



Oct 1992

OUR NEWSLETTER

Welcome to the second issue of our *new* kind of newsletter!

Our cover shows some of the smiling faces of St. John's, as photographed at our planning meeting on October 18. We hope that many of those smiling faces will soon become subscribers.

Becoming subscribers is the core of our new idea of a newsletter. Our idea isn't a different layout or different kinds of articles: our new idea involves **YOU!**

This is the last issue of a newsletter which we will distribute in a general way. In December, we will only mail or give the newsletter to those people who have told us they want to receive it. That's the price of subscription - some contact from you to us saying you want to continue receiving it.

You can contact either Maggie Pawson (763-2266) or Mike Maunder (961-1521), or simply put your name on the centre page and get it to the Church.

Why are we doing it this way?

We find that most people get quite enough junk mail these days, and we don't want to send this publication to people who are not interested. We are worried about the effect that today's constant barrage of information has on people, and we don't want to be part of the problem: we want to be part of a solution.

We believe that the barrage of media and information coming at people results in them becoming passive receivers. Meaningful action becomes separated from thought. There are intellectuals like Marshall McLuhan and Noam Chomsky, who maintain that this is an intended effect of mass media: as people get numbed by the avalanche of information, they cease to care and cease to be active, (unless it's media entertainment, like the Blue Jays!)

That's probably a major reason that people voted "No" to the Peterson Government and may very well vote "No" in the Referendum: they get so much information and so little chance for action: they feel bypassed, powerless and frustrated. Something like the Referendum comes along, and they get power, even if it's only the power of rejection.

You can say "No" to this newsletter, too, simply by not doing anything. To say "Yes", we ask you to contact us. This is our new idea, to have a newsletter that gets our community involved and active.

In saying all this, we also recognize that the church takes up a small piece of most peoples' lives, and this newsletter can be expected to take up an even smaller piece. We think we can produce a newsletter which will be worth focusing your attention on St. John's and its community for maybe ten minutes every two months. And, in following out philosophy of active participation, we hope this ten minutes will lead you to do more.

1. We'll end several stories each issue with suggested things to do. Try one of them out!
2. Get involved by giving us your opinions, comments and responses.
3. As a *minimum*, let us know by December if you want to continue receiving this newsletter.

We hope to produce this newsletter five times a year (October, December, February, April and June). Each edition will contain one large story - **Our Community** - and a number of smaller stories. June's **Community** story was about seniors in the church, and how they are often marginalized. In this issue, we are writing about another group of people who are marginalized in today's society, and the efforts of many people in the Parish to change that.

The centre section - **Your Response** - is the most important part of the newsletter for us, and the part which will determine whether the newsletter

is succeeding. It will feature your opinions, comments, responses and participation in the newsletter. Five people responded to June's newsletter: we hope many more will respond to us now. ***Write to us or phone us: we promise to either answer you or print you!***

The stories in the section **Our Church** are starting to take shape. In December, we hope there will be less about us and more about important issues being worked out in the Parish, upcoming events, "Pages from Our Past", and more.

And now, about us.....The newsletter is co-edited by Mike Maunder and Maggie Pawson. This issue has been typed by Cynthia Stoddart-Webster and produced for distribution by Lynda Woolrich.

Mike arrived at St. John's last November. He was a teacher for 18 years, and works now at odd jobs in teaching and writing. This year he is learning a great deal, both as a student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and as someone who is searching spiritually. He finds St. John's a place where others are asking questions and trying to be a community.

Maggie has been a member of St. John's for 4 years. Married and the mother of three, she spends much of her time pondering the need for hope, and how the church does or does not answer that need. Former Executive Assistant for the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Maggie is now the Chairperson of our Outreach Committee.

Cynthia has been with St. John's for 8 years. She owns a Human Resources and Employment Equity consulting company and is a co-ordinator for the Youth Group. Lynda is on a journey that presently takes her on a path with the pilgrims of St. John's.

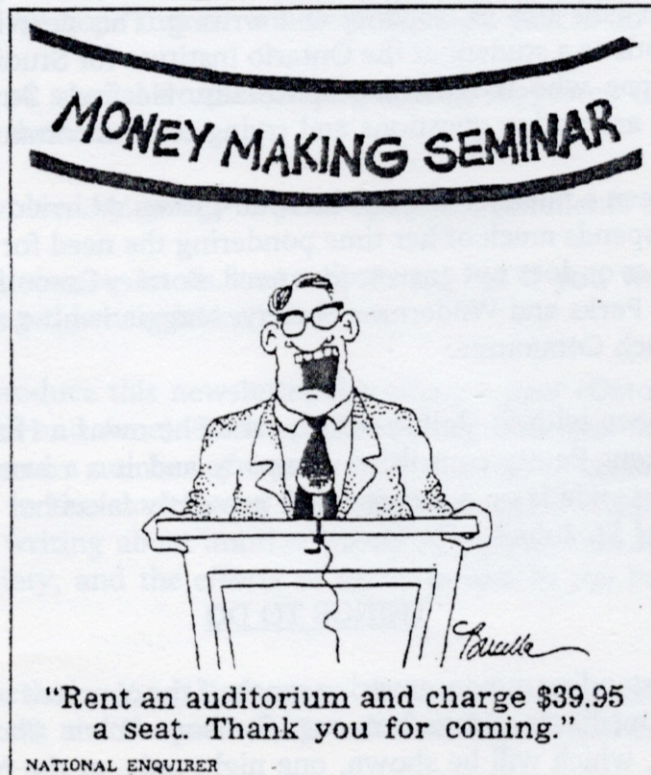
THINGS TO DO

1. An outstanding movie, covering much of the concerns we've expressed about media is "*Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*", which will be shown, one night only, at the National Film

Board theatre on October 29. It is a film version of Noam Chomsky's fairly cerebral musings about the media, and is much easier to understand than any of his 40 books. Chomsky is "arguably the most important intellectual alive", according to the New York Times, a newspaper he despises. The show is well worth watching. The visit to NFB at 150 John Street, can also get you free membership for their library of videos.

2. We would **STILL** like to start a regular feature in the newsletter, called "Critics' Choice", a guide to movies, magazines and TV, to help our readers wade through media overload. We need 3-4 readers who are willing to form a club, meet occasionally, and give us a list every two months of what's upcoming. Anyone interested?

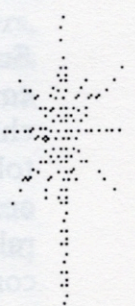
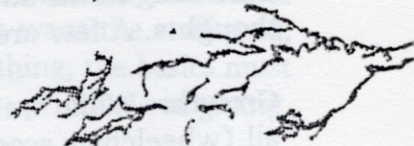
Some Advice to the Finance Committee





OUR CHURCH

- Oct 30 **Bible Studies**
Tom and Judy Wolever are hosting bible studies at their home every Friday night through November. Phone Lynda at the Church Office (763-2393) if you'd like to join the fellowship.
- Nov 15 Priest/Musician **Kelly Walker** will be join us for a forum on *Music in Our Church* following the Eucharist.
- Nov 24 A Bach concert in support of St. John's Trust, at Rosedale Presbyterian Church. Tickets \$22.00: phone 485-9574.
- Nov 27-29 **Life-Sharing Workshop** - co-sponsored by St. John's Trust and West Toronto Deanery (see this month's story in the Community Section). This is the first in a series of events around the theme of life sharing. For more info, contact David Holmes (538-7037).
- Nov 28 **HOLLY TEA**
- Dec 6 Forum on **Native Spirituality** following the Eucharist
- Dec 8 High Park Girls' Choir
- Dec 20 Christmas Pageant & Decoration Party
- Dec 24 10.30 p.m: Christmas Eve Eucharist & Collation
- Dec 25 10.30 a.m: **CHRISTMAS DAY EUCHARIST**
- Dec 31 Proposed New Year's Party



PLANNING & THE FUTURE

In 1991, St John's parishioners attended a meeting at which our parish story was told. The outcome was an eagerness that the story continue to be written, that the parish continue to grow.

In May 1992, a further meeting was held, at which time we identified four major areas to be discussed later: **growth, support for existing members, liturgical space and finances.** On October 18th the parish looked again at the four areas, assessing what we have done, what needs to be done and identifying where we as individuals and as members of St. John's want to put our energy.

In order to have the opportunity for everyone to speak, smaller circles were formed and the native ritual of the "talking stick" was adopted. This rite gave all present a chance to speak, or not, uninterrupted and without comment. Gathering in the large group after the small circle experience, we shared our thoughts. A few are highlighted here:

Growth: While we see St. John's as welcoming and tolerant, accessible to all (wheelchair access) and committed to the daycare, there is much to do. We have yet to share our resources with other parishes, we do not offer enough education, we have not ministered to the "lapsed" members of our parish family, nor formed a relationship with the local school. What do we offer to new members?

Support for Existing Members: The Christian Education Committee continues to work hard to involve the whole parish in its program, the children continue to take an active role in our church. Perhaps more tolerance should be shown to those who do not want to participate in certain areas. Do we as a parish compromise enough, at all? We address issues relating to all people in our seminars and forums. The Prayer Chain offers continuing support. Most are willing to participate in the liturgy, and we are a welcoming community.

Have we addressed the negative aspects of our decisions, some of which resulted in losing members? Have they been contacted? Why are there so few senior citizens? Are we doing enough for those in our church community who do not have children? What do our locked doors say to our own members and to those who may seek sanctuary? Do we offer or receive enough spiritual support?

Liturgical Space: In the area of liturgy we are mostly pleased. The services are a hit with us: we involve children, youth, special groups. However, it is felt that people need space to participate or not. It is no longer clear where we are going. There is much unused, empty space in the church. In the second circle on this topic, many parishioners discussed ideas on how church space could be better utilized to serve the many small groups that make up the parish. Can we make the front entrance more welcoming? Can a consultation process help us redesign some of our space?

Finances: Least talked about, but not the least important are the finances of our parish. We do not like to speak about money, but want the staff paid, the lighting and heating functional. To accomplish anything, the basics must be met! As parish, we must define our financial needs, prioritize our giving, and be kept informed about our financial situation.

Youth: The Youth Group has earned the right to speak out, and did. Though not "up" on financial matters in the church, they are willing to learn. They would like to encourage resource-sharing with other parishes. The Youth Group offers support for parish activities: making candles, delivering flyers, fundraising, helping in the Church School, babysitting as needed. Individuals would like to continue this support - and invited support for themselves from people who were not parents of Youth Group members.

A surprise to no-one, the meeting ran a bit late! Though there was not time to discuss where we might put our energy, we left with much to think about, and with great hopes for the future!

PAGES FROM OUR PAST

I was asked to share some brief notes about our more recent history in the Toronto West Deanery with you, so here it is, in a page!

After many years of growth and stability, many changes occurred suddenly in the High Park area during the '60's and '70's. Substantial numbers of older homes were demolished and replaced by high rise apartments and condominiums, occupied for the most-part by non-church affiliated residents. Many of the remaining houses were sold to new Canadians of varied ethnic background and church loyalties. Of course, this tremendous change affected not only St. John's parish, but all of our associate southern-Deanery churches, too.

In 1978, to address this situation we were included in a formal, published Diocesan study made of the Toronto-West Deanery. (A similar study was also conducted in Toronto-East Deanery.) The objective was to determine the future - possible amalgamations, closures, multi-use community use of church facilities, etc. Meetings and planning sessions abounded! This was not a false alarm, but all of the churches concerned have survived well!

Again, in the early '80's, St. John's and our three Anglican neighbours entered into discussions, instigated by the Diocese, to decide on the viability of continuing as four separate parish entities. This phase occurred when St. John's was operating without a designated Priest-in-Charge. Quite a challenge! Every parish was able to make a statement so sufficiently positive as to convince the Diocese that problems could be overcome, and each would continue in their own unique ministries.

And so we have evolved at St. John's. Our own unique ministry grows, changes, and will again overcome any perceived problems of the '90's.

Joan Devitt

OUR COMMUNITY: THE ST. JOHN'S TRUST

St. John's consists of many communities: seniors, young families, communities of interest around music, bible study, liturgy and social activity. But there is one group of people within St. John's who have been struggling harder than most for many years in an effort to build a unique kind of community.

They are the families whose children carry the label of various "disabilities". For these families, the struggle to find places where they can freely belong began years ago as the "disabilities" label began closing more and more doors to them - schools that segregated their children into classrooms for "disabilities"; swimming pools and recreation programs that couldn't handle their "special needs"; even churches that asked them to leave because of the children's behaviour.

They formed circles of friends around themselves - to help cope with day-to-day realities, to help find alternatives that did not involve institutions and sending their children away, and to help answer the terrible question that loomed in all their futures: who will look after my child? In the midst of the soul-searching and the search for alternatives, one set of doors in society did open wide for them - here at St. John's Church.

Four years ago, the Marmura family, the Helleiner family and the Mohler family began attending St. John's regularly and found themselves and their children accepted. The magic of those early days, of finding a place to belong, is still recalled by all of them: parish members welcoming and sitting with them in the service, invitations for their children to meals, the simple act of belonging to a Cub pack, Peter and Colin adding their own style to serving at the Eucharist, the formation of a parish trust fund to help get government funding, bake sales and garage sales and special birthday parties, Father Robert and Brother William offering special support, the arrival of Richard and Lynda Woolrich to help in home support for Tim.

What brought the families together was acceptance and a sense of belonging conveyed by St. John's parishioners. This acceptance sustained them in a dream they had of establishing a new kind of community.

The families, along with friend and co-ordinator, David Holmes, moved into West Toronto neighbourhoods. Specifics vary from family to family, but in general their dream was to buy homes into which their children could eventually move as they grew older, to form circles of friends around them, and to find people who would share the homes and help support the children in their lives. In social worker parlance, this dream translates into terms like establishing group homes, building networks and hiring service providers for clients. This isn't the dream.

Central to the dream is a value that doesn't translate well in the social worker vocabulary: a spiritual value - the value of community, of living and sharing together, of simply belonging. Four years ago, the people of St. John's came closer than anyone ever has to providing that part of the dream.

It's a relationship of equals: it's not "special needs" people, leaning on their strong brothers, but simply friends, all learning from one another, appreciating one another, and accepting one another. It's a value that communities for the disabled such as Jean Vanier's L'Arche and Rudolf Steiner's Camphill strive for. However the St. John's families dream of this community, not off in an idyllic setting separate from the world, but in the middle of a west Toronto neighbourhood - indeed, in the middle of St. John's church.

It's a difficult dream.

Unfortunately, when dreams are translated into the language of social workers and trust funds, they have a tendency to die. So far, the translation of the dream hasn't been successful.

St. John's Trust (actually named the "West End Special Needs Support Group") is the corporate entity that was formed in 1990 in the hope of raising money to help supplement mortgages and living costs. The Trust is

falling on hard times. Provincial cutbacks make it unlikely the Trust will receive any government funding. Other fund raising is going slowly. Communities depend on interpersonal relationships, and some of the key St. John's people surrounding the Trust have changed in the last two years, including pioneers like Father Robert and Brother William.

The practice of the "circle of friends" which the Helleiner family has incorporated successfully into their daily life for the last ten years, is not a concept that's officially accepted. A recent grant request from a similar "circle" was turned down because the results of the circle approach were not quantifiable and measurable in the way social programs are supposed to be. However, the international newsletter of the Camphill residence near Barrie, which Peter now attends during the week, has praised his circle as the most effective example of the technique they've ever seen.

The Camphill program is one of the best in existence, but it is still not the dream that either Georgia or Gerry have for their son. As formidable as the obstacles are, they continue to hope and work towards the dream of a neighbourhood home for Peter.

Recently, at the October meeting of the Trust, Christian Swayne described a similar dream. His dream was using parish land to construct some kind of a co-op which could involve seniors, special needs people and people without labels living together in a supportive way. There is no doubt that such co-ops and ways of life-sharing are growing in today's society, often on church properties.

But translating dreams into reality is not easy stuff. One person who has triumphed over the labels she carried is Toronto consultant Judith Snow, presently involved with similar co-op projects. In one of her books, she described how society seems to pick and choose the dreams it supports. If a child is labelled "Olympic" material, it takes the active support of dozens of people over many years to realize that dream. Similarly, the dream of children labelled with "disabilities" to live as part of their community will only happen with the intentional effort and the simple friendship of dozens of people.

St. John's is a parish that believes in welcoming people and building community. In today's society, building any kind of community is not something that happens naturally or easily, it takes an intentional effort. Years ago, when neighbourhoods and villages still existed, it was simply the way people lived. Now, people move around a lot; we don't know our neighbours; the extended family of grandparents, parents and children is a thing of the past. We often live in pseudo-communities: housing developments marketed as neighbourhoods; apartment complexes with their social centre and swimming pool; Sam and Diane and all the gang at "Cheers". There is a real hungering today for real community; people bound together by common concerns and a sense of belonging.

The families of the St. John's Trust serve for all of us as a prophetic community as they seek to find simply that for their families.

THINGS TO DO

1. Life Sharing with People Who Are Marginalized is the topic of a three day workshop to be held at St. John's from Friday, Nov. 27 to Sunday, Nov. 29. The workshop is open to about 40 people and is being sponsored by the West Toronto deanery. Keynote speaker will be D'Arcy Elks, a teacher and workshop leader from Syracuse, NY, who has long been active in special needs communities. Participants will end the workshop by hosting a forum discussion on the same topic with parishioners following the Sunday Eucharist. Contact David Holmes (538-7037) to attend the workshop, or plan to stay Sunday afternoon for the forum.

2. Circles of Friends, by Robert and Martha Perske, offers some good stories of how circles work from the viewpoint of kids with disabilities. It's available from Welch Publishing, 960 The Gateway, Burlington. A quote:

"Teach, Heal, Supervise, Evaluate, Instruct.... After an overfull schedule of such relationships, try to sense how you might feel if you suddenly found a friend who:

- Became attracted to you exactly as you are.
- Just liked being with you.
- And never - repeat, **Never** - felt the need to fix you."

YOUR RESPONSE

Your response to the first issue of St. John's "reworked" newsletter was not overwhelming, but very positive. Only five people responded - and are now our first registered subscribers! The detail and depth of articles was appreciated, the layout approved, and those who returned the response sheet wanted more of the same.



Among the suggestions:

1. The newsletter should be more spiritual;
2. The main article was too "social work" oriented;
3. The article on seniors did not acknowledge the work St. John's has done on a personal as well as a parish level.

In this, our second issue, we again include a response sheet. Please take the time to fill it in and return it to Mike or myself, so that we may continue to improve the newsletter. Suggest story ideas or features you'd like to see.

Maggie

COMMENTS ON NEWSLETTER

I liked:

I didn't like:

I would like to see:

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

COMMENTS ON PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

If you'd like to share your ideas on some of the issues discussed on October 18th, read the story and jot down your thoughts here. We'll pass them on to the facilitators.

I liked:

I didn't like:

I would like to see:

This month's contest will challenge you to get to know some St. John's parishioners. Select 5 faces that you do not know from our front and back cover, and collect their autographs. The winner will receive a handsome autographed original photograph by the same world-renowned photographer.

