

John Black Memorial United Church

Christmas Newsletter 2012

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DATES TO REMEMBER

Dec. 2: Just Christmas

The focus is on Fair Trade, social justice and peace at the fifth annual event, being held at John Black, 2-5 p.m.

Dec. 2: Mitten Tree

The annual mitten tree makes its appearance at John Black. Donations of knitting go to Prince Edward School, Wolseley Family Centre, West Broadway and the NICU at St. Boniface Hospital.

Dec. 9: White Gift

Bring your donations of non-perishable foods, or financial gifts, for the Christmas Cheer Board.

Dec. 11: Blue Christmas Service

John Black acknowledges the darkness we may feel, but also offers a gentle word of hope and healing. Join us at 7 p.m.

Dec. 24: Children's Service

Bring the kids at 5 p.m. for a service starring shepherds, wise guys, and angels.

Dec. 24: Communion Service

Join us at 10 p.m. for a traditional Christmas Eve service and Holy Communion.



MESSAGE FROM DAWN BALLANTINE-DICKSON...

Christmas a time to give thanks for God's love

There are five or so large plastic tubs at my home, all marked "Christmas." I know two are the artificial tree, one is lights, both indoor and a few outdoor strings, and the others have to be ornaments, linens, and nativity sets.

The closer the date of Christmas gets, the more ominous these containers become. I can pass them at Easter and ignore them, but come the first of December they seem unnaturally bigger and lurk in the storage room waiting to spill out the garlands, the half-burnt candles and a 32-year-old "Baby's First Christmas" ornament.

Someone on the radio has coined the term "Christmas creep" for the propensity of the stores to put out the Christmas merchandise earlier and earlier (not accounting for the Christmas stores that are dedicated to selling these trinkets all year around.) The meaning of Christmas can become sideswiped by

shopping, just as the meaning of American Thanksgiving is being ditched by Black Friday, which now begins on Thursday.

It is not a question of reining in the merchants, as they won't sell if we won't buy. What we need to do is focus on what Christmas really means.

The story of the first Christmas is the celebration of the birth of a child of a couple who are away from home and have to settle for a cattle stall to house their newborn son. Add to this indignity the interruption by local shepherds inspired by angels' song.

It wasn't until about two years later that the wise men or sages showed up with gifts. The gifts came after the awe of the baby, and after the alleluias, and the realization that the gift was the child and the giver was God.

Christmas calls us to renew this excitement as Christ comes to us in the love of family and friends. Christmas is our giving thanks for the love of God that is given to us and that we now have the opportunity to share with neighbours and strangers.

If the opening of the new Blue Bombers stadium or Ikea grabs more of your excitement than Christmas, I invite you to go back to the storage room of your memories, in albums, boxes or plastic tubs, and listen for loving voices of years gone by. Or better yet, in your imagination, visit the first Christmas in Bethlehem and offer yourself to the little king who will reign in your heart.

May your Christmas this year be filled to the brim with meaning, love and thankfulness ready to be spilled out in the lives of others.

Blessings,
Dawn



CHRISTMAS CRAFT SALE AND TEA A HUGE SUCCESS

Once again our annual Christmas Craft Sale and Tea was embraced by the community and we were very successful.

Of course, all the credit goes out to our congregation members who baked...and baked...and baked! We made \$1,113.50 just with our baking!!

The ladies in the kitchen who prepared bunwiches and very lovingly prepared eye-appealing desert plates for each table are truly angels in disguise. The men who set up all the tables for the vendors and the tea room must have sprouted angel wings as well.

The Pie Ladies outdid themselves and sold about \$900 worth of pies. Watch for the next pie sale just in time for Christmas!

Luella, our Silent Auction Queen, gratefully accepted help from Liz and John, and Kathy. So much work is put into each basket and they were displayed so beautifully that you couldn't pass by without dropping a ticket or two into each one. A total of \$565.25 was realized from the auction.

The vendors shared their talents with all of us and were royally treated by Cathy and Nell, who served them lunch and greeted them upon their

arrival. Vendor tables netted us \$625.

Sheila's great idea of having our own "craft table" was very successful, with many donations, of which most were sold, bringing in \$305.

The Children's Christmas Room, which made \$105, was very popular amongst the little ones and some young-at-heart, as well.

The Tea Room was busy from 10 a.m. until closing. Elizabeth and Jacob were run off their feet but kept right on smiling, helping us to clear \$655.

We did very well financially. Of course, the two ladies who always volunteer to count the proceeds at the end of day deserve a big pat on the back—Marilyn and Marge. Thank

you so much, ladies!

The best part of the whole day was watching friends meet for lunch, young children buying that special gift in the Children's Room and many of us browsing all the wonderful crafts the vendors had to offer. It was truly a successful day. Way to go!!!

Donna Fabbri

PUTTING SMILES ON CHILDREN'S FACES

Seasons greetings from the volunteers at Prince Edward School breakfast program!

Once again, we are well into the school year and busier than ever. We have partnered with the volunteers from Grace Lutheran Church as we now need four people to help serve breakfasts on Mondays and Fridays. The Parents Asso-

ciation of Prince Edward serves on Wednesdays.

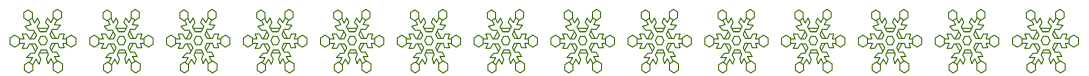
Each morning, we have about 35 happy children joining us. They always enjoy their breakfast and also the fellowship that this program allows them with their friends.

We wish to thank you so very, very much for your financial support of these breakfasts as we continue

to put smiles on the children's faces. This truly is an example of our reaching out into our community.

Wishing you much peace during the holiday season,

Joan Zuk, Lynne Mellow, June Kusnick, Fran Russell, Carolyn Westmacott, Susan Stastook, Elaine Steski, Nell Dyck, Gene and Marilyn Leggatt

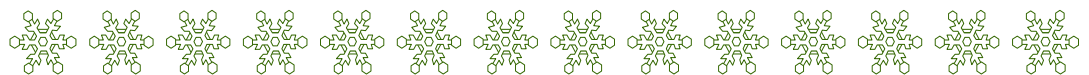


New "Going Greener" interest group started at John Black

A new interest group, Going Greener, has started at John Black.

You are welcome to join us as we look at various environmental issues in our church and our community. Most of the events will be workshops in nature, with fun activities for the whole family: children, adults and seniors. These events will be open to our surrounding community, as well.

If you are interested in joining our eager group, please contact Luella Stephens at 204-668-1623.



JOHN BLACK TO HOST WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY SERVICE

One of the great joys of working at John Black has been my shared involvement with the ecumenical and local United churches in this community.

I am excited to announce that we have been given the opportunity to be one of the hosts of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, to be held Jan. 23, 2013 at 7:30 p.m.

The United Church of Canada is one of the 349 churches that make up the World Council of Churches. Each year, the council promotes one week

in which the different Christian denominations come together to pray for Christian unity.

...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:8

Churches from different denominations will be hosting worship in their towns and cities throughout the week, giving believers an opportunity to experience the gospel shared by their various traditions.

We have been asked to share a worship service that reflects the United Church tradition, lifts up prayers for Christian unity, and includes—but does not need to be fully centered on—this year's scripture, which is Micah 6:8.

To do this, we are inviting other United Church choirs in our areas to join us in praise, and for two Sundays prior to the service, we will be practising the hymns in our own worship time.

Things you can do to be part of this special event:

- Plan now to attend.
- Offer a ride to someone who needs one, or offer your name to the office and we will connect you with passengers. If you are in need of a ride, please tell the church office.
- Volunteer to make cookies or work in the kitchen.
- Help set up a few tables in the halls.
- Come sing with the choirs.
- Come, smile and welcome our guests and be part of this wonderful time together.

Advent plans fill calendar

Advent, the waiting time, is here again and with it the special Sundays and the old story told new once more.

The Worship Interest Group has been finding people who can light the advent candles as characters from the Christmas story. We still need people to assist with the Christmas Eve service and especially invite children to put on one of our costumes and be part of the pageant.

There are two services on Christmas Eve: a family service at 5 p.m. and a quieter, more reflective service with communion at 10 p.m.

Our White Gift Service is December 9 and you are invited to contribute food gifts or a financial donation to assist the Christmas Cheer Board.

December 30, the Sunday between Christmas and New Years, will be an intergenerational service with no Sunday school; classes will resume Jan. 6, 2013.



Saying farewell to Kathryn Basso

The Sunday school teachers have been blessed since September with the leadership of Kathryn (Parsons) Basso.

She was the Sunday school co-ordinator and gave material, suggestions, and confidence to the teachers in their planning and presenting of lessons. Unfortunately she has needed to offer her resignation because of other job time commitments.

We would like to offer our thanks for her expertise and best wishes in her future endeavours.

I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.

- Charles Dickens

WORKSHOP EXPLORES REVITALIZING, RE-VISIONING, RENEWAL

The John Black Leadership Team hosted a "Revitalizing, Re-visioning, and Renewal" workshop on Sunday, Oct. 28. The session included a potluck lunch served by the volunteer members who participated. I facilitated the session with the support of Dawn Ballantine-Dickson. The objective of the workshop was to come up with creative and innovative ideas that can revitalize our community of faith through renewed activities and interests such that we can engage the congregation in meaningful ways.

The event was very well attended with over 20 people. We began with lunch—which was nothing short of fantastic. The food was excellent as one would expect coming from our members' kitchens and recipes. In fact, the potluck idea was so promising, one of the members suggested this as a contributing and positive idea to the revitalizing, re-visioning, and renewal workshop. So that became one of our first popular suggestions to make it onto the table!

Following lunch, it was on to the idea generation exercise. The participants were divided into small teams of four to five people. Each team was given 15 minutes to brainstorm on whatever new ideas they wanted to suggest. There were no rules on what type of ideas and each idea had to be written down. There was no discussion on the merits of the idea and no judging. The goal was to come up with as many fresh new ideas as they could. At the conclusion of the brainstorming, the teams were then given another 15 minutes to review, discuss and categorize their ideas into themes. Following this, each team presented their ideas to the rest of the audience, who in turn had the opportunity to listen, ask questions, and seek to understand. Once all of the teams had presented, we posted the worksheets, complete with the categories and ideas, around the room for all to see. The teams were given sticky dots and instructed to work their way around the room and review the posted idea worksheets. Each member was asked to place one of their sticky dots beside the idea they felt was most appealing to them. This was an individual scoring exercise with each participant voting on their favourite ideas. Once the voting was complete, we concluded our session with a prayer and committed to documenting the results and communicating back to the workshop participants and the congregation.

We are currently in the process of reviewing the results. I am planning to present them at our next Leadership Team meeting on December 12. At this time, I can tell you that the feedback and the ideas generated are all very positive. Here's a summary of some of the more popular ideas grouped under their respective theme categories:

- **Music:** This was a very common theme that resonated with several groups. It seems our congregation is quite moved and motivated by music. There were some very refreshing ideas on how we could involve the congregation more in the music and songs that define our faith.
- **Sanctuary:** This theme involved ways that we could rearrange the aesthetics of the sanctuary (without having to restructure) in a way that would make it more intimate and engaging for the congregation as part of the service.

- **Greetings/Welcome:** This theme focused on ways that we could be more inviting to visitors as well as new and existing members. This included suggestions on external signage to in-house fellowship amongst our members.

- **Children & Youth:** This theme raised ideas on how we could engage the younger folks (children and youth) in our programs and activities. It also raised the notion of working collaboratively with other United churches in our community to pool resources, time and ideas that we could share in ways to effectively engage and grow our base of young people. This is not necessarily a brand new idea as much as it provided more pragmatic activities that could be started to get this moving.

- **Bible Studies:** Clearly there is a need and desire to continue with Adult Bible Study as well as a series of spiritual and ecumenical discussions and presentations that deal with our current world and community affairs. This was also seen as a way of engaging new members, young families and possibly young adults.

- **Volunteers:** These are the heart and soul of our congregation and our operations. This theme presented ideas on how we could re-charge and re-engage and recognize our current volunteers while reaching out to others and sharing the responsibilities and activities.

- **Environment:** There were some ideas that suggested social outings to help promote important environmental issues and provide a means for our members to get engaged.

- **Communication:** They say that the success of any strategic program is its ability to become infused with the audience it serves. That goes without saying in terms of how we want to share ideas and seek ways to engage our congregation in the future of church. This newsletter posting is certainly one way to meet that challenge.

- **Outreach:** This was by far one of the most popular themes amongst the workshop participants. Here, we found ideas ranging from starting some new volunteer interest groups, to new social networking (non-technical type), to developing new support programs that focus on our connection with shut-ins and seniors. In some respects, the success of any one of the other themes presented above will serve as a strong base for us as a church to develop an equally strong and successful outreach program in the community.

That basically summarizes the key output from this session. Next steps will involve presenting and sharing these ideas with the Leadership Team - and then with the congregation.

One of the team's tasks will be to develop a set of plans and steps on how we can effectively mobilize these ideas. The goal is to try to get these ideas moving forward. Given the success of this first session, I am also going to recommend that we host another session sometime early in the New Year.

Stay tuned for more updates as well as a date for presenting our plan to the congregation. This will likely take place sometime in December or January 2013.

Blessings,

Kerry Augustine, Leadership Team Chair