



St Paul's-Eastern United Church Advent/Christmas 2013

My dear friends,

I have been so touched by the Christmas cards and digital creations I have received so far as the artists seem to outdo their creativity each year, especially when they have the freedom given by digital images. One simple card though has stood out as it is adorned only with a small watercolour of the nativity. Inside the message reads "He was born in a simple stable, that his love might shelter us all."

It reminds me midst the hurry and extra stress of the Christmas season that we celebrate a simple message that God's love is to be proclaimed for all people, and all creatures in every corner of the world, including the endless cosmos. It is a similar message that is being proclaimed in South Africa as I write this message, as the world celebrates the life of Nelson Mandela and his witness to an inclusive love and justice that lead a nation to struggle for new depths of freedom. Hopefully we too will be inspired by his life in our own community.

In our own congregation here in downtown Ottawa, we are working hard ourselves to become a more inclusive church, celebrating our diversity in this unique and dynamic part of Ottawa. Not only have we become the church home for Jericho Road Coffee House, Tsagwit (Eritrean), Free Believers of Christ Church International (Filipino), but we have also welcomed two outreach programs - the Odawa Centre's Food Bank and their Soup and Bannock Outreach Program. We are now hosting the monthly Sandy Hill Seniors Network which was organized ecumenically. We are a busy place and we hope to continue growing in our outreach and relevance to our neighbourhood.

Our visioning process that many in our congregation have taken part in this past year has confirmed that this is a positive direction for us to be taking and that we need to reach out further into our surrounding community, where we worship, live, play and work. As we are in a rapidly changing community, this is an exciting prospect. We stay grounded though in our worship life and seek to

build on our strengths as a small, family size congregation. Single, married, widowed or seeking, rich or poor, gay or straight, strong or tired out - we strive to make everyone feel that they are a part of this spiritual home that Jesus Christ is creating and inspiring.

As we look to the new year, we are also searching for a new Music Director as Carol Gurofsky has left us to pursue other opportunities. We are grateful for the years she served our congregation with her passion for excellence. The music ministry is considered one of the strengths of our congregation, so we are looking forward to renewing and enlivening our music program in the New Year as we hire a new Music Director (check out our web site for more information).

As I begin my fifth year serving St Paul's-Eastern, I feel very blessed by your dedication and passion for living Spirit-led lives, especially as we live in what is sometimes called the post-Christian era. For some people, we provide a place of sanctuary where they can come and find quiet, rest and healing so they can move on strengthened; others are fragile parents who are leaving their young adults behind for the adventures of university; some are students, spreading their wings, seeking learning, purpose and calling; others have deep roots in the city, working, raising children, nurturing deep friendships; still others are new to Canada for many reasons, seeking a new life of security and promise. I am truly awed and humbled by the diversity, energy, and possibility of serving in such a place at this time, that is open to the movement of God's surprising Spirit.

At Christmas we remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ not just as a unique onetime event, but with the belief that Christ - the wisdom and love of God - is born still in many humble, out of the way places, in people that we would least expect. Now is the right time to welcome Christ into our lives, to embrace our future with hope and anticipation.

May you find days, nights or moments as you move through the Advent/Christmas season when you will feel the touch of an angel's wings as you remember a loved one; or hear the strains of joyous singing that call you to join in; or feel the possibilities of new dreams moving within you, calling you to some new challenge. I know that many of you travel far and wide to visit family and friends during this season, so may you do so safely and with a sense that you are always sheltered by God's protective love. As a midwife waits for the coming birth, I am ready to serve you.

*Faithfully Yours,
Laurie (Rev. Laurie McKnight-Walker)*



COME AND WORSHIP CHRIST

Sunday, December 15, 10:30 am International **Christmas Cantata** sung by our choir. Join us for this special service of carols from around the world

Sunday, December 15 is the last day to return the Christmas Stockings that have been filled for the children at the Youville Centre in Sandy Hill

Sunday, December/ dimanche 15 3:00pm Ecumenical Blue Christmas *Quand Noël, c'est pas un cadeau, Elgise Sacre-Coeur/ Rue Cumberland and Laurier St.* - a quiet service of reflection and remembrance.

Sunday December 22, 10:30 a Service of Carols and story.

Christmas Eve Evening Service at 7:30pm - Join us to worship the birth of Christ through carolling, lighting candles and sharing in Holy Communion

Merry Christmas

Sunday, December 29, 10:30 am there will be an informal Christmas Service held in the hall. Join us for worship, carolling, sharing stories, mulled stories and muffins.