temple)

Sunday, March 14, 2021
Lent #4 / Covenant of Love
Ephesians 2:1-10 (Saved by
Grace)
John 3:14-21 (God so loves
the World)

Sunday, March 21, 2021
Lent #5 – New Covenant –
death and new life
Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Write law
on heart) John 12:20-33 (a grain
of wheat falls to the earth)

Sunday, March 28, 2021
Lent #6 – Palm Sunday
Mark 11:1-11

February – Black History Month – The Month of Spirituals

As we approach the first Sunday in Black History Month, let's have a look at the meanings of some of the words in the spirituals. We will be singing several throughout the month, both as congregational hymns and special music by the choir.

There Is A Balm In Gilead. The original balm found in Gilead was a medicinal fragrance and use of the term became the healing balm of religion through the scriptures.

Michael, Row The Boat Ashore. The river Jordan, the final step in the escape of the Jews from the grip of the Romans, has long been used as the obstacle separating man from God. Crossing the Jordan referred to freedom from sin as religion was adopted. To the Blacks it also meant crossing from slavery into freedom. The word stygian applies doubly, both as crossing the river and its meaning of black.

Over My Head – I hear music in the air. As slaves were placed in coffins and transported to freedom, their awareness of the freedom first occurred as they heard the singing in the church above them.

They Crucified My Lord and He Never Said A Mumbalin' Word. Knowing that Jesus could endure what he went through should help us all get through our daily problems, even slavery.

Hush! Somebody's Callin' My Name. "I'm so glad that trouble don't last always." Freedom from earthly slavery could come in more than one way.

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot. Again we see the idea of a boat or chariot taking them from slavery to freedom. "I looked over Jordan, and what did I see?" A band of angels – freedom.

Jesus Walked This Lonesome Valley. Again, Jesus endured even more than we have to.

As you listen to spirituals, be aware of the meaning behind the words. The simplest arrangements are best. The big, fancy arrangements by 'whitey' often obscure the meaning and emotions of the original.

- Tom Inglis



The Great Grocery Giveaway Comes to Fort Erie

- Rev. Bill Thomas

It started with a text message asking if St John's Stevensville and the Embrace Centre were interested in taking part in what has become known as The Great Grocery Giveaway in The Niagara Region. It had happened in St Catharines, Niagara Falls, Pelham, and other locations in the region but, it had never come this far down The QEW. After a few phone calls to the chair of the board and the chair of finance, (in-kind, charitable tax receipts were involved), I said yes and that led to the busiest week, by far, that I have had since things shut down due to Covid-19.

I, and The Embrace Centre, became the point person for the giveaway in our town. You can imagine the logistical demands for such an event ... We needed to find a space large enough to accommodate the expected automobile traffic so, I approached St Michael's Roman Catholic Church on Central Avenue. Father Patrick was extremely supportive of the initiative and we had a site. The organizers had also been in touch with Matthew House and so, we had a small cadre of volunteers and an extra truck, (which we ended up needing). Next there were emails back and forth to The Mayor and Council as well as Town staff which led to a plan for traffic control and, through long-standing relationships the promise of a forklift and pushcart. Things were falling into place.



Next we created a media blitz and word went out on local radio, electronic notices went out on our church and Embrace Centre Facebook pages, members of the congregation put it out on their personal pages, the town advertised on their social media sites and, I sent notice out to all of our sister churches and faith communities in Fort Erie.

All of this happened between Saturday afternoon and Monday afternoon. But there was much work still left to do.

Our tech team, John Bedell, volunteered his expertise and we created a short video that was shared on social media. John also volunteered his time on the day of the giveaway, as did other members of the congregation. I collected tables and created a site map, did a walk through to figure out how traffic would flow most efficiently and the schedule of events was then set ... truck arrival, unloading, bagging of groceries, start time, estimated finish time, breakdown, and then leave, (with as little evidence of our having been there as possible).



The Great Grocery Giveaway Comes to Fort Erie cont...



Then the day arrived, Wednesday, about 100 hours after I first learned that the Grocery Giveaway was coming to Fort Erie. While we were setting up the first cars arrived, (about an hour and a half before the scheduled time). And, they continued to arrive. By ½ an hour before start time there were between 50 and 75 cars and a few people had walked up pulling small grocery carts behind them. We got concerned with the cars spilling out of the parking lot at Our lady of Fatima school and onto Central Ave so, we started serving people a little early.

We started putting groceries in people's trunks, (Covid protocols had to be followed so there was minimal interaction with the people in the cars, masks were worn, etc.), at 2:40 and the last groceries were given out before 4:00. In the end we served between 300 and 350 cars and an estimated 50 walk-ups. On that day we gave away about 5 tons of food but it was obvious that the need in Fort Erie at this time is great and the anonymous donor who is responsible for this show of generosity and community spirit asked if it would be possible to do it all again on the following Saturday, (yep, 3 days later). I thought about it for a minute and said yes, we had done

it once and we could do it again. But, this time it would be in Crystal Beach or Ridgeway so, a new site had to be found. St George Roman Catholic Church seemed to be the perfect location and Carol, the church secretary, Father Ceasar and the leadership of the church were again, quite supportive and opened their parking lot up to us.

The need is indeed great and, at the second event we served another 300-400 vehicles and gave away 9 ½ tons of food in just over an hour. As I write this short report, we are preparing for a third event, back at St Michael's, again with the support of the town and our ecumenical brothers and sisters. Obviously, organizing this kind of event requires many hands and, many more hands still to go from the organizing to the actual carrying out of the giveaway. But, it was a blessing for me and, a gift from St John's Stevensville United Church and The Embrace Centre, that I was available to take the primary lead in these events. Even in these difficult and restrictive times, as many wonder how to be the church and how to minister to a community both suffering and in need, this was our answer ... "WHEN YOU SAW I WAS HUNGRY, YOU FED ME!"

May God continue to bless us and through us may god's blessing be made known to others.

Sunday School Update

Sunday School has continued the online programming this winter, following the theme "Calling of the Disciples. Two by two, we've met the disciples of Jesus and discussed some of the big moments in scripture where these disciples were present.

I would like to send out a heartfelt thank you to all of the parents who take the time to watch our youtube videos, and those who send me pictures of the children doing their activities.

Hugs! -Victoria MacDonald

Wider Church Conferences

The Seven Testaments Trilogy



Day 1: <https://youtu.be/bM91CSiyXR8>
 Day 2: <https://youtu.be/dR55i4VW9ww>
 Day 3: <https://youtu.be/EfpEQZ4ygn4>

The United Nations Week for Interfaith Harmony launched by introducing the Seven Testaments Trilogy. This book set is a historic breakthrough in religious understanding.

From Feb. 1 - Feb. 3, 18 distinguished international educators and practitioners were present to speak on a variety of points within the trilogy. With over 100 attendees, the conference was enlightening and informative.

Sessions from all three days are available on YouTube if you missed them and are interested in listening about the projects that the Seven Testaments Trilogy has opened up.

A Step Towards Diversity

A Tri-Regional UCW Virtual Gathering led by Rev. Stephanie McClellan, Rev. Sandra Bendall and Rev. Thérèse Samuel.

Saturday, February 20th, 2021 at
10:00 am

(Link will open at 9:30 – a sing along
Will start 5-10min before 10:00)



Meeting ID: 913 9994 4781
 Password: 253172
 Or Call in: 1- 855-703-8985



Are You Smarter Than A Church Mouse?



It's been a while since we've been able to do anything fun, and we know that people are missing meeting up with each other. The youth group put their heads together to come up with an idea to bring everyone together for an evening of something... trivial. Therefore, the Church MICE bring you the event of the season..... **Are You Smarter than A Church Mouse?**

It's a trivia fundraising night for all ages, and here's how it is going to work! First, register with Victoria (through Facebook, or email at centralunited.churchhouse@gmail.com) to let us know your Name, address and Pop preferences (sprite or coke?). Every household is its own team, with as many members as lives in your home.

\$10

March 11

@ 6:30pm

We will deliver a Trivia Night pack to your house, which includes all the paper and scoring needed for the event, as well as some snacks (popcorn, mini chocolate, and two pop cans)!

Then log in with us on Zoom or Facebook Live to hear the questions, write your answers, and check your responses with us, then send your final score back to the church so we can share them with each other!

Creative Spirit

This Lenten Season Creative Spirit will be making a quilt out of canvas. While the Creative Spirit group will be undertaking this activity as part of a larger spiritual practice, we are also opening it up to all members of the congregation.

We are using 10x10 square canvases, on which you may paint a design or use markers, or whatever you wish. The only stipulation is that you **must use purple somewhere on the "quilt square"** and then drop off the canvas to the church or directly to Carolyn Campbell or Rev. Cheryl.

The canvases will all be displayed together at Easter time as an Easter quilt.



The Older Testaments: Encounters on the Way

As many of us know, our Minister Emeritus, Brian brown has recently published the final installment of his exploration of World Religions, 7 Testaments Trilogy. The first book, Three Testaments was a deep dive into the Abrahamic Religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam and the second book, Four Testaments moved the conversation to Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and Confucianism. In early February there was an international conference, sponsored in part by the United Nations as part of their Week of Religious Harmony, with scholars and religious practitioners from many of the world's faith traditions and from every corner of the globe.

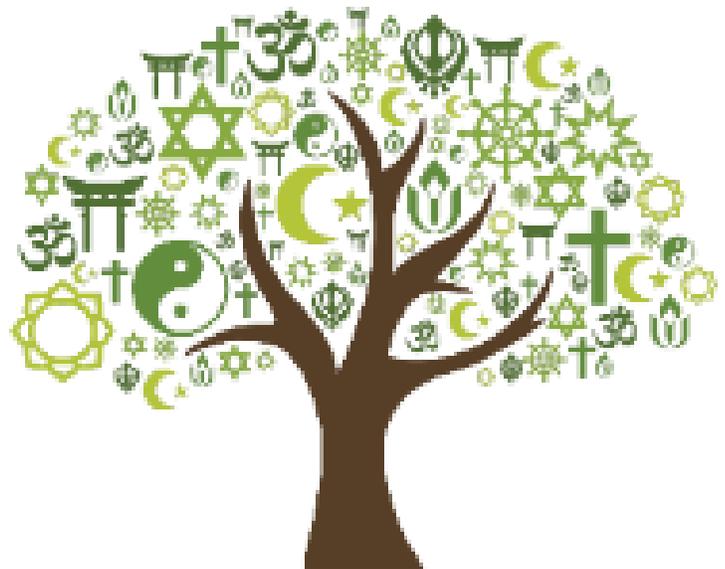
The Older Testaments: Encounters on The Way is a play that was written by me to accompany the Four Testaments and explores some of the themes of both the book and the scriptures of those non-Abrahamic traditions through drama and the arts. Before the Covid pandemic struck the conference, which was held virtually, was planned for last Spring and was to be held at First Baptist Church in Niagara Falls, New York. As part of those proceedings the play, was to be performed. However, the in-person conference did not happen and not only was the play not performed but, over the last year we have not been able to gather in sufficient numbers for even a dramatic reading of the play.

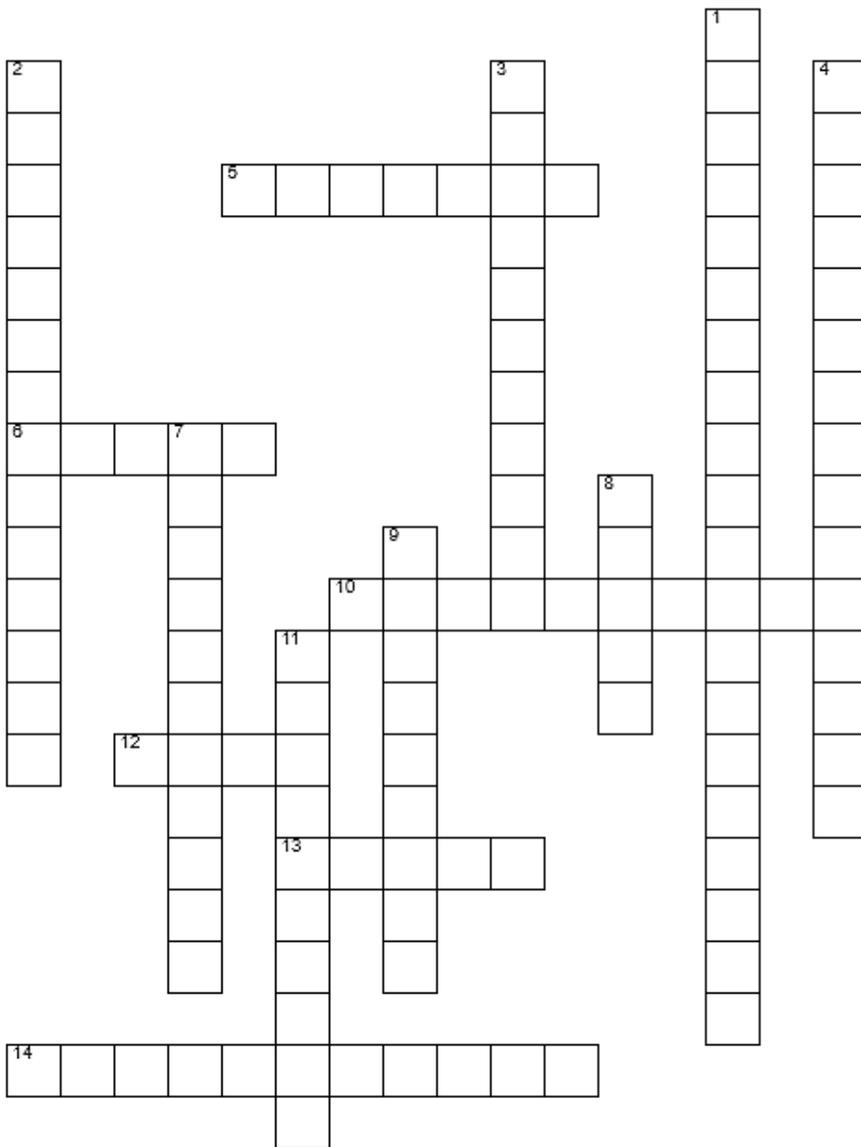
It is hoped that **The Older Testaments: Encounters on The Way** will be used in university classrooms as part of an inter-faith curriculum. Interest has been shown by professors teaching on a number of university campuses and the question of a dramatic reading of the play came up once again during the conference.

This is an invitation to anyone interested in being a part of a dramatic reading of the play, once we are able to gather in sufficient numbers to do so. The reading would be recorded and made available to those professors and their students as a conversation starter as they enter into the realm of inter-faith dialogue. Further in the future it is still hoped that the play will be performed, in the same way as the earlier, Shalom, Peace, Salaam that accompanied Three Testaments had been and, that a recording of that performance will be made available for similar purposes.

If you, or someone you know might be interested in participating in this project, please contact me at rev.bill.thomas@gmail.com.

Blessings;
Rev. Bill Thomas





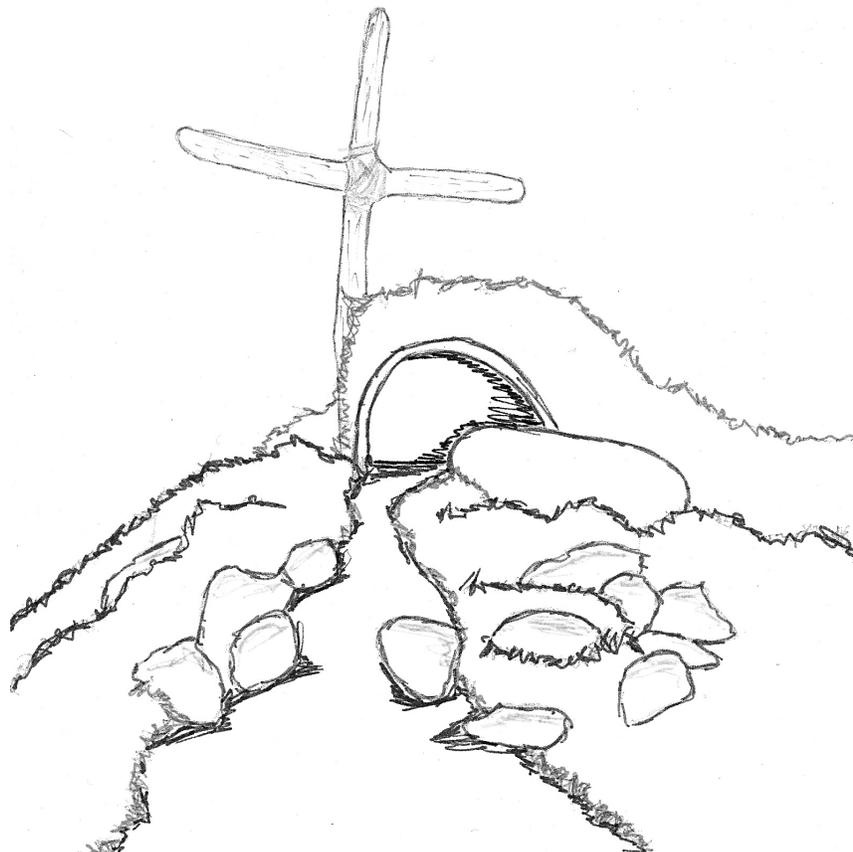
SJS Lenten Crossword

Across:

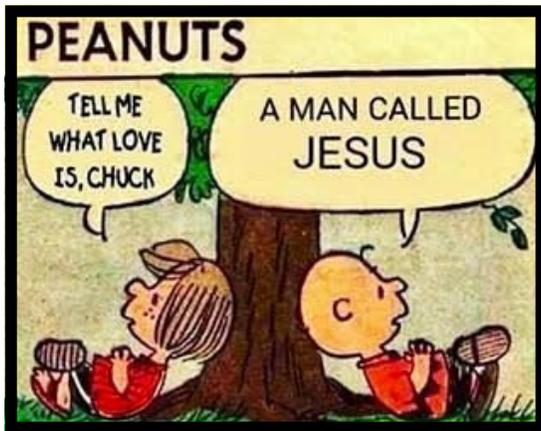
- 5. Palm Sunday is also called _____ Sunday.
- 6. Where did God tell Jeremiah that the new covenant would be written? (Jeremiah 31:33)
- 10. Lent is the season of... ?
- 12. What did the Disciples borrow for Jesus so he could enter Jerusalem? (Mark 11)
- 13. On what road is St. John's Stevensville United Church located?
- 14. The name of the art gallery at SJS is...?

Down:

- 1. What is the name of our live-streaming ministry?
- 2. What is the name of the group that knits prayer shawls at SJS?
- 3. What did Moses put on a pole to heal the people? (Numbers 21: 4-9)
- 4. God so loved the world, that what did God give? (John 3:16)
- 7. Jesus was baptized where?
- 8. Who denied Jesus after his arrest? (Matthew 26:70)
- 9. Lent begins on which day of the week?
- 11. What is the name of the garden where Jesus prayed? (Matthew 26:36)



Announcements



BEEF STEW FUNDRAISER

Warm-up this winter with a bowl of Rev. Cheryl's homemade beef stew. Just \$5 for a bowl of stew + roll. Ready for pick-up on Sunday, February 28th. Delivery available for those unable to get out to the church. Email orders to: rev.cheryl.wood@gmail.com OR text/call 905-687-2664 All proceeds will go to the general fund.



Would you like to learn a new skill AND help enrich the ministries of our church?

Join the tech team!

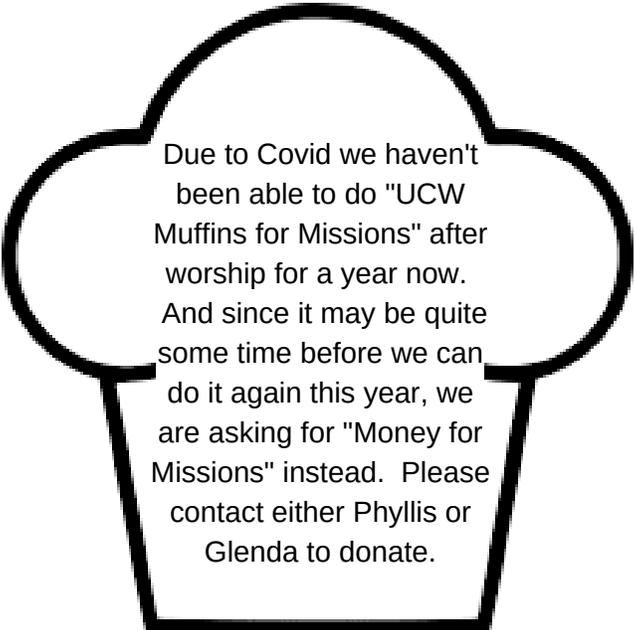
Speak to John to see how you can participate!

Reopening?

There have been lots of questions recently as to when we might be able to reopen the church for in person worship.

As you know we are set to come out of the emergency measures "stay at home" order on February 16th.

However there is some confusion as to whether that then puts us in a grey zone or a red zone in Niagara. If on the 16th we go into a red zone, then we will return to in-person worship on February 28th. However if we return to a grey zone, then we will need to wait until we can transition down to a red. Stay Tuned!



Due to Covid we haven't been able to do "UCW Muffins for Missions" after worship for a year now. And since it may be quite some time before we can do it again this year, we are asking for "Money for Missions" instead. Please contact either Phyllis or Glenda to donate.

Please remember to be faithful with your offerings during this time. Although we are not in the building together, SJS still has a variety of ministry programs running in our community.

Decadent Chocolate Pudding for 2

- 1 cup of milk
- 1 heaping tablespoon of cocoa
- 1 heaping tablespoon of cornstarch
- ¼ cup of sugar

Heat the milk in the microwave while you mix the other ingredients with a little bit of water to make a paste, then mix them together the paste and milk. Microwave mixture in one-minute intervals until it has boiled and is thick and dark brown. Serve hot with a scoop of vanilla ice cream!



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Ongoing Events!

Take a look at these events, happening every week!

- Sunday @ 11am - Church Services (Bring your mask and maintain social distancing)
- Sunday @ 11 am - Online Church Services
- Tuesday @ 1pm - Bible Study on Zoom (hybrid information to come)
- Thursday @ 1pm - Creative Spirit Zoom session

Wondering where our streamed sessions can be found? Check out the following:

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

We understand that it can be hard when we are all isolated. So please keep in mind that both Rev. Bill and Rev. Cheryl are available to provide pastoral care over the phone at any time. Do not hesitate to call.



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