

## Newsletter Items for Sept 26

Welcome to "Embracing the Rainbow: Supporting Same-Sex Relationships in our Church." If you receive this newsletter on the day of our event, we hope that our boldness (that's the culture of St. John's - we are not a beige congregation!) will help you to listen deeply. We hope you will share our vision of a God who loves all of us, and grow in your faith through this experience. We plan to debrief from "Embracing the Rainbow" and talk about "where we should go from here" on Sunday, October 3, after the 10:30 service.

If you receive this newsletter after these dates, we invite you to ask us how it went. And furthermore, we invite you to read on. These are words of hope and encouragement, and you will learn a lot about what is important to the people at St. John's.

## FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Friends,

Let's reconsider the word "**Open**"

As we see the parish mission statement on the cover of the Sunday bulletin every week, I am amazed at the power of repeated words to sink into my mind. I like our mission statement. Over the past while, the phrase "You will find open minds and open hearts at St. John's" has particularly been at work inside me. People often ask me for a card, and I included "**OPEN MINDS + OPEN HEARTS**" on my first order of "business" cards.

Then along came Doors Open Toronto. Three years ago, we piggybacked on this event to show our newly repainted church to all the people coming from Humberside Collegiate. We called it Open Doors because we were not on the official tour. The next year, we applied to be officially on the tour, and we entitled our devotional guide to the windows "Open Doors and Open Windows." By then, I was ready to place a new order for business cards, and I changed the slogan to "**OPEN MINDS + OPEN HEARTS + OPEN DOORS.**"

I gave a card to an American, who pointed out to me that this is also the slogan of the United Methodist Church, one of the largest Protestant denominations in the United States. Initially I was disappointed because I thought we were being original, but it began to occur to me that the word "OPEN" is in the air. I began to notice it everywhere. The latest was a poster plastered all over the place, entitled "The Scream in High Park." This is an annual festival of the spoken word, which uses the slogan, "OPEN MIND. OPEN BOOK. OPEN AIR."

I see the word OPEN all over the place in church too:

- In our **liturgy**, "Almighty God, to you all hearts are open..."
- In our **hymns**, "Open now the crystal fountain, whence the healing stream doth flow..." (Guide me, O Thou Great Jehovah 565); "Open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth thou hast for me..." (Green Book, 82)
- In our **Bible**: The serpent says to Eve that if she eats the fruit, her eyes will be opened, and she will be like God, knowing the difference between good and evil. Jesus opened the eyes of the blind, and evidently, the eyes of the inwardly blind. Jesus says, "Ask, and it will be given to you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."

- In our **windows**: In the narthex, the sixteenth window of our tour is based on the famous painting of William Holman Hunt, "The Light of the World." Jesus is knocking at a door that has no handle, and with intentional symbolism, Hunt intends the viewer to open his or her life to the Divine Master.
- In the **issues** raised in our church: A number of people have mentioned to me the concept of the **Open Table**. This phrase represents a change in our Anglican tradition whereby people are welcomed to receive communion prior to baptism, if they desire the intimacy of closeness to God in their life. While we were taught in confirmation that baptism is the initiation needed to receive communion, a number of Anglican parishes welcome everyone to receive communion. The sacrament is then to work in their hearts until they are ready to make a public profession of faith by being baptized. I have asked the clergy of parishes that practice this new tradition, and they did not ask permission, they simply agreed together as a community and revised their practice. Our bulletin still says, "All baptized Christians are welcome to receive the Holy Eucharist," but I have welcomed dialogue about this when you have raised it.

At some point, I began to see the word OPEN as expressing an important value to our St. John's community. And I began to "work it" and use the word intentionally. For example, when we developed our own parish prayer for the Anglican Rosary, we incorporated this prayer:

*Open my eyes, O Christ, to see you.  
Open my ears, O Christ, to hear you.  
Open my heart, O Christ, to love you.  
Open my hands, O Christ, to serve you.*

During the visit of **Bishop Thabo** and **Lungi Makgoba** from the Diocese of Grahamstown, they participated in our Tuesday early Morning Prayer service, which includes the Anglican Rosary. Lungi seized upon the idea of making Rosaries, as an ideal income generating craft for the women of the Townships in post-Apartheid South Africa. Bishop Thabo told me, with pleasure, that he used the above prayer to introduce his sermon at St. James' Cathedral.

I think we live the word OPEN at St. John's. We make an effort to have open minds: to weigh new information, to keep ourselves from judging others. We have open hearts: we are easily moved by issues of justice, the human face on the horrors of our world, the immediacy of real people, as seen in our passion to make St. John's a safe and loving place. We have open doors: we open them often, we try to make people feel welcome, we try not to have gatekeepers.

But my understanding has changed. We passed motions endorsing same-sex blessings at our vestry meeting. Prior to "the vote" people informed us that they could not stay – several people – because they anticipated the majority position. I have come to appreciate that OPEN MINDS meant (to them) that we didn't have an official opinion on same-sex relationships. Oddly enough I thought it was pretty clear in the rest of the mission statement: "...We are married, single, divorced, straight and gay. We are from all over the world, yet we could live next door..." Maybe OPEN MINDS meant we could "sit on the fence" for this one.

OPEN MINDS has done battle with OPEN DOORS and the OPEN DOORS won. So did the OPEN HEARTS. **We no longer have open minds on whether God welcomes same-sex couples.** We have decided. We are satisfied that it is consistent with scripture and the evolving tradition of the church for the church to support same-sex relationships. We believe that the love of God is shown to us in a special way through the love of one other person, regardless of that person's gender.

If we are to keep this slogan, we now need to reclaim the phrase OPEN MINDS. What are we prepared to mean by it? Can open minds mean we are always listening and learning? We support gay and lesbian relationships. But we do not yet fully appreciate – as a community – how they differ and how

*they are the same as heterosexual relationships. We do not appreciate the pressures on gay and lesbian relationships in a world that still has a lot of prejudice. We do not yet appreciate how the active presence of gay and lesbian couples as members of St. John's might change our outlook and our priorities.*

*The word OPEN is in the air. It is part of the groundswell inside and outside the church. May God guide us in this new path:*

*Open my ears that I may hear voices of truth thou sendest clear,  
And while the wave-notes fall on my ear, ev'rything false will disappear.  
Silently now I wait for thee, ready my God thy will to see;  
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!*

Yours in faith,  
+Gary

## **FROM THE WARDENS**

***"The mission of St. John's Church is to build a community of caring believers committed to Christ to work for justice and service to all in need. We believe Christ calls us to work towards the full acceptance of gays and lesbians in the church and in society, taking action as appropriate to the situations before us, according to our means and resources."***

With these words, St. John's stepped beyond not only supporting the blessing of same-sex relationships, but to be supportive of these relationships regardless of whether they have received a formal recognition by the Church. Through "Embracing the Rainbow" we are taking another step in our affirmation of the importance of these relationships, through listening and dialogue about the important relationships in all our lives. Through these discussions, we hope we will be better able to be supportive and understanding of the challenges and joys of same sex relationships, both within our church community and in our daily lives.

As a congregation, we actively believe that all relationships grounded in mutual love and respect are a gift from God that should be nurtured, cherished and supported. This event is another step in our journey of our "work towards the full acceptance of gays and lesbians". We hope that you will continue that journey using what we learn through our discussions today.

Jim Crummey, John Mohler, Chris Barnett, Lynn McCleary

## **A Letter to the People of St. John's from Marque Smith**

Dear Friends at St. John's,

I just wanted to take a moment to thank all of you for making my first year at your church an abundant blessing. What a pleasure to share the gift of music with you.

This has been a transitional period in my life, as I have become more open about my sexual orientation. As many of you know, it has been a struggle for me to be a homosexual in other churches that taught that I am an abomination. Coming out to you at St. John's has been a positive step in becoming a completely liberated person. I feel renewed, restored and revived as a result and I am ready to press on toward the mark!

I am becoming more secure in my sexuality and do not seek to justify it. I am happy that God has made me who I am. I am happy to be a gay man.

When I first heard that you were planning this event "Embracing the Rainbow", I mentioned to Father Gary that I hope I am in a relationship by then! I know your inclusiveness and sensitivity will be a great blessing to gay and lesbian couples, but I am really glad to know that you welcome and include single people. We have different issues, and we also need support. I did not find a partner in time, but I take comfort from something my late grandmother Mabel Bailey used to say, "God will provide someone for you when he is ready." I know that there is a special man for me, and when he appears, I hope I will recognize him.

Let me share with you a poem that I wrote during this transitional year of growing self-acceptance:

Me

*Oh such joy that I have in my life  
As I continue to remove all the strife  
Which permeates my heart, soul and mind  
And replace it with things happy and kind.*

*My days are filled with excitement and peace  
I am glad for the time when I fully release  
All the tensions that build up inside me  
And convert into a time when I am totally free.*

*My joy is playing the piano and singing  
These two tasks are both rewarding and fulfilling  
Music for me is a kaleidoscope of sound  
It's part of my identity for which I'm grateful I've found.*

*Life is about passion and desire  
Which are the elements that light my fire  
As I continue on a journey to embark  
I will be who I am: The person named Marque.*

As we look to the future, I invite us all to continue to transcend our thinking and to support one another.

Warmest regards and blessings,

Marque Smith

*Marque Smith is one a regular visitor on our music roster at St. John's. He is a member of the Nathaniel Dett Chorale. Marque was recently appointed Music Director of the Caribbean Chorale of Toronto.*

### **WHAT DOES A SAME-SEX BLESSING LOOK LIKE?**

At St. John's, we are considering how to make our desire to be inclusive more sensitive and real for gays and lesbians. We want to be welcoming and supportive to people in same-sex relationships, as an issue of justice. We have already decided that we want to be able to bless same-sex relationships at St. John's. We'd like to do this "right away" and some in our community have expressed impatience about waiting for the rest of the church to catch up. But we are waiting, and as we know about the themes of the Advent Season, waiting has its own gifts. We want to wait productively!

It may have occurred to you that if same-sex blessings are happening already, we can learn how it is done. The Diocese of New Westminster in British Columbia has published a liturgy, entitled "The Celebration and Blessing of a Same Sex Union, with the Holy Eucharist." Here is a "Walking Tour."

***You may find it helpful, for comparison purposes, to refer to page 528 on the Book of Alternative Services, "The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage, with the Holy Eucharist."***

The Same Sex Blessing begins with **The Gathering of the Community**. The couple stand before the presider, along with their sponsors, and as in the marriage service, the presider greets the people, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ..." After the people respond, "And also with you," the presider makes the following declaration:

Beloved people of God, we have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the covenant of love and fidelity which *NN* and *NN* have made with each other. The union of two persons in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for their mutual joy; for the help and comfort given one another in prosperity and adversity; and that their love may be a blessing to all whom they encounter. This solemn covenant is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and with the commitment to seek God's will for their lives."

After the readings and sermon, the presider addresses the couple, "*NN* and *NN*, what do you seek?" They say together, "We come before God, you and this community; believing that we belong to each other and together we belong to God. We ask for God's blessing and the blessing of the church on our life together." The presider then asks each partner in turn, "*NN*, will you share your love and life with *NN*, your wholeness and brokenness, your joys and your sorrows, your health and your sickness, your riches and your poverty, your success and your failure, and be faithful to him/her so long as you both shall live?" Each responds, "I will."

The presider asks those present to declare their support:

Will you, the families, friends and faith community of *NN* and *NN*, promise to honour and uphold them in their life together; to recognize them as a household; to guide and pray for them in times of trouble; to celebrate with them in times of joy; to respect the bounds of their covenant; and to seek to discern the continuing presence of God in their lives?"

After the community has responded, "We will, with God's help," the presider asks a further question: "Do you give them your blessing?" The people respond, "We do."

The presider declares that the couple has been "duly prepared to enter into this relationship. They have stated their intent, they will exchange solemn vows, and in token of this, they will (each) symbol(s) of their vows." The community is invited to pray that, "by God's help, they may fulfill God's purpose for the whole of their earthly life together."

O God our Creator, lover of heaven and earth, you have taught us to love each other as Christ loved us, to bear each other's burdens, and to share each other's strengths. Look with favour upon *NN* and *NN*, whom you have brought together in love. Grant them sincere love and unflinching strength. Protect them in their life and in their work, and lead them with us and all creation into your realm of justice and peace. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

For the vows, the couple face each other in full view of the congregation, and taking each other's hands, each says to the other in turn;

*NN*, I give myself (again) to you. I love you, I trust you, I delight in you. I will bear your burdens, I will share your joys, and I will go with you wherever God calls us. This is my solemn vow.

After the vows, there are four further questions for the couple: “*NN* and *NN*, do you believe God has called you to live together in love?” “Will you continue to be faithful to each other?” “Will you, under God, recognize each other’s freedom to grow as individuals and allow each other time and space to do so?” “Will you do all in your power to make your life together a witness to the love of God in the world?”

Several options are given for the blessing of rings, one almost the same as in the marriage service, another asking God to bless the rings as “enduring signs of *NN*’s and *NN*’s commitment to each other, and a further prayer which acknowledges that they may have worn their rings for a long time: “May God bless these rings already worn down by years of shared work, play, quiet, companionship, and joy. May they be an outward sign of God’s indwelling grace in your love.” They place the ring on each other’s ring finger with the same vow as the marriage service. (see B.A.S., page 532)

The prayers of the people include the following biddings: “Look with favour upon the world you have made, and for which your son Jesus gave his life, and especially on these two persons whose covenant you bless.” “Give them wisdom and devotion in the ordering of their common life, that each may be to the other a strength in need, a counselor in perplexity, a comfort in sorrow, and a companion in joy.” “Grant that their wills may be so knit together in your will, and their spirits in your Spirit, that they may grow in love and peace with you and one another all the days of their lives.” “Make their life together a sign of Christ’s love to this broken world, that unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness heal guilt, and joy conquer despair.” “Give them such fulfillment of their mutual affection that they may reach out in love and concern for others.” “Grant that we who have witnessed these vows may find our lives strengthened and our loyalties confirmed.”

The “**Blessing of Union**” is the same prayer as the “Blessing of Marriage” (see B.A.S., page 534 top) with a few small changes. The phrase, “We thank you, also, for consecrating the union of man and woman in his name,” is removed from the prayer. In place of “pour out the abundance of your blessing upon this man and this woman”, the prayer states, “pour out your abundant blessing upon *NN* and *NN*.” The B.A.S. includes a second option for blessing that is not found in the new liturgy, but both conclude with the identical final blessing. (B.A.S. page 535)

The liturgy continues with the peace and the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. The liturgy is printed as a booklet, with identical typeface to our liturgy in the Book of Alternative Services, but includes more recent developments, including inclusive language Eucharistic Prayer options. There are subtle inclusive additions throughout the service, such as the response after the reading of scripture: “Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church” instead of “The Word of the Lord.” The rubrics provide additional directions: Thirty days notice must be given prior to the service. At least one of the partners must have been baptized (the same as for a marriage). Unlike for the celebration of marriage, there is a ‘conscience clause’: “No priest will be required to preside at such a blessing where his or her conscience does not allow. Similarly, no blessing shall take place in a church where the community has not approved of the same.”

A Bishop’s Committee on Liturgy created this liturgy for the Diocese of New Westminster in the year 2000. The rationale for the Blessing of Same Sex Unions in the Diocese of New Westminster states, “In the absence of rites prepared for national or provincial use, it is incumbent upon the diocesan bishop to provide liturgical rites to address the needs of his or her diocese. The practice of blessing same sex unions is subject to the direction of the bishop and policies of the diocese.”

For further thought:

- ***How do you feel about the resemblance between this Blessing and our official marriage service?***
- ***Could you imagine making these vows with your partner?***

- ***What should the Blessing of Same Sex Unions look like in the Diocese of Toronto? Is the New Westminster liturgy an acceptable model for us?***

## **rites of passage – a journey with the Allison family**

On Sunday, July 4, at St. John's, we celebrated the sacrament of Holy Baptism for Tanya Joelle Allison. As preparation for this celebration, the Allison family considered how the Baptismal Covenant applies to them. On the same day as Tanya's baptism, we were privileged to have a Confirmation presentation by Rachel Allison during the sermon time. Rachel participated in Confirmation preparation over the fall and winter, including a special project on outreach ministry.

## **SOME THOUGHTS ON THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT IN OUR LIVES**

By Jackie and Michael Allison

**Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?**

*We see ourselves living this by encouraging Tanya and her siblings to attend church with us and participate actively in Sunday School.*

**Will you persevere in resisting evil and, whenever you fall into sin repent and return to the Lord?**

*It is important to recognise right from wrong, acknowledge and take responsibility for mistakes, and then accept forgiveness.*

**Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?**

*This is reflected in how we raise our children, and in our friends. This also involves standing up for what we feel is right and supporting the efforts of others to do the same.*

**Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself?**

*We believe that we should treat all people with kindness and respect, regardless of origin or religion. This goes beyond tolerance, that is, we should welcome differences. We can love our neighbour by contributing to the community in which we live.*

**Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?**

*We will teach our children to be fair, and to be active in removing negatives, such as racism and other prejudices, from society.*

**Michael and Jackie Allison, July 4, 2004**

## **OUTREACH MINISTRIES: A CONFIRMATION PROJECT**

By Rachel Allison, July 4, 2004

## **INTRODUCTION**

I have been participating in outreach ministries with my confirmation mentor, Marion Karasiuk, as a part of my upcoming confirmation. I have visited three different ministries in the city, each one run by individuals who are trying to spread the word of God through their outreach.

### 1. Treasure House Ministry - Downtown Vineyard

The first place I visited is called the Treasure House Ministries, located just west of Queen and Spadina. The Treasure House has a coffee house ministry that provides dinner for those who need it seven nights a week. It operates like a cafeteria. Seven different churches run the program, each one responsible for a different night of the week.

When Marion and I went, a group from the Downtown Vineyard was running the meal but there were also some volunteers from out of town who had driven in to help. We prepared and served food while others chatted with the clients and played music. There was an opening prayer where we blessed the food, the volunteers, and the clients.

Though it seemed at first that there would not be enough food, we served about 90 people that evening, and there was always enough food to go around. As soon as one dish was emptied, another appeared.

This experience reminded me of **The Feeding of the 5,000** (*Matthew 14: 14-20*).

### 2. The Hunger Patrol

The second outreach ministry I visited is called the Hunger Patrol, and it is run by the minister of St. Olave's Anglican Church, Rev. Dave Burrows.

Every Saturday evening he drives a van from the church to the College and Spadina intersection, right outside the Scott Mission. There, he and other volunteers, serve soup, drinks, and baked goods and provide clothing to those who need it.

Before we left the Church, we said a prayer for the evening's trip. On the colder days, such as the first day I went, we also drove around downtown looking for those who may have been in need of blankets, clothing, or food. As it happened, on the night I went, it was raining, but our search persisted nonetheless and we did find many people who were glad to take some hot soup and bread.

This experience reminded me of the story of **The Lost Sheep** (*Luke 15: 1-4*).

### 3. The Sharing Place

The third ministry I visited is called the Sharing Place, and it is located on Annette Street at Durie St. They offer meals, clothing and food banks, and a "church service" for the marginalized.

The evening began with a series of prayers and worship songs and then we proceeded to eat. The volunteers go around and talk with the clients to check up on them. Some clients there we recognize from the community as they are, literally, our neighbours. On that note, some volunteers come from out of town to help out as well. Here we can learn something about who the real neighbours are.

This reminded me of the story of the **Good Samaritan** and how the scholar questioned Jesus in his meaning of neighbour (*Luke 10: 25-37*).



## **CONCLUSION**

Through my experiences in the outreach ministries, I learned that the Bible, particularly the Gospels, are more than historical accounts of Jesus' time on Earth, but stories that can be related to situations nowadays. These stories remind us that we are following the Lord and that he will lead us in the right direction, though it may not be the easiest. The stories in the Bible were exemplary of the time and times change, as must we, but the word of the Lord is forever - as should be our service to him.

## ***WELCOME TO OUR NEW WEBTENDER***

We welcome John Spragge, who takes up the ministry of webtender from Bruce Alton. John's input has resulted in a proposed Web Policy, which has been presented to the wardens, and we now invite your input on the *Draft* policy below.

## **DRAFT WEB POLICY FOR ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, WEST TORONTO**

1. An advanced communications system such as the World Wide Web offers the church a valuable opportunity to reach out to the world, to communicate our message to others, to encourage interested people to come to church, and to provide information about opportunities for service.
2. As in all things, we should make our presence on the web conform to the great commandments: love God, and love your neighbour as yourself. Our web site should reflect a loving, vibrant, and joyful community. Our manner of providing it should also reflect a deep concern for the welfare of the whole community and of each individual member.
3. Our presentation of points of contention within the Church or within the wider community should show the highest respect for those people who disagree with the views we present, and they should reflect the highest respect for the people whom the questions we address directly affect.
4. For everything we publish, we will ensure the ethical treatment of authors and artists. We will respect the moral and economic rights of copyright holders, and work to ensure fair attribution for all donated material.
5. The power of the web brings with it certain hazards. We will take measures to ensure the safety of the people of the Church.
  - a. We will not publish personal information of any kind without permission of the people concerned. Where possible, we will use generic contact e-mail addresses (webtender@sjwt, sundayschool@sjwt, etc.). We will relay these messages through a spam protector such as "spam assassin". We will not give out personal e-mail.
  - b. Photographs:
    - i) For each photograph of an identified person published on the web site, the church shall obtain and keep on file a signed release, from the person concerned, containing a thumbnail version of the photograph, the text used to identify the person on the web site (e.g. Alice McFluffy teaches the Junior Sunday school class), and the following text: I <name> give my permission for the above photograph and text to appear on the Saint John's West Toronto web site. I understand that my image may be stored, transmitted, retrieved and

saved in a variety of computers, most of which St. John's and its parishioners cannot control.

- ii) St. John's will obtain a subscription to a digital watermarking service. This will help deter any use of pictures published on our site without our permission.
- iii) St. John's webtender will attempt to use the appropriate technical measures to safeguard the photographic images of our members.
- iv) Paedophiles are known to collect all types of photographs of children. Accordingly, the following special precautions will apply when a child (person under eighteen) appears in any photograph published on the church website:
  1. The web tender shall not, under any circumstances publish a photograph in which any person under eighteen is identified by name.
  2. Children's photographs should appear mainly in long shots, group shots (such as class pictures), activity shots, and family groups.
  3. No child shall appear in any photograph such that the child's image has a resolution greater than 300 pixels in the largest dimension.
  4. For each child who appears in any photograph, the Church shall obtain and file a release, which will contain the name of the child, a thumbnail (or thumbnails) of the image or images in question, and the following text: I <name> give my permission for the above photograph, which includes my child <name>, to appear on the Saint John's West Toronto web site. I understand that my child's image may be stored, transmitted, retrieved and saved in a variety of computers. I understand that St. John's will take all reasonable measures to ensure the appropriate use of my child's image, but that St. John's cannot undertake to control the web.
  5. The web tender will use technical measures to avoid the caching or indexing of any page on which a photograph including children appears.

## THE NEW AND IMPROVED WEB SITE FOR ST. JOHN'S

Our web site has been updated! We invite you to look it over. On your computer, go to [www.sjwt.ca](http://www.sjwt.ca)! Our webtender, John Spragge writes:

I had three goals with this web site redesign:

- 1) Accommodate a wide variety of visitors, with a wide variety of computer equipment, and a wide range of abilities. In particular, you may notice I have tried to display all important text in large, clear fonts for people with limited vision.
- 2) Provide an interesting and pleasant experience.
- 3) Reflect the vibrant and caring community I have found at St. John's.

John invites your comments, input, and material for our web site. We hope it will be a great way to stay informed ourselves, and also to welcome people to visit us and share in the faith and ministry of our community. Email: [webtender@sjwt.ca](mailto:webtender@sjwt.ca).

## GREETINGS FROM OUR NEW SUNDAY SCHOOL COORDINATOR

After two Sundays here at St. John's, I feel fortunate to be part of your community. Those of you that I have met have been welcoming and I know I have found a place in my neighbourhood where my family and I can further our spiritual growth.

On Sunday, September 12, many families were back for the Homecoming lunch and I met many of you and your children. I hope to complete the registration of Sunday School children soon. By accepting the position of Sunday School Co-ordinator at St John's, I understand this will be a year of learning for me. I embrace volunteer participation to support my growth as a Sunday School teacher and to build a sense of community between the children and those of us who will guide them.

My vision of this upcoming year is to create an inclusive environment where problem-solving is encouraged and where children can learn together. Each child will have the opportunity to make choices and actively participate, while observing personal interests and age appropriate needs.

The programme will offer engaging and meaningful activities to help the children make concrete connection with the teachings of Christ, drawing in music, art and literature. Here is where participation from the congregation is vital. Please volunteer one Sunday this year to offer a talent, interest or expertise that will enrich the learning experience and prove that "it takes a village to raise a child."

*Jacqueline da Costa*

### **"THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE" -- A BOOK REVIEW BY MABEL-ANNE WATERS**

While in Florida last winter, Allan and I took part in a Lenten activity with a St. John's parish in Largo involving the book "The Purpose Driven Life: A Personal 40 Day Spiritual Journey", by Rick Warren. In this book, Mr. Warren sets out to answer the question – "What on earth am I here for?" Self help books often suggest that you try to discover the meaning and purpose of your life by looking within yourself. However, as Mr. Warren says, it is the wrong place to start. It's not about you! You must begin with God, your Creator, and his reason for creating you. You were made by God and for God. Until you understand that, life will never make sense. Knowing God's purpose for creating you, will reduce your stress, focus your energy, simplify your decisions, give meaning to your life, and, most important prepare you for eternity!

Well, once we got our minds around all of that, we were ready to begin – sort of. Mr. Warren is a Baptist minister and has a strong fundamentalist side. The focus on eternity and on biblical texts was a bit off putting for this Anglican and the parish that we were visiting. However, the Rector was aware of this difference. She reminded us that the Anglican beliefs were grounded in the bible, tradition, and reason. We could temper our reservations about the Baptist focus and still get a lot out of this book.

Once again, we started. The book is divided into 6 sections as follows, with 7 daily chapters and discussion questions for each section.

1. What on earth am I here for?
2. Purpose # 1: You were planned for God's Pleasure
3. Purpose # 2: You were formed for God's Family
4. Purpose # 3: You were created to become like Christ
5. Purpose # 4: You were shaped for serving God

## 6. Purpose # 5: You were made for a Mission

Each week, we would come back and discuss the 7 daily chapters that we were supposed to have read. Many lively discussions developed. "Were we God's pets?" "What makes God smile?" "What is the heart of worship?" "Can we become best friends with God?" "Why do I need a Church Family?" "How can we develop our Church Family?" "How can we grow up to be more Christ-like?" "Can I be transformed by truth, trouble, and temptation?" "How has God shaped me for my ministry?" "How can I act and think like a real servant?" "What will be the center of my life?" "What will be the character of my life?" "What will be the contribution of my life?" "What will be the communication of my life?" "What will be the community of my life?"

Working in the same small groups with a pre-assigned leader, we tackled these questions and many others. It was interesting to share our responses and to hear what others had to say on this Lenten faith journey. I particularly enjoyed the sections that related to parish development and communications. With some reservations, I recommend this book.

### **AN UPDATE ABOUT OUR PARTNER PARISH**

By Margot Raven

I have been in correspondence with Helen Morgan, the wife of the Rector of St. Saviour's Church in East London, South African, since early 2003. At that time, Helen was not in the best of health. She was trying to meet the desperate needs of parishioners of St. Saviour's, no small burden considering the recent history of South Africa. As the letters from Helen continued to come, I have rejoiced to sense that her physical fortitude has allowed her the strength and the means to deal with the challenges she faces. She and Canon Morgan were in theological college together in England and chose to work in South Africa, the country of Helen's upbringing. They have raised two children of whom they are justly proud. We include their parish regularly in our prayers of the people, and as we do, we should also remember their work.

Recently I sent Helen one of our Anglican Rosaries. She found it "a bit too Catholic" but wanted to know more, and I've sent her the instructions to make them. In return she sent me a "prayer cord." This tool for prayer is to be used particularly at night for insomnia. It is to be helpful to those who have ongoing sadness in their lives. The cord is threaded through beads, buttons, and bits of bone. Each bead should help to recall the name of someone you pray for. After a few beads, there is a little silver bell to remind you to thank God. There are also several crosses to remind you to ask God for personal blessings.

I look forward to my continuing correspondence with Helen. She is a very genuine person.