



In the Orchard

The Gift of Joy - A Christmas Story

It was Christmas Eve in the village and the snow lay over it like a soft, thick, white blanket. At the edge of the woods stood a small white church, its bell tower dwarfed by the tall snow-laden pines surrounding it. Inside, the church was alive with the hustle and bustle of busy people, accompanied by the chorus of their excited voices.

Many of the villagers had come to help the pastor get the church ready for the evening service. Some were spreading out embroidered linens; others were setting candles on the communion table and window sills. Some were making garlands out of holly leaves, bright red berries and long ribbons, and hanging them along all the windows and over all the pews. Another group was busy decorating the beautiful blue-green spruce tree, standing at the front of the church, with paper chains and popcorn strings.

The pastor looked about, content to see everyone working together

so happily. Even those gathering wood for the stove seemed happy and bright, their faces glowing as they came in from the cold. Soon, the pastor thought, she would ring the church's bell and begin their celebration of the Christ child's birth.

Just then, the pastor spied someone who did not look terribly happy. One child was working as hard as the others, but her face was long and sad.

"Joanna, what's wrong?" the concerned pastor asked. "I have nothing to give baby Jesus."

"But you have already given him something. You have given him

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Blowing Snow in the Rain:

Dear OVU and Covenant Church Friends:

We're heading into our second winter in the stunning Annapolis Valley and I'm taking stock of all my new experiences. Nova Scotia, and in particular our beautiful piece (peace?) of it, is so unique that there are things others may take for granted.

Simply driving down the Harvest Highway we pass through some small valleys granting a spectacular view of

the forests and their diversity of trees. I get to witness this each day and it never gets old. This autumn's beginnings displayed one of nature's own light shows as the leaves glowed with such a wide variety of colours – reds, purples, greens, browns, oranges and yellows; in many combinations of these... you get the idea. The sunrises and sunsets are stunning. I was overwhelmed by my first sunset looking over the Bay of Fundy from Hall's Harbour,

The Gift of Joy (continued)

this wood that will warm everyone coming to worship him tonight." "Oh, that's not enough," the girl sighed. "And I have nothing else to give." "Hmmm," said the pastor, but she said nothing more and let the girl return to her work.

The men and women soon finished their work and began gathering their children together, anxious to get them home to feed and dress them in time for the evening service.

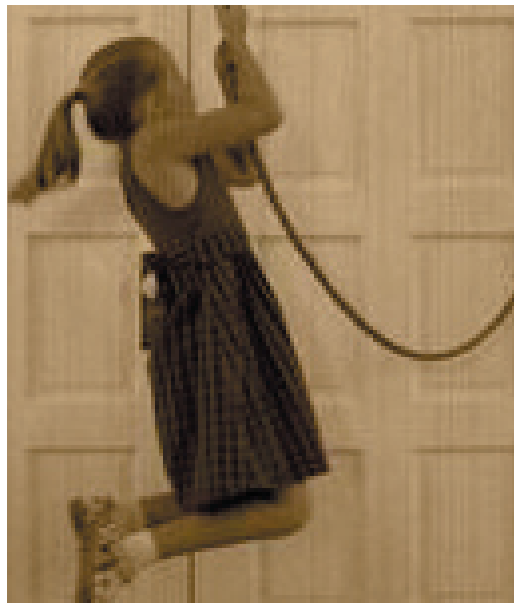
"Joanna," the pastor called just as the girl

was about to leave. "Can you be extra quick in getting ready? I'd like you to ring the bell tonight." Joanna's face lit up, her eyes sparkled and a smile stretched from ear to ear. "Oh, Pastor, I'd love to! I'll come as soon as I can."

Joanna was already running down the path when she called back, "Thank you! Thank you, Pastor!"

The pastor merely nodded, but her face too was bright and filled with joy.

Submitted by Andy Pitter



The Minister's Advent Message



and then again just this week simply looking to the end of our street.

We watched the convocation of eagles (I learned this is the

correct term) feed at Sheffield Mills. We looked over the valley from The Lookoff, walked on the ocean floor at Burntcoat Head, climbed several lighthouses (don't get many of those on the prairies), had lunch on the rocky shore of the Bay of Fundy over an open fire (scallops, of course), and the list goes on. There are less glamorous firsts too. I never had to blow snow in the rain before—that was new! Most of the storms we get here are a new and unique experience.

Each Sunday morning coming into Orchard Valley United Church also feels new. There are so many faces, many of them new, and the youth bringing new life into each day. You all look great! Preaching in a historic church, over 200 years old, was new. It was an honour, and a humbling experience--sensing the spirit of the

people from days gone by, their prayers clinging to the walls of the Covenanter Church.

With all this newness, I can't help but look forward to this Christmas, not as an anniversary, but as something yet again NEW this season. We are about to experience the new birth of a baby we call Jesus. It's going to be new, and it's going to be exciting.

This year, this new child is being born into our lives. Once again, we can experience all that a new child represents – promise, hope, joy, peace, and of course, love. As this new child, our Christ child, comes again into our lives, it's my prayer that we will rediscover the things unnoticed or previously walked past. That love not spoken is expressed, that forgiveness long overdue is given or requested, that belated or hesitant phone call is made; those of us who are hungry are seen and fed, those of us who are cold are witnessed and clothed, and our ill or imprisoned are remembered and visited. May our eyes be re-opened to the newness, the needs and the wonders this season can embody; like a newborn child.

Shalom, Rev. Don Sellsted

Council Chair's Advent Message

As Christmas fast approaches, it is a wonderful time to think about all the blessings that we have in our lives--those within our families as well as within our congregation.

As a congregation we have many blessings to be grateful for. We are lucky to have our minister Don and of course Cheryl, who seem to have taken to the Valley with great enthusiasm. We are also blessed with all of those who fill our church. Those who come to church and be the faithful people who seek to learn, laugh and love each week. We are blessed with those who fill the seats of our choir, who faithfully deliver wonderful voices each week for us to refresh our souls. Music does that for me, and I hope for you as well.

We are blessed with those who fill the seats of all our committees and our council who look after the day to day running of our church as well as the nurturing of souls through worship or Bible study or Christian Development, Sunday School or book groups.

We are blessed with those who offer stewardship in the devotion of the various skills and time that they give to our Church whether it be through knitting/crocheting of blankets/shawls for our prayer shawl ministry or the

preparation and delivery of meals through our Soup Luncheons and Y'all Come to Supper events. We are blessed by the children we see each week. Whether they come to the early service or the later service they offer us hope. Hope, not only for our church and faith community but also for our society as a whole. We hope that we are teaching lessons that will help mold our children into caring and loving adults for all peoples no matter who they are and where they come from. God loves each of us.

At this time of year families often try to spend time together and if you are so lucky to have family nearby or whom you can visit you are blessed. Many are not so fortunate. For many reasons, this time of year can be painful for people. They may have lost someone near and dear to them and this time of year for many can be a lonely time. Please remember to open your arms and enfold those among us or close to us who may need that extra little bit of care or attention this season.

As Advent arrives I hope we can all reach out to add some Hope, Joy, Love and Peace to those around us so that we can all celebrate as a family.

Blessings to all, Jane McDonald

Facilities Committee Seeks Feedback on Initial Design

by Harvey Gilmour

November 27 marked the sixth meeting between your Facilities Committee and the design architect, Cory McFadden of B. D. Stevens Ltd. Each meeting to date has made substantial progress toward an initial presentation to the congregation on Dec. 8. A short presentation will be made after the early service, with the major presentation scheduled for after the 11am service. The Committee, comprised of Carolyn Cameron, Jim Dewar, Cynthia Bruce, Helen Seymour, Harvey Gilmour, Don Sellsted and Council Chair Jane McDonald, will be alongside Cory to answer questions.

The Committee began its work over a year ago by incorporating the work of a previous committee that surveyed the congregation about future building location and functional priority hopes/expectations.

The four design pillars arising from their work, and upon which discussions have since been based, reflect clear priorities of music, Sunday school/youth, kitchen, and structural and sanctuary size and flexibility. As those in attendance on Dec. 8 will see, a sanctuary designed for up to 200 people, expandable to 250 for special occasions and through membership

growth, is possible through expansion. The footprint of the building will nearly double by extending it southeasterly into the Quality Concrete property to be gifted by B. D. Stevens Ltd.

Early financial parameters will be available for the basic design thus far, with major decisions lying ahead regarding environmental leadership, landscaping, equipment and interior options.

At this point, the Committee offers this initial design for information and asks for comment. The complete “package” will come to the congregation at a later date and then, further, will require approval of the UCC Region 15.

We are also cognizant of the opportunity we have to integrate, where possible, items in storage from our predecessor buildings. On behalf of the Facilities Committee, I want to thank the congregation for its patience and support to date. I hope you are as excited as we are about the future of our Church and about these plans.



An early design concept; recent modifications will be shown to the congregation on Dec. 8.

Christmas at Orchard Valley

Our Christmas Giving Tree is up and decorated in red bows at the back of the sanctuary. We hope you will share in transforming a joyful red tree to a peaceful white, by dedicating a bow in celebration of life, love, community, family and friends. We will acknowledge those dedications during the Advent Sunday services. Envelopes are available next to the tree. We are grateful for your joyful support.

Christmas Hamper Programs

– Please help the church fulfil its commitment of \$4000 to the Canning, Wolfville and New Minas/Kentville Christmas Hamper Programs.

UCW Christmas Luncheon

– **Mon. Dec. 2 at 12 pm (for 12:30).** The women of the OV-UCW have been invited to join those of the UCW Wolfville Unit for lunch at the Old Orchard Inn.

Christmas Soup and Dessert Luncheon

– **Tues. Dec. 3 from 11:45 am to 1:00 pm.** We'll be serving a choice of Sausage and Squash Soup or Cream of Broccoli Soup, biscuits, tea/coffee, and Sticky Date Pudding for \$8.

Men's Fellowship Luncheon

– **Fri. Dec. 13 at 12 pm.** All men are most cordially invited to a Christmas

Luncheon. Cost is \$5. Please sign up on the appropriate sheet in the Narthex. Our speaker is Ms. Dale Sanford. Dale will tell us all about the Valley Hospice. For more information, please speak to Dave Murphy, Ian Godfrey or Chris Seymour.

White Gift Sunday and Sunday School

Pageant – Dec. 15. Are you ready for Christmas? We ask each other this all through Advent, but what are we really getting ready for? Our Sunday School students will present a short play that explores what it means to get ready for Christmas. We hope to see you all then.

The Women's Breakfast Group's Annual Christmas Breakfast

– **Fri. Dec. 20 at 9 am.** Free will offering. We will be providing some light Christmas entertainment for your enjoyment.

Longest Night Service

– **Sun. Dec. 22 at 7 pm** The Advent season is one of wonder. For so many it is a time of hopeful anticipation and promise. The longer nights and the gray clouds seem to provide the perfect background for the lights and the tinsel.

But for many, Christmas is a harsh reminder of life that once was. So, we gather not so much in hopeful anticipation, but in the

cloud of despondency. While so many are ready to sing, “Joy to the World,” at Blue Christmas we gather as those who mourn.

We gather to carve out a time of quiet reflection. We gather to shed tears if they come, to hold hands if they are available, and to know that we are not alone. Whether this is the first Christmas without someone you love, or if you seem to be hurting from loss for as long as you remember, we gather to be reminded that it’s okay to mourn, even at Christmas.

The Month Before Christmas – by Ken Hassell

‘Tis the month before Christmas, the chimes
and the choir

Are busy in practice right down to the wire!
All the choristers work to sing only fine
notes.

I think some do home practice in their
comfy housecoats!

We’re all looking forward to December 22.
The cantata is that day; yes, please be there
too!

On this Christmas Eve, our fine chimes will
be rung

Along with the choir, Still, Still, Still will be
sung –

At 6 o’clock here at our OVUC, and later at
Grand Pre!

How busy they’ll be!

We’re all looking forward to this
Christmastime,

This info is finished ‘cause I’m out of rhyme!

**Christmas Eve Service at the
Covenanter Church – Tues. Dec. 24
at 11 pm.** As you come up the hill
on a cold wintery night, the candles in
the windows will beckon you to come
immerse yourself in the atmosphere of
this over 200-year-old church building.

Soft organ music by Ken Hassell
will welcome you, contributing to
a relaxing prelude to the evening
while people are greeting one another.
The ministers, Rev. Don Sellsted
and Rev. Tim McFarland, our choir
and local community members
will be poised to begin the service.

Caroline Burton will open the
service with “O Holy Night”. The
service of scripture, poetry, carols
and candle lighting will flow along
without introductions, allowing the
congregation to enter into a calming,
peaceful reflection. The service
will close in a contemplative mood
with the singing of “Silent Night”.

Many people come from far and
wide, year after year, to join with their
family and friends in a reunion that
has become a special tradition. Parking
spaces beside and behind the church
have a lit path to the door. In front of
the church, parking is available only
on the church side of the street.

OVU to Become Affirming Church

by Vicky Austin

“Affirming Ministries provide information, acceptance, support and justice-making for people of all sexual orientations and gender identities and for people exploring their place on the spectrum of human sexuality. These ministries declare, in words and actions, that God loves and celebrates all people. And they call upon the rest of the church and society to do the same.

Through a process of discernment and reflection, Affirming Ministries discover what it means to be inclusive and justice-seeking. They prepare a statement of faith and vision that sets out their ongoing commitment to work for justice on issues of gender diversity and sexual orientation within their congregation, the wider church, and their community, and to support and participate in the Affirming Ministries Program.” (Open Hearts: Resources for Affirming Ministries in the United Church of Canada)

Your OVUC Affirming Committee first met in April 2019 after receiving approval to proceed from Council, followed by congregational approval at the March 2019 AGM.

Eight of us have met regularly and worked diligently over the intervening

months to understand and appreciate the scope of the process we have undertaken. We are making every effort

to educate ourselves so that we can become strong allies and advocates for the 2SLGBTQ+ community. We are reminded of Orchard Valley’s Mission “to deepen our spiritual understanding and reach out to others through worship and socially just action.” To provide a safe space for all.

The Committee recently had an afternoon educational session facilitated by the Valley Youth Project that covered Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation. We may have a follow-up session: Creating Safer Spaces for 2SLGBTQ+ Communities.

In early 2020, we will be hosting a workshop for all interested OVUC members. It will focus on the role of scripture in discussions of sexual orientation and gender identity.

We are on an exciting and challenging journey together towards inclusivity in our “open hearted” welcome and in our worship. Please browse the Affirming page at orchardvalleyunited.ca for our mandate, contacts and resource materials.

