Merry Christmas Companions of the Journey:

Greetings favoured one! The Lord is with you... Do not be afraid Mary, for you have found favour with God. And you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus...

Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word.

Luke 1:26-38

I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done. “Yes” I will serve the Lord.

These words of Mary were pivotal in the plan of God and for our personal salvation. Mary’s “Yes” was the personal word of an Intentional Disciple. Every Intentional Disciple’s “Yes” profoundly changes the world we live in.

You may remember that Mary was living in Nazareth and was engaged to Joseph, when the angel Gabriel appeared to her with the request from God. As an aside, I celebrated Mass in October 2018 in the ruins of an ancient house, believed to be the house of Mary where the angel appeared in the village of Nazareth. After Mary had given her yes, she immediately did what an Intentional Disciple does; she made her way, carrying Christ in her womb, to visit her cousin Elizabeth. In Luke’s Gospel there is a double miracle story. There is not just one miraculous birth, but two. Elizabeth and Zechariah in their old age have conceived a child, the child is John the Baptist, the last of the prophets who proclaims Jesus.

The spotlight is on two women that God had chosen to begin the transformation of the world. Women, all too often, are overlooked or ignored both in society at large, and sadly, within the Church. Elizabeth takes on the role of the prophet by proclaiming what Mary has not yet told her. Elizabeth tells Mary she will be the “mother of my Lord.”

Elizabeth declares that Mary and the child of her womb will be “blessed.” Mary is blessed not only because she is the mother of Jesus, but because she trusts in God’s promise.

Mary will be honoured rather than shamed for bearing this child. She is blessed because she believed that God was able to do what God has promised. God uses ordinary humans like Mary and Elizabeth in the great work of redeeming the world and the building of the eternal Kingdom. God is still doing this, using ordinary people to build the Kingdom.

The story of Mary is not so much about what Mary can do, but about what God can do through her. It is also true of each of us. Being ordinary is no excuse in the Kingdom of God. God specializes in doing extraordinary things with ordinary people.

Christmas is really an invitation not to wait for the gifts we want God to pour out on us, but rather to discover and use the gifts God has given to us. A part of the meaning of God choosing Mary, is that God chooses people like you and me.

Christmas is all about humans co-operating with God to bring about extraordinary things: a baby in a manger, God living among us surrounded by Mary and Joseph. This Christmas is about Jesus using us as Intentional Disciples to make His presence known.

On behalf of the Staff and Pastoral Team I wish you the blessing of Christmas. We thank you for allowing God to use you to bring Jesus to the world. We look forward to seeing you at our Christmas celebrations, but more importantly, seeing you Sunday after Sunday being renewed by the Sacred Word of God, the Body and Blood of the Lord and the presence of Christ in our Companions on the Journey.

Fr. Murray Sample
Pastor
Advent and the New Evangelization by Angela Townend

Advent. A time to reflect on our need for Christ in our lives. A time to renew our commitment to living out our faith. And a time to joyfully welcome the “Hope of the World.” Amidst the busy malls, Christmas tunes and gatherings with friends and family, these four weeks in anticipation of the birth of Christ offer us a spiritual focus on the greatest gift of all - Christ the King, Saviour of the world!

The word Advent itself comes from the Latin word for “coming.” This coming, however, refers not only to the birth of Christ, but also to our awaiting of the second coming of Christ. With this time of waiting in mind, the call for us to evangelize by Pope John Paul II in 2001, is beautifully linked to the Advent season. We too are invited to proclaim the Gospel and Christ’s coming, much like the shepherds who joyfully spread the word of the babe born in a manager.

However, what does it mean to evangelize and what is this New Evangelization?

Evangelization means to fulfill the mandate of Jesus Christ to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), so that all might respond to the Father’s love and be saved through communion with Jesus and His body, the Church. At the core of evangelization is “the proclamation of Christ and his Gospel by word and the testimony of life,” which invites conversion, evidenced through faith in Christ, repentance, and full communion with the Catholic Church. (Catechism of the Catholic Church Glossary).

With respect to the New Evangelization, as Pope Francis notes in his encyclical, The Joy of the Gospel, there is a priority on re-evangelizing “the baptized whose lives do not
Advent and the New Evangelization ...continued

by Angela Townend

reflect the demands of baptism...who lack a meaningful relationship to the Church and no longer experience the consolation born of faith. The Church, in her maternal concern, tries to help them experience a conversion which will restore the joy of faith to their hearts.”

What then could be a more wonderful time than Advent to refocus ourselves for the new year on our call to be disciples; to shore up our “apostolic zeal,” as John Paul II once referred to when noting our duty to bring others to, or in some cases, back, to Christ. Like the pink candle we light on the third Sunday, the candle that represents joy, we must start by being joyful Christians, drawing others to Christ not with admonitions or lectures but with opportunities to witness our true Christian joy.

Could we make but five promises for the new year--not resolutions, but promises--to God and to ourselves that we will take this call to heart? That we will be a light to others, especially those who are broken or those who may have grown distant from, or bitter about, the Church in the wake of all her struggles?

1. Ensure first that you have a personal relationship with Christ found through prayer, the sacraments and Scripture. Spend time in God’s Word and be filled with His wisdom, peace and love.

2. Seek out someone who, as described by the Holy Father, is fallen and lives with a “restless heart”; be courageous and let them witness your love for Christ. Some have a burning desire to know Christ but need to be in relationship with you as they are encouraged to return their hearts to God.

3. Live a Christian life that reflects to others your need and love for Christ and your obedience to His will. You must be a living sign of Christ in your life. As Pope Francis shared in a recent homily “It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows but by attraction.”

4. Look closely at your own troubled relationships and perhaps allow those to be a place where you can humbly forgive and move past the hurt. We have all received God’s grace. Do we extend it to others?

5. Be bold. Be willing to step outside your comfort zone in order to reach those who simply need someone to encourage them to renew their faith, to seek God when they are lost, or to receive comfort when they are hurting. Yes, we should always pray for others lost to their faith but pray also that God gives you the courage to put those prayers into action.

If...we can close our eyes and imagine what it must have felt like to be a shepherd boy or one of the Magi on that first Christmas night, that is what the New Evangelization is all about. We are called, finally, to wonder and awe before the great claims of our faith and Advent is the time to prepare ourselves for that wonder. (Michael Sean Winters, Visiting Fellow at Catholic University’s Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies).

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This year’s Bazaar, the parish’s most successful fundraiser in five years, raised over $12,000, with all proceeds supporting St. Michael’s Social Outreach Programs. Since 2015, total profits from our annual Bazaar have exceeded $41,000. More than 665 visitors entered the festive parish hall to view unique gifts lovingly created by parishioners, and products offered by vendors and parish crafters. The event involved over 150 dedicated volunteers who exemplify our parish’s strong faith community, willing to share their time, talent and treasure.


In early July, Karen and Fr. Murray prepared and signed letters seeking donations from local businesses and companies. Typed by the parish secretary, the letters state where and how bazaar profits will be designated. Three committee members delivered the letters in early August and followed up with phone calls. Although this can be a daunting task, we are inspired by the overwhelming support from our community resulting in 50 items donated for the silent auction and 100+ for the draw table.

Promoting the Bazaar also starts early. Corrie Gigante worked closely with talented graphic designer, Joanne Tremblay, who created the colourful flyers for distribution to community newspapers, school and diocesan websites, church bulletins, libraries, Hospitality North churches, St. Joseph’s Hospital and Kijiji. Debbie Walsh and Sylvain Patry followed up with school visits. Given that many bazaars occur at the same time in London, the personal contacts, emails and follow-up phone calls helped get the word out about St. Michael’s Bazaar. Mary Egan and Yolanda Squire printed some hard copies of flyers. Doug Manners created the outdoor mobile sign and uploaded information on the church TV screens and website. Linda Round and her daughter created new signs for the event. Photographer Terry McBride captured Bazaar 2019 memories, and the custodial staff ensured the hall was ready for the event.

Once advertising appeared in the weekly bulletin and on the bulletin board in the narthex, many parishioners eagerly responded to the call to share their time, talents and treasures. Karen coordinated a group of 11 women, dubbed “the sewing guild”, who created beautiful crafts; Cheryl Brydges, Maureen Beamish, Grace Wren, Carol Finkenzeller, Suzanne Scollard, Helen Yakobchuk, Carmen DiVincenzo, Linda McBride, Judy Wright, and Anita Rodrigues all enjoyed participating as did several other parishioners this year. Many offered their talents to knit, crochet and sew beautiful items such as aprons, Christmas stockings, pillows, tablecloths, potholders and hot pads, cloth bags and totes, hats and toques, scarves, afghans, baby blankets, quilts, stockings, wreaths, pillows, tablecloths, kitchen towels, hot/cold neck wraps and much, much more! Joanne Zwolski, Katherine Viner and Karen Owens created and donated the beautiful afghans for the draw this year.

We have excellent cooks among us who willingly shared their prepared food items, making jams, jellies, salsa, pickles, beets and relishes. Linda Round organized the preserves section, a very popular part of the bazaar. To keep cost down, parishioners donated empty mason jars.

Our very talented woodworkers, Howie Wright, Otto Finkenzeller and Stan Langlois used their skills to make unique wooden items such as charcuterie boards, stools, cedar benches and BBQ paddles. We are also very grateful for all the anonymous donations dropped off at the church office.

In August, Karen contacted vendors who participated in previous bazaars and invited them to rent tables. The aim is to provide a variety of products. Due to limited space, only 10 to 12 vendor tables are available. Our event is so popular that vendors actually contacted us.

The draw table and silent auction, both major attractions, required a tremendous commitment of time and persistence. Margaret and Geoff Hutton, Carol Zsoldos and Karen were instrumental in seeking donations for the draw and silent auction tables. Gil Owens organized the tickets and helped with picking up donations. Joanne Zwolski and Lynda Ducharme assisted in the setup of tables and the selling of items and tickets. At the end of the day, the draws occurred and the silent auction closed. Volunteer helpers notified winners. This year, we received more items than previous years, confirming that parishioners are most willing to share their hidden talents and in addition, those parishioners with companies or business are willing to generously donate so much.

At the church entrance, the beautiful Thank You Tree created by Anita Rodrigues acknowledged our generous donors. Jean Hishon, responsible for the Bake Table, invited about 50 volunteers to share their culinary skills. With help from her talented granddaughter, Marina, Jean created a beautiful display of cakes, cupcakes, cookies, pies, tarts, muffins, breads and candy creations. Students...
Intentional Disciples

Scott Veenvliet

Scott Veenvliet has been an active volunteer in our community since he officially joined the parish in 2010. Scott and his family decided to pursue a life led by Christ and embraced Catholicism at the Easter Vigil that year. Since then, Scott has participated in the EDGE program, helped with funerals, and has recently been asked to join the Parish Council.

Some of Scott’s most memorable experiences are from youth groups, which he has helped to organize and run for many years. He finds it very fulfilling to demonstrate to young people that there are those who are excited to be part of the parish, and that our youth can share in these experiences too.

As Scott was growing up, he consistently participated in youth groups, and his passion for them has continued into his adulthood. Scott values the EDGE experience and tries to incorporate the theme of Intentional discipleship by helping young people explore their faith and become faithful leaders in their daily lives. He strongly believes that it is important for each young person to recognize that volunteering is an essential part of growing closer to Christ. It is essential for strengthening our relationship with our faith, and for learning to walk with Christ and putting our love for Him into action.

Scott’s natural abilities to teach others about their faith in an effective way stems from his studies at Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C., where he studied Church History and Psychology, and attained a PhD in Psychology. Currently, Scott is teaching at Fanshawe College.

Tom Majer

Tom Majer has been a member of St. Michael’s Parish since his youth. After spending many interesting years at university in Quebec, and living in Japan, Slovenia, the Caribbean and the U.S., he is back at St Michael’s and involved in many areas of parish life. Tom assists with first reconciliation and Eucharist, supports the confirmation class and assists with the celebration of confirmation. He has staged the Stations of the Cross with the youth and worked with EDGE. Tom is a eucharistic minister, and also sits on the Parish Council as the new Youth Education Representative.

Tom feels that being an intentional disciple starts inwardly and radiates outward through the example one gives and the actions one takes. While in the Caribbean, he experienced an invitation from the St. Vincent de Grenadine bishop to work at a Catholic high school. The bishop recognized Tom’s faith in action. He was told that he lived as a Catholic without even being aware of the positive effect he was having on others. For him this was a real awakening in his personal faith. He feels being an intentional disciple is a way of being, a way of living one’s life.

Tom loves his work in the parish. He appreciates the strong leadership and support from Father Murray. He is continually inspired by the parish, by the students he works with and with all those at St. Michael’s with whom he is able to share his faith. He looks to future opportunities to serve, by planning and organizing sacraments alongside the pastoral ministers and by continuing to love and support our parishioners.

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Christmas Bazaar 2019

Corrie Gicante

from John Paul II High School also made desserts. Corrie, Wayne Wolanski and Cheryllann Grace welcomed visitors, inviting them to try their luck at the 50/50 Draw. All 400 tickets sold well before closing.

Tommy and Vina Wang coordinated the lunch room, where once again they demonstrated their expertise in food preparation and selling. Dan Vickery, Gil Owens and Cheryllann Grace, our chili chefs, prepared a delicious hot lunch. Tommy and Vina, along with other volunteers, prepared scrumptious sandwiches throughout the day along with refreshments and desserts.

In so many ways, the collective, creative talents of parishioners contributed to the success of the bazaar. The call for us to work together achieves that which is so vital to our parish community - helping others who are less fortunate. Sometimes, people just need to be invited. Since 2015, Karen and the committee have been thrilled to see so many parishioners respond to this call that confirms how much talent, often hidden, is among us. People want to help and are helping. THANK YOU, THANK YOU.
The Power of Hospitality

by Debbie Walsh

I have been pondering the meaning of hospitality since I was invited to write this article. Upon reflection I recalled how much I enjoy welcoming people to my home, sharing a meal and conversation, and story-telling with them. During my time of transition to London, I’ve deeply appreciated the hospitality shown to me at St. Michael’s. I know the hospitality of this parish community has provided a soft landing pad for me as I get my feet on the ground, giving me the ability to love and serve our community.

With each new family I have had the opportunity to meet from far-off lands, I have marveled at the great courage, trust and hope in a new life it must have taken to journey to Ontario. My deep desire is to be a welcoming presence to all: not only as a fellow new arrival to London, but also as a Canadian and as an ambassador of faith in the Catholic Church, particularly in St. Michael’s parish community.

I know first-hand that a warm welcome can transform fear and alienation into a sense of belonging and hope for the future.

We don’t need to look very far in Scripture to hear what our Master teaches us about hospitality. We are called to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, wash one another’s feet, welcome the lame, clothe the naked and practice hospitality always. All of these actions have been not only expressed in words, but are also reflected in the life of Jesus. The Scripture stories are where we learn how we are called to live. Each time we extend hospitality I believe we touch the hem of Jesus’ garment: we not only help transform lives, but we ourselves are transformed.

As I look at the liturgical year and as we prepare ourselves in this season of Advent for the coming of Emmanuel - God With Us, I ponder the incredible courage of Mary, whose ‘yes’ changed the world forever. Mary’s ‘yes’ was the ultimate in hospitality, by being completely open to the power of the Holy Spirit and offering herself to carry and give birth to God’s Son, Jesus. Joseph’s ‘yes’ ensured God’s plan for us would be complete.

Like Mary and Joseph, the gift of hospitality begins in the heart. With each simple act of hospitality, we are expressing God’s love and presence to each person we greet.

Every time we gather as a community to celebrate liturgy, we are given the opportunity to welcome all who enter St. Michael’s. For those who serve in liturgical ministry: the priest, who leads us through worship; the lector, by proclaiming the love and presence of God in the Word; the gift bearers, by carrying the offering given by human hands and hearts forward on behalf of the community; the Eucharistic ministers, by feeding each of us with the bread of life; the ushers, by ensuring all are comfortable and tended to; the choir, that helps us raise our praise in song; the altar servers who assist throughout the celebration; and those in the pew, participating through song, prayer and presence each has a unique and important role in receiving men, women and children into our time of celebration.

Just as at home when we invite guests to dinner, we welcome them at the door and ensure they feel comfortable and welcome as we gather at the table. Hospitality is the ministry of each baptized person. It is up to each of us to be aware and pay attention to those who are with us at Mass. We create that hospitality in every “welcome,” every prayer and every song we sing.

I’ve experienced that unique hospitality years ago, as I grieved a loss. I knew I needed to be in community to experience comfort, yet I was too sad to fully participate in song because of the lump of sorrow I carried in my throat. It was at that liturgy that I was so very thankful for those whose voices were raised in song and prayer in unity, for they were the voice I could not be that day. That – is liturgical hospitality. That – is what community can do to be agents of healing. That – is who we are called to be in every act of hospitality.

It seems to me there are endless opportunities to practice hospitality. When we are aware and attentive stewards of the many gifts we’ve been blessed with, it is God’s welcome we extend, God’s presence we become, and God’s smile we convey.

I invite you to be aware of the power of the hospitality you extend – whether in your home, our parish, or in our community – for in doing so, you are truly the hands, the heart, the smile of God. Together we, as the mystical Body of Christ, manifest the Incarnation.
I am pleased to author this short article to provide both a better understanding of the Thanksgiving Appeal, as well as to introduce you to a new method of supporting St. Michael’s.

No doubt every parishioner knows about the Annual Thanksgiving Appeal. We promote it specifically for a good six weeks during the Thanksgiving season. The main reason this appeal is so crucial is that this is the ONLY area of donation which is not subject to the 15% assessment fee that we pay to the diocese each and every year. From every other gift that you designate for St. Michael’s --be it regular offertory, special seasonal collections or general donations-- 15% of every dollar of those donations goes to that annual assessment. Our ability to keep providing all of the ministries, programs and operations of our buildings to current levels is directly related to the success of this one campaign.

We felt it necessary to provide this brief explanation because for some, this year’s brochure for the Thanksgiving Appeal may have been a little confusing. The brochure speaks a good deal about support for your parish and diocese. It also lists a good number of departments, programs and services that seemingly receive direct support from this appeal. To ensure transparency, diocese programs and services are funded directly from the 15% annual assessment, and not from the appeal itself. The idea is that the success of the Thanksgiving Appeal will directly pay for the parish assessment, however, one does not have such a clear relation to the other. If the Thanksgiving Appeal was unsuccessful, we would still be required to pay the annual assessment. It is also important to note that we pay additionally and individually for many services and materials provided through the diocese, including DioNet (connectivity), phones, email, computers and some printing, Currently that total is $381.50 each month and antivirus / malware protection is $755 per year.

I hope that in some small way, the importance of the Thanksgiving Appeal has been explained a little more clearly. At the time of writing this article, we are at 67% of a very modest goal of $32,000, while our parish assessment for 2019 is $95,095. In past years we have had a single gift of both $20,000 and $30,000 to this appeal. This is something we can no longer rely on. The personal reflection from every parishioner on what they can give to support the Thanksgiving Appeal is where future success will come from. Please accept our appreciation to you, the supporting parishioners, for your generosity and faithfulness in believing in what we do here. In times when we all might be doing more with less, the continued belief in what the Church is doing and the significant role it plays in our lives is paramount. The Thanksgiving Appeal remains open all year round.

The second objective of this article is to introduce an additional layer of financial giving to St. Michael’s. At the beginning of the Give to Grow – Foundations for our Future capital campaign in 2015, we instituted our first electronic giving model through PayPal. While it has been a success, it in itself did not address the modern reality of people no longer carrying cash. With a generation that is most comfortable with electronic payments, we needed to address their willingness to support the parish financially, especially on Sundays! This is why we would like to introduce PLLENTY. PLLent is a mobile and web-based portal in which credit cards and debit cards can be easily used to donate to St. Michael’s. By the time this Christmas edition of the newsletter is available, PLLent will already be in full effect! You will see various examples of our St. Michael’s QR codes that can be scanned or tapped in order to use an interface on your smart phone to make your donation. This easy to use interface will allow for both one-time and recurring donations to the Church. We will also ensure that those who use PLLent but still wish to place something physical into the collection basket can use specially designed PLLent cards for that process. We are excited to introduce PLLent as an additional platform of electronic giving to help make it more convenient and easy for everyone of every generation to show their support for their spiritual home.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this article, and for all that you do to continue to make St. Michael’s the thriving, welcoming and spiritual community that we are! Bless you!
Each year the parish hosts a meal for the men and women who serve the clients of Hospitality North. We begin the evening with an ecumenical prayer service. Volunteers from St. Michael’s Catholic Church gather in prayer with volunteers from New St. James Presbyterian, Colborne Street United, Trinity Lutheran, and Maitland Street Baptist faith communities. This year Debbie Walsh, our pastoral minister, shared a reflection on the Gospel. She spoke of hospitality and how this gift marks the Christian community. Her reflection on the family table spoke profoundly about the altar, the table in our Church, and why we gather each Sunday to give our Heavenly Father praise. Here is the text of that evening’s reflection. It is truly profound!

Fr. Murray Sample

It is good for us to be here. I prayed on and pondered what this reflection might be, I thought about the dedicated work of your hands, your generous hearts and how God always provides in abundance where there is need.

Dear friends of Hospitality North, indeed you are the salt of the earth – shining your lights for others and feeding those who attend this meal not only with the food you prepare, but you also nourish them with God’s love and presence through your actions, through your warm hospitality.

Henri Nouwen wrote, “Hospitality means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people but to offer them space where change can take place.”

I believe hospitality is a cornerstone of the Christian faith. There are many Scripture stories we hear about welcoming the stranger, helping the stranger and the invitation to come and see, in welcoming strangers we may be entertaining angels unaware – and so many of those stories are of gathering around a table. Whether the meal is being eaten in haste because of the Passover or it is a banquet feast, with those present reclining and lingering together, the invitation so often is come and dine, share this meal. Share this table. The table represents love and relationship. Everyone is invited.

I can’t help but seeing this banquet meal you prepare and serve each Monday in the kitchen of St. Michael’s as an answer to Jesus’ praye, ‘Father may they be one in you as you are in me and I am in you’. Isn’t it amazing, the power of a meal celebrated each week together? The food you prepare, the table you set is a banquet where stories are shared, relationships are formed and a community is built.

Poet Helen Steiner Rice wrote, ‘strangers are friends we haven’t met.’

I think of the joy I feel when I’m preparing a meal for my family and friends and the deep satisfaction when we are all seated together at the table in my home. There, at the table we are one, living in peace and unity. Each of us arriving with our own life story, each with our own joys, each carrying our own sorrows. Each of us seeking nourishment in body, mind and spirit as well as companionship. The table is where we share our stories, our jokes, our challenges, our laughter and tears. We share memories and make memories. We gather together as the younger and the older – we gather in our health and in our infirmities, in our wealth and our poverty.

The Table, every table, every meal is a holy place where we learn more about one another and remember we are not alone. The Table is where we become more connected as family and as community. The Table, as we pause for blessing and prayer, is a place where we take time to remember who we are as children of God and whose we are as His sacred creation. THIS is what you provide the guests of Hospitality North each week. Each week you are the presence of God in welcoming, serving and sharing with the guests. I’m sure you’ve heard the phrase, “preach the gospel at all times; if necessary, use words.” Your warm hospitality and generous service is the gospel preached loudly for all to hear.

Friends of Hospitality North, YOU are the salt of the earth and YOU are a light to the world with each potato peeled, with each coffee poured, with each smile you share with the guests who attend Monday’s meal. The work of your hands reflects the love in your hearts. I appreciate the many demands in life that you need to juggle and prioritize, yet each time you serve the community of Hospitality North, you are living your baptism through your service to others. You don’t need eloquent words when your deeds reflect the light of Christ in your heart and your lives provide flavour so that the stranger feels welcome, accepted, and receives the light of Christ’s love through you. May your light of God’s love continue to shine, may you extend hospitality and welcome all you meet.

The book of Hebrews reminds us, “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

Keep your light shining bright.
Amen.
The Christmas of My Youth  

by Deacon Gaston NK Mabaya

Every year my memories of Christmas, when I was young, always came to mind as the Christmas season approaches. It was the time when I was trading my school uniform for the beautiful surprise gifts of new clothes and a new pair of shoes. My parents were just amazing! For our family and our neighbours, this time of the year (a few days before New Year’s Eve), was seen as a renewal period in our lives. It was like being born again with the Lord: Mass celebration, Christmas songs, and food were competing with each other.

When I grew up, though, moving from one country to another and embracing different cultures and different styles of celebrations, I noticed that there was a variety of activities related to Christmas; some devoted to God, others more commercial. All this brought a change in everyone’s behaviour during this time. A sense of newness was felt as well, which evoked many emotions: joy, suspicion, or simply the feeling of achieving something. To describe it, I would have to say, it was a period of adjustment. Then, I came to ask myself the true meaning of this feast.

So, what is Christmas really?

Two thousand years ago, in Bethlehem, a boy was born. A Saviour was given to the world. A Messiah was revealed to the Jews. An amazing account - he was born of a virgin mother. We were speechless as young Christians, when this story was told to us over and over. But, the truth of the matter is that the story was real.

But, when you grow up, you may say: “Oh! It is just a birthday. Let’s buy stuff, exchange gifts, eat, dance, and rejoice”. No, make no mistake. This is the birth of Him whose name is Emmanuel (God is with us). His name is Jesus Christ, the Saviour, the Son of Man. He is the Son of the Most High who dwells in us. He is in our hearts. He walks with us, taking care of us, and overtaking our enemies.

This is the mystery, the revelation that the Angel Gabriel came to tell a young virgin woman named Mary: that she would bear a son. On that night, when she heard that strange voice greeting her, she was much perplexed by the angel’s word and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

In light of this encounter and the promise of God who said, by the angel, that this child will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of His kingdom there will be no end, the celebration of this feast should echo in our hearts the joy felt by Mary. The Holy Spirit came upon her and the power of the Most High overshadowed her; therefore the child to be born was to be holy: He was to be called the Son of God. Moved by this anointing, Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” By her “YES,” she became for us a channel of light, a channel of blessings.

Therefore, Christmas is not only a remembrance of this event but a time well spent in families, rejoicing and worshipping the Lord. As Mary showed humility in her heart, St. Teresa of Calcutta prayed, “Humility of the heart of Mary, fill my heart. Teach me, as you taught Jesus, to be meek and humble and so to glorify the Father.” Amen.
Death is permanent. The reasons individuals choose to seek death are as varied and numerous as people themselves. These individuals need support in living, not euthanasia. Euthanasia is an abandonment of people at a low time in their life. In a culture where government does not share our ideals as Christians, we need to be a strong voice for the sacredness of life from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. Those seeking death are first and always seeking comfort and compassion. Euthanasia and assisted suicide are catchall solutions for problems society does not want to tackle. Euthanasia gives your physician the right to cause your death. The federal government in Canada legalized euthanasia by defining it as an exception to homicide in the Criminal Code, rather than defining it as medical treatment. Assisted suicide permits doctors to prescribe lethal doses of drugs, which the individual chooses to use at their own discretion.

Who has failed these people? Where does it end? It ends when we all do our part to be caring and compassionate. It is up to each of us to be a hope for somebody’s tomorrow. Alex Schadenberg of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition spoke to an audience at St. Michael’s and showed a film entitled “Fatal Flaws,” which airs both sides of the issue. He has been the executive director at Euthanasia Prevention Coalition since July 1999. This is a non-profit organization that opposes euthanasia and assisted suicide. It was founded by Alex Schadenberg, Dr. Barrie De Veber, and Jean Echlon in 1998, with its headquarters here in London. Alex’s blog (link below), which focuses on euthanasia, assisted suicide and end of life issues, is the most-read blog on this topic in the world.

Compassionate Community Care, a registered charity comprised of health care professionals and volunteers who provide support to clients and their families during times of illness and crisis, outlines clearly what we can do. Many people believe, when they are faced with a life-threatening illness, experiencing serious health problems, or are nearing death, that euthanasia or assisted suicide should be an option. The fears that lead someone to consider these supposed options are real and legitimate. Each fear has a corresponding life-affirming answer. For many people who are lonely, suffering, and/or possibly dying, the prospect of lethal injection gives them the feeling of control over their helplessness. There is no reason for a person to suffer uncontrolled pain, feel they are a burden to their families or caregivers, feel abandoned in their time of greatest need, or fear receiving unwanted medical treatment without consent. Euthanasia and assisted suicide undermine the truth that intentionally killing a human being is always wrong. It erodes the respect and equality of every person and establishes killing as a solution to problems that are best resolved by caring options. It destroys the trust relationship between medical professionals and patients. People will fear for their lives when they are most in need of help. Everyone has the right to refuse unwanted medical treatment. Withholding or withdrawing such treatment is a legal and common practice, but it is not the same as euthanasia or assisted suicide. People with disabilities, the elderly, and the chronically ill may be vulnerable to

family, friends or the medical profession caregivers who question their quality of life. People may be pressured into choosing death without informed consent. A person’s freedom to choose death may sometimes be the only choice offered. Abuse of the elderly, children, and the disabled is a prevalent social scourge. No legal safeguards will ever protect these vulnerable persons. If killing is an acceptable solution for one problem, what other problems will killing become a solution for?

We have choices at our disposal. Proper palliative and hospice care provides relief from distressing symptoms, affirms life and regards dying as a natural process, and neither hastens nor postpones death. These care models offer support to affected families as well, as they use a team approach to address the needs of all concerned, including care staff. These options integrate psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care by enhancing the quality of life, and can positively affect the course of the illness when introduced early, in conjunction with other therapies that are intended to prolong life. They involve investigations needed to better understand and manage distressing clinical complications. We as individuals can make a difference by becoming informed, and by being willing to inform others. We need to educate ourselves about our rights and designate someone to speak on our behalf when we cannot. In every circumstance we respect the dignity and equality of others, especially the vulnerable, and care for those in our community who are isolated and lonely. Be truly compassionate, care for, and be present in the lives of those who need us but who maybe www.CompassionateCommunityCare.org cannot speak their need. Support good palliative care and hospice services. By doing our part even in small ways, we are renewing hope and purpose in their lives, and in our own. We are challenged, as a people who oppose euthanasia and assisted suicide, to be a positive, caring influence in society. It is up to each of us to create a culture of caring, not killing.

Euthanasia Prevention Coalition: www.epcc.ca 1 877-439-3348
Compassionate Community Care: 1-855-675-8749
Many people feel retreats and youth groups are boring; they feel young people are forced to attend and listen, and just be quiet. Everyone has been to those retreats at some point in their life: listening to somebody speaking at them, about Jesus and how you need Him in your life - or else. Or, you might have experienced the opposite, where you go along and you end up having lots of fun, but when you leave nothing in your life has changed and the day just fades into your distant memory, like so many other youth events. So what actually makes youth ministry -- and more specifically, retreats -- actually impactful and worth hosting?

Well, our youth, family and young adult ministry team knows that the most important part of ensuring young people remember a retreat, and that it impacts them deeply, is letting them experience Jesus themselves. That’s it! It’s really that simple. In our retreat, a few months ago, we led our youth through a variety of high-energy games and activities, but then went on to allow each member to learn and build trust with the leadership team.

Having built that trust, we presented the personal story of one of our leaders. Many youth groups and churches use this time to give information and spread the word, but we view this as an opportunity for the chosen leader to open up and share deeply about their past and what they have been through. This is one of the most powerful moments I have experienced in youth ministry: seeing young people engage with the story, as if they are experiencing those exact same issues in their lives. The more raw and honest the story is, the more the youth lean in. I cannot explain what it is like to see a leader choke up as they are talking; to look around the room and see young people respond to them as if they are feeling the exact pain or heartache that leader felt. This time in our retreats is the moment that things change. This is where we begin unlocking the hearts of the young people. Too often in ministry, we lead first with catechesis, without having touched hearts.

From here, it is easy to go into small groups or try to make a lasting impact on these teens, but I ask, is it not true that anything we can do, Jesus can do one hundred times better? So we give them the most raw and the most real experience they can have: Jesus.

Syl Patry, our youth minister, proceeds to share what is about to happen:

“Jesus is gonna show up guys. He is going to be present among all of us in a few minutes. This is a time to offer your personal challenges, your hurts, your joys and gratitude. Anything and everything that is in your heart. Give Him permission to be present and in your heart. If you have doubt, it’s okay. Let Him know that you’re not ready, but willing. Or maybe say, if you’re real, then show me Lord! Give Him permission!” And lastly, sharing with you what his mentor Andre Regnier from Catholic Christian Outreach, and his spiritual director, the late Fr. Bob Bedard, CC, often reminded him, “Lord, whatever you want me to do, I will do.”

This is the pinnacle of the day. The hall is blacked out. A single spotlight beams on an empty altar. The Encounter Worship Band, our very own choir, leads us in a dramatic procession. Altar servers lead the way with candles, and the priest reverently carries the Monstrance up to the altar. This is what the personal encounter is all about. THIS is our “why”. In the darkness, in the silence, we allow them to experience adoration, and for most, this is their first time.

At first this might seem like too much for the youth of today’s world, but all they need to do is trust. They want to know the facts, and
in our faith, there is nothing more pure than to experience Jesus himself. Our Parochial Vicar Fr. Pio D’Oria, and Fr. Danny Santos (Director of Vocations for the Diocese of London) spent the day with us. After Fr. Danny reposed the Monstrance on the altar for adoration for about 30 minutes, he walked around to each row with Jesus in his hands, and gave each young person ten seconds with Jesus directly in front of them. ALL OF THEM! This is unlike anything else I have seen. Some teens were laughing or chatting, but as Jesus came to them, they were simply in awe. Complete silence and reverence. This is absolutely the pinnacle of the retreat, just as it should be. It’s about all our parish community becoming youth ministers, leaders, disciples in our own lives, creating an opportunity for everyone to experience a personal encounter with Christ.

So, as I posed the question earlier, what actually works in youth ministry? At St. Michael’s Parish we believe that the only thing that works is focusing on a single goal, and that goal is simply creating room for Jesus to work. This is the true essence of youth ministry: relational discipleship.

A couple of students were asked to share their experience...

Alysa Kuriakose, Grade 8 Confirmation candidate:

-What was your expectation going to the retreat?

I have attended other church events and retreats before so I kinda knew a little bit, but wasn’t expecting that much.

-What was your experience after the Confirmation retreat?

I was very surprised at how fun it was and I didn’t expect so many other students to be there, like one hundred? It was very different.

Carter Vaughan-Warford Grade 8 Confirmation candidate:

-What was your expectation when attending the retreat?

I really thought and expected that it would be only about religion.

-What was your experience at the retreat?

I thought it was going to be only about religion, but there were some really fun activities and talks. I attended with an open mind and I got to meet new people, which was a great experience.

-What kind of impact did the retreat have on you?

I really related to Joshua’s story about bullying. I now believe more in myself, in my beliefs, my self-esteem, because of Jesus. I’m more confident now. I’m different now, I believe more in Jesus, I’ve seen Him and felt Him.
Longstanding tensions with the majority population of what was formerly Burma have driven the Karen people, many of whom are Christians, from their homes. The conflict originated decades ago, intensifying when a military dictatorship took over in the 1960s and renamed the country Myanmar. Beginning in 1995, ethnic cleansing forced many Karens to flee their traditional homelands in eastern Burma through dense jungle and across the Salween River to UNHCR refugee camps just over the Thai/Burmese border. Tha So, mother of our sponsored family, would spend 21 years in the camp in Thailand. K’Nay Moo, her husband, was abducted by Burmese soldiers when he was only 13 years old and was compelled to labour in a number of roles. After four years he escaped and made the perilous crossing into Thailand and the relative safety of the refugee camp.

Three years after our initial application for sponsorship of this family, the St. Michael’s refugee team received word, in May 2019, that they would soon arrive in Canada. On June 25th, members of the team welcomed Tha So, and K’Nay Moo and their family of four children aged 21, 15, 11, and 8, to Toronto to begin their new life in Canada. Their arrival also occasioned a reunion with Tha So’s sister, Dah Ree. Dah Ree and her husband, Lah May and their three children, parishioners from St. Michael’s, have been a vital link in helping the Moo family become established in London.

Generous donations from the parish over the years enabled the team to mobilize quickly to organize transportation from the airport and accommodation for the family here in London. Appeals to the parish resulted in a wonderful outpouring of clothing, household goods and furniture. Another parishioner in a nearby rental office helped identify a suitable apartment. Willing hands helped with the move-in in early July and then the work of settlement began in earnest. Over the summer, government documents were applied for and obtained. Banking and budgeting matters were addressed. The children were registered for school and the adults for ESL. Team members worked with the family to get vaccinations updated, explain bus routes, and equip everyone to begin classes in September.

Health care in the refugee camp was rudimentary. For example, those with vision problems obtained secondhand glasses by bartering portions of their food ration. Although the Karen diet is typically low in sugar, the lack of dental care took a toll. Consequently, following their arrival in Canada, identifying suitable health care professionals for the family became a priority. They now have a family doctor, and funds donated by St. Michael’s parishioners have underwritten dental care and eye exams for the Moo family. Where needed, family members have been fitted for eyeglasses with accurate prescriptions.

September and October brought many new experiences. The youngest children attend one of the parish’s elementary schools, where understanding teachers and support workers help them to learn English and catch up to their grade level. The family’s teenager is enrolled in high school. Mom and Dad and the 21-year-old attend adult ESL classes. Team members visit frequently to assist with ESL at home, liaise with the schools regarding meetings, schedules, newsletters, etc. Sr. Maria van Leeuwen, CSJ, arranged Thanksgiving dinner for the family where they sampled traditional fare, even pumpkin pie! This occasion also celebrated the teenager’s 16th birthday. The younger kids loved Halloween, dressing up as SpiderMan and a ladybug.
The adults have made many friends at their ESL classes and enjoy socializing with the diverse community there. The whole family is picking up English conversation with interest and humour and the winter weather has brought a whole new set of experiences to talk about.

The Moo family is very appreciative of the help they have received from St. Michael’s. They attend Mass here and look forward to meeting the parish more formally. This will probably not happen until January because recently a bad fall resulted in a broken hip for Tha So. However, after surgery and a brief stay in hospital, she is doing her physio and recuperating well. She was deeply touched by the get well cards she received from her ESL friends and is eager to get back to school as soon as the doctors give her the all clear.

The Refugee Committee is deeply grateful for the amazing outpouring of support we have received from St. Michael’s parishioners in terms of money, clothes and household goods, but also for your interest and prayers. The work of settling this family in Canada has only just begun, but with your help they have made a good beginning. Watch the bulletin for further updates. If you are interested in becoming more involved there are still many ways to help this and other refugee families. For more information please contact us at refugeeteam.stmichaels@gmail.com

Ministry Fair

After each Mass on the weekend of October 19th, parishioners were invited to learn about the parish’s 55 ministries and how these contribute to our parish and community. The displays and persons speaking on behalf of each ministry encouraged parishioners to volunteer and share their time and talents so that the parish can continue to provide and sustain its many existing services.
Parish Photos
Sunday Masses
Saturday: 5:00 p.m.
Sunday: 8:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m.

Weekday Masses
Tuesday & Thursday: 12:00 noon
Wednesday & Friday: 8:00 a.m.
Saturday: 9:00 a.m.

African Caribbean Catholic Community Mass
(St. Josephine Bakhita)
4th Sunday of each month at 2:30 p.m.

Sacrament of Reconciliation
Saturday: 9:30 – 10:30 a.m. and 4:00 - 4:30 p.m.

Free Bus Service to
10:30 a.m. Mass
The route . . .
9:35 a.m. (new time)
- 64 Wyndham
- Blackwater east of Adelaide - bus stop
- Grenfell just east of Blackwater
- Fanshawe/Trossacks - bus stop on corner
- 770 Fanshawe Park Rd east of Fremont - bus stop
- Fanshawe Park Road - west of Fremont
- Adelaide/Fanshawe - bus stop south of Fanshawe
- Kipps Lane/Adelaide - bus shelter just east of Adelaide
- Kipps Lane/Barker
- Kipps Lane - bus stop east of Barker
- Kipps Lane/Kenmore Place - bus stop
- 295 Briarhill
- Cheapside/Boullee
- Huron Street - bus stop east of Wedgewood Drive
10:15 a.m.
- Royal Oak Apartments - 3 stops
  go to St. Michael’s Church

The bus will stop at regular bus stops or wherever it is hailed along the route.