

News from the Pews, Christmas 2022

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People living in war zones must surely envy the peace we enjoy in Canada. Those who currently live here, with the exception of immigrants and refugees, have always known peace.

There are, however, many other stressors that make our lives far from peaceful.

This issue of our newsletter has as its theme, "Christmas Peace".

We hope you will enjoy reading it and reflect on ways to make this Christmas a peaceful one.



Peace at Christmas—by The Rev. Steve Baldry (our Interim Moderator)

When the angel announced the birth of Jesus to shepherds, peace was the outcome: "on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14).

On earth peace?

The world power at the time of the angel's message was Rome, and the peace under Roman rule was referred to as the PAX ROMANA (Roman peace). This peace was enforced by harsh brutality and fear... if you crossed the line, you might end up hanging on a cross. The world's version of peace was achieved by dominant power. And if Jesus' promise was about geopolitical peace, the mission was an unqualified failure; just turn on the news for five minutes.

So, what kind of peace was being promised and how would it come about?

In John 14:27, Jesus told his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." In contrast, Jesus' reign is not about crushing others into submission, but about being crushed to absorb the pain of sin and death upon himself. "For He (Jesus) himself is our peace," said Paul in Ephesians 2:14. And this peace may not change the world's landscape (at least not right away), but it does change us. His peace doesn't force us; it invites us.... to live out the same vulnerable love that Jesus demonstrated ("Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" - Colossians 2:14). That means that we are not only recipients, but also agents of God's peace. May that same vulnerable love that brought us peace with God, translate into our thoughts, words and actions this Christmas season.



LET HIS PEACE
FILL YOUR HEART



His name
shall be called
Wonderful
Counselor
Mighty God
Everlasting Father
Prince of Peace
Isaiah 9:6

Peaceful Thoughts for Christmas—compiled by Molly Shannon

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.~~~Luke 2:14

Christmas is not a time nor a season, but a state of mind. To cherish peace and goodwill, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas.~~~Calvin Coolidge

I truly believe that if we keep telling the Christmas story, singing the Christmas songs, and living the Christmas spirit, we can bring joy and happiness and peace to this world.~~~Norman Vincent Peale.

Peace on earth will come to stay, when we live Christmas every day.~~~Helen Steiner Rice

I heard the bells on Christmas Day, their old, familiar carols play, And wild and sweet the words repeat, Of peace on earth, good-will to men.~~~Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Christmas is joy, religious joy, an inner joy of light and peace.~~~Pope Francis

May you have the gladness of Christmas which is hope; the spirit of Christmas which is peace; the heart of Christmas which is love.~~~Ada V. Hendricks

The Christmas gift of peace was the uncoiling of the links of a triple chain, that first unites a person with God, then with himself, then with his neighbour.~~~Fulton J. Sheen

The challenge of Christmas: Justice happens when all receive a fair share of God's world and only such distributive justice can establish peace on earth.~~~John Dominic Crossan

At Christmas I'd rather have Peace on Earth than pieces of earth.~~~Maura, Age 9

Christmas is the spirit of love, peace and goodwill to all humankind. It is within the reach of every heart and hand.~~~Lailah Gifty Akita

Silent night, holy night. All is calm, all is bright. Round yon Virgin Mother and Child. Holy Infant so tender and mild. Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace.~~~Joseph Mohr

Oh! lovely voices of the sky, Which hymned the Saviour's birth, Are ye not singing still on high, Ye that sang, "Peace on earth"?~~~Felicia Hemans

Peace be with you, when lights dance to the sound of Christmas bells and the whole world breathes in silence.~~~Kristian Goldmund Aumann

Peace on earth and mercy mild are still possible. On Christmas Eve, all things are possible.~~~Gregg Easterbrook

I do like Christmas on the whole.... In its clumsy way, it does approach Peace and Goodwill. But it is clumsier every year.~~~E. M. Forster

This Christmas ... Say a prayer for those in need. Be a friend to those in despair. Give to all the gift of peace!~~~Timothy Pina

Jesus lived a life of peace, love, kindness and forgiveness. During the hustle and bustle of the Christmas season, may we all do our best to follow His example.~~~Barack Obama





Trinity Visioning Workshop—by Karen Spence



In the fall of 2020, following the amalgamation of Trinity and Chalmers Churches, a Visioning Committee was formed to discern the direction the church would take as the two congregations moved forward together.

This committee, under the guidance of an outside facilitator, the Rev. Ian McFee, created a congregational questionnaire, which was sent to all members and adherents.

The responses were summarized and divided into five categories; Worship, Stewardship, Discipleship, Service and Fellowship. A Visioning Workshop was called for Saturday, October 29, 2022. Because South Gate is now in amalgamation discussions with Trinity, we received an invitation to participate.

Approximately 40 people attended the workshop, including nine from South Gate: Mary Pomfret, Teresa Robson, Brenda Podio, Molly Shannon, January Will, Pam Kovacek, Ruth and Kevin Smith and Karen Spence. We started the morning with a light breakfast, then proceeded to the sanctuary where we were divided into five groups.

Five stations were set up in the church, and each group rotated through each of the five categories. Participants were able to share thoughts, ideas and make suggestions, all of which were recorded on flip charts by Rev. McFee and members of the visioning committee. The morning ended with a soup and sandwich lunch.

The visioning team is now in the process of organizing and summarizing all the information collected and will choose action items, based on the majority of common answers. A report will follow.

As South Gate continues with amalgamation talks, we are grateful that we were invited to participate and share in creating a vision for the future of the church.



Amalgamation Update—submitted by Brenda Podio

Since polling The South Gate and Trinity congregations in September, the amalgamation team has been busy on your behalf. The team met on October 26, to transition to formal negotiations with both the original members and new members of the team. The South Gate representatives going forward are Brenda Podio, Mary Pomfret, Teresa Robson and Ruth Smith. Heather James and Ken Young are stepping down, but remain available if called upon in the future. Kelly Ferguson, Deanna Johnson, Craig Kerr and Christine Stevenson will represent the Trinity congregation. Rev. Janice Doyle, Anne Forsyth and Rev. Cathy Stewart, remain with us for Presbytery support and guidance. We will also be calling on other resources and expertise to deal with specific issues that may arise.

Some of the things we will be focusing on in the months ahead are determining a timeline for an amalgamation, that will respect the concerns of The South Gate congregation, while meeting the needs of Trinity to move forward with the visioning process, that is underway as a result of their amalgamation with Chalmers. We will also be looking at terms for a Basis of Union including the use of the assets from the South Gate congregation.

We want to assure everyone that the Session and congregation will be kept informed of our progress every step of the way. We are representing you in the process and we look for God's guidance as we move through our deliberations and discern where and how South Gate can continue to serve the Lord in our community.

The South Gate Amalgamation Team



CHRISTMAS 2022

Born in a stable, a babe, laid in a manger, in a bed of hay
The Prince of Peace we still celebrate, in our world today

The star shone bright leading to His lowly bed
The shepherds were amazed it's a sign they said

Angels and archangels heralded his coming
Wise men, with gifts on that first Christmas morning

All fell on their knees in awe and adoration
He, who came to save each and every nation

We celebrate His birth in many different ways
Praises being sung, and thankful prayers
We light up our homes with peace and in love
Knowing the love comes from the Father above

For the congregation of all at The South Gate
We look to the changes as we contemplate
It is the Lord's Hands He will show us the way
As we trust in him as we fervently pray

Many happy memories we all will hold
As a congregation within His fold
As we go forth with His love it will be bright
May each one have a peaceful blessed Christmas Night.

Mip



I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who asked and trusted me to do these poems for "The "News from The Pews". I have enjoyed preparing them and I am thankful for the many compliments.

Yours in Music
Moira Paterson



Christmas Peace and Hope in the Trenches of WWI—By Kathryn Shanley

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. (Luke 2:14 KJV)

It was Christmas Eve 1914. Weary soldiers shivered in the muddy damp trenches they called home on the Western Front, their uniforms soaked to the skin, clutching letters from sweethearts, wives, children, and family members far away but close in their hearts. Memories of Christmases gone by would be the only warmth the soldiers would experience that year without their loved ones. Many of the soldiers had barely reached their eighteenth birthdays. Scared to death, they tried to snatch moments of sleep in the mucky rat-infested trenches.

“No Man’s Land,” a frozen, snow-covered, barren strip of land that separated the British trenches from the opposing German trenches, was eerily quiet except for the distant sound of German voices singing Christmas carols. Soon British soldiers started singing the familiar and comforting carols. Incredibly, both sides started shouting to each other from their trenches exchanging Christmas greetings instead of gun fire.

I’m sure that the soldiers must have been questioning their sanity engaging the enemy in conversation. But what followed was even more bizarre – German soldiers shouted invites to the British soldiers to come out and meet them in No Man’s Land. Remember these are soldiers who just moments before were mortal enemies, so it would stand to reason that the British would be skeptical about the German soldiers’ intentions. What if it were a trick? Why should they trust the enemy?

In a leap of faith, the soldiers from both sides gradually laid down their weapons, crawled out of their trenches, and met together in No Man’s Land, singing carols, talking, and even playing football! Undeterred despite the dismay of their officers, the soldiers shared this magical moment in time escaping the brutality and misery of the war, sharing a truce no matter how short lived. This Christmas peace would be one of the most stunning and unprecedented events in the history of WWI.

Many soldiers wrote letters home telling their families about their experiences. J. Reading, a British rifleman, wrote to his wife saying, “And our chaps went out to meet them...I shook hands with some of them, and they gave us cigarettes and cigars. We did not fire that day, and everything was so quiet it seemed like a dream.” I wonder what this soldier’s wife must have thought of her husband’s letter. I hope she felt a sense of peace, no matter how fleeting, that her husband so many miles away found some comfort that bleak Christmas night.

The Christmas Truce as it was later dubbed, captured the true spirit of Christmas, a shining example of humanity in one of the most inhumane situations. Because the truce was unofficial, it’s difficult to know just how many soldiers participated in the Christmas Truce.

Celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ transcended all borders and human conflicts. We’ve all heard the expression, “God works in mysterious ways” and to me, this was one of them.

Sources:

WWI’s Christmas Truce: When Fighting Paused for the Holiday. A.J. Baime & Volker Jansenn, updated Oct. 4, 2022, History.com; The Story of the WWI Christmas Truce. Mike Dash, December 23, 2011, Smithsonianmag.com; The Real Story of the Christmas Truce. Imperial War Museums, iwm.org.uk.

Peace for Just One Night—by Molly Shannon

The Swiss psychiatrist and psychologist, Carl Jung, coined the term “synchronicity” to explain meaningful coincidences. A friend tells me there are no coincidences; if something is meant to happen it will. Yet another friend calls coincidences, “God winks.”

Indeed, there was a coincidence during the preparation of this edition of "News from the Pews". I had submitted the writing below. Shortly after, Kathryn Shanley submitted a page on the same topic...a truce between British and German soldiers in WWI. You will have read the fine piece, written by Kathryn, on the previous page. She speaks of a truce in 1914, that showed Christmas Peace. A year later in 1915, perhaps inspired by what happened the previous year, a similar truce took place bringing forth another short term of peace at Christmas.

The song “Christmas 1915” written by Cormac MacConnell, tells of one of the most moving and human moments of the 20th century. The song is based on the true story about British and German soldiers during the First World War. On Christmas Eve, the Royal Welch Fusiliers were stationed in northern France, near the village of Laventie, when they heard the Germans in a trench 100 metres away singing, “Silent Night”. In their reply, the Royal Welch Fusiliers sang, “Good King Wenceslas”. The men joined each other and there was a truce by these soldiers, who found peace for just one night.

1915 on Christmas Day

*On the western front the guns all died away
And lying in the mud on bags of sand
We heard a German sing from No Man's Land
He had a tenor voice so pure and true
The words were strange but every note we knew
Soaring o'er the living dead and damned
The German sang of peace from No Man's Land
They left their trenches and we left ours
Beneath tin hats the smiles bloomed like wild flowers
With photos, cigarettes, and pots of wine
We built a soldiers' truce on the front line
Their singer was a lad of 21
We begged another song before the dawn
And sitting in the mud and blood and fear
He sang again the song all longed to hear
Silent night, no cannons roar
A King is born of peace for evermore
All's calm, all's bright
All brothers hand in hand
In 19 and 15 in No Man's Land
And in the morning all the guns boomed in the rain
And we killed them and they killed us again
At night they charged, we fought them hand to hand
And I killed the boy that sang in No Man's Land
Silent night, no cannons roar
A King is born of peace for evermore
All's calm, all's bright
All brothers hand in hand
And that young soldier sings
And the song of peace still rings
Though the captains and all the kings
Built No Man's Land
Sleep in heavenly peace.*



Some of you will know of the touring, Irish, singing group, *Celtic Thunder*. They performed this song as part of their 2014 Christmas show. You can find their YouTube video of this song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JG3I-OBdcPI>. Proudly I say, that the second person to sing is Ryan Kelly, a cousin of my late husband.

Advent and Christmas at The South Gate



November 27, 2022

@ 10 am

First Sunday in Advent,
The Candle of Hope is lit.

Communion Worship
with The Rev. Lois Whitwell

After worship, a
Christmas card workshop



The Mitten Tree will be ready to receive
winter mittens, gloves, hats, scarves,
new socks, and new underwear



December 4, 2022 @ 10 am

Second Sunday in Advent,
The Candle of Peace is lit.

with Dr. Boyd Blundell



December 11, 2022 @ 10 am

Third Sunday in Advent,
The Candle of Joy is lit.

with Marilyn Repchuck



December 18, 2022 @ 10 am

Fourth Sunday in Advent,
The Candle of Love is lit

with The Rev. Dr. Nancy Calvery-Koyzis



December 24, 2022 @ 7 pm

Christmas Eve Service,
The Christ Candle is lit

With The Rev. Charmain Sebestyen
and special Christmas music

December 25 and January 1: No Sunday services at The South Gate.
On these Sundays, you may choose to attend Trinity's worship at 10:30 am.

Practicing the Perfect Christmas—by Charisse Goforth

When my kids were little, they would “practice” Christmas morning. It was the sweetest thing to watch. They would come up with “what-if” scenarios, then practice their solution to each. ~what if Michael wakes up first, ~what if Andrea wakes up first ~what if Jessica WON’T wake up...~what if Kathryn sneaks downstairs...~what if it’s too early...

Then they would act out their solutions. Michael would go in to wake the girls, Andrea would wake Michael, all of them would jump on Jessica, Kat would be strictly admonished to stay upstairs until given permission, and if it was too early they would tell mom and dad they had to go to the bathroom and couldn’t wait any longer.

Funny thing is, all that practicing for the perfect Christmas went right out the window once that day arrived. The excitement made all the perfect planning and good ideas disappear, but that was alright. They will forever hold memories in their heart of running downstairs in complete chaos on Christmas morning and in their eyes, it was always perfect.

It seems like so many Christmas movies revolve around someone trying to pull off the perfect Christmas, and utterly failing in one way or another. Apparently this is a hot topic during the holidays. As I look back on my little family and all the Christmases we have shared, I realize that too often I have fallen prey to practicing the perfect Christmas myself. My goal to make everyone happy ended in me being miserable at times, because my focus was misconstrued.

I have come to the Christmas conclusion that you will never make everyone happy and~only Jesus can give the gift of true happiness. I certainly am not Jesus.

Year after year I got caught up in striving to make things perfect for everyone, and ended up taking my focus off of Him. Instead, my focus was placed solely on others. I found myself in tears last year because I was afraid that Christmas wouldn’t be special enough for my kids. That old saying~’practice makes perfect’ doesn’t always hold true; 35 years of practicing and planning to make the perfect Christmas for my children, and in my eyes I have yet to perfect it.

Now that my kids are adults, they are no longer oblivious to the amount of work that sometimes goes into the perfecting of the perfect Christmas, and they are fully aware of the stress it can bring IF your focus isn’t on the entire reason for celebrating. Last year my girls bore witness to my little breakdown of emotions over my felt-failures and they didn’t like it, because they now wish for ME to experience (and not just provide) the perfect Christmas as well.

So what is the key to the perfect Christmas if it isn’t in the practice? The key is the peace that passes all understanding. My words might seem counterintuitive but when pleasing others becomes more important than pleasing Christ~we have no peace. Aren’t we always told to focus on others and not ourselves? Yes, we certainly should. I’m not saying that focusing on others is wrong, I’m saying that if that is our only focus, Jesus will become an afterthought.

The words to the song Silent Night hold so many truths we need to grasp when December comes around... All is calm. All is bright. Holy infant so tender and mild. Sleep in heavenly peace.

When we keep our eyes on Jesus and remember that He is the ONLY reason we celebrate the season, things will change. Christmas might be chaotic, all the perfect planning and good ideas might go right out the window, but that’s alright. Our hearts will hold the peace that passes understanding... All will be calm. All will be bright. All because of the Holy Infant born for us.

And we will forever hold memories in our hearts of what a truly perfect Christmas is all about.

Living in Michigan, Charisse Goforth shares her husband’s ministry as a Baptist Pastor. They have four children and six grandchildren. Charisse posts weekly on her blog, Holding Hope: <https://www.holdinghope.co/about.html>. (Content used with permission.)



Update from the Finance Committee—Submitted by Brenda Podio

As we enter this Advent season and look ahead to the coming of 2023 and all that the future has to offer, we would like to update the congregation on the state of the finances of The South Gate Church.

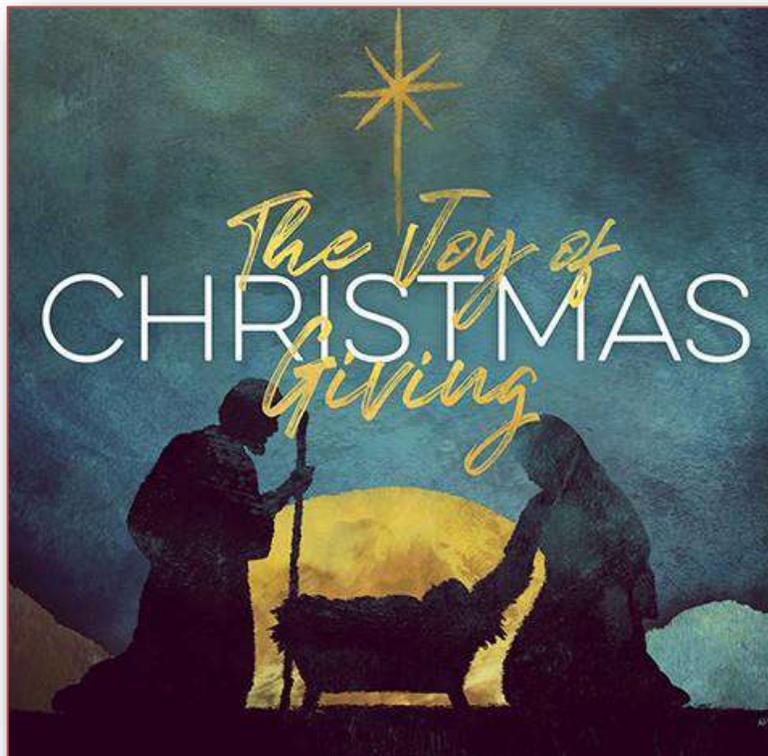
As of the middle of November, the year to date envelope offerings are down significantly from this time last year and although we have also been able to reduce our expenses, we are experiencing a substantial shortfall. With a few weeks left to go in 2022 we hope, with your help, to be able to shrink that shortfall as much as possible.

Year to date income:	\$47,426.07
Year to date expenses:	<u>\$54,571.92</u>
Shortfall:	\$ 7,145.85

We hope that everyone has a blessed Advent season and ask that as you enjoy the holidays and special times with loved ones, to please keep the church's finances in your prayers.

If you have any questions, or would like to discuss the financial status of our church, please speak to your Elder or any member of the Finance Committee.

Yours in Christ,
Heather James, Brenda Podio, Ken Young



WebNews--from Pam Kovacek, Website Administrator
(Click on title to follow link to our website.)

Especially during the Christmas season, be sure not to miss information about what's happening at South Gate and at Trinity, using the information that is being continually updated on our website!

Our Communications Committee, with permission from our church Session, has recently renewed our web hosting service for the upcoming year until November of 2023. This decision was made despite the uncertainty of the length of time to complete our amalgamation process. A continued web presence, gives us the opportunity not only in our own church community, but also for those who may be looking for a new church home, to keep updated with South Gate news as long as the amalgamation process takes, and beyond, if necessary.

If you have a newsworthy church or community event that you would like added, please be sure to let us know. We'd love to hear from you.

Why should we have a church website?

1. Church websites establish credibility
2. Church websites inform visitors
3. Church websites encourage engagement



Kathryn Shanley continues to maintain South Gate's presence on Twitter by tweeting many interesting and timely posts that are both religious and secular in content, including information about our weekly services. Be sure to check it out! NOTE: If you haven't signed up for **Twitter**, the "tweets" can be accessed by clicking our website's Twitter icon (left).



*This edition of News from the Pews
has been formatted by
Pam Kovacek and
edited by Molly Shannon
with initial input from the
Communications Committee.*

