

St. John's Journal

St. John's Anglican Church, West Toronto
288 Humberside Ave. (at High Park Ave.)
www.toronto.anglican.ca/parish/stjohns/
(416) 763-2393

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As the Advent Season approaches, we think about the arrival of Jesus and the beginning of Christianity. How fitting that in November we remember the beginning of our own parish of St. John's. Happy 120 Everyone!

Incumbent's Greeting

It is my pleasure to write to you in what is now my third month at St. John's. It has been a very intense and exciting time. I admit to initially feeling a little lost in the whirlwind of all that goes on here at St. John's. I was told that I kept people pretty busy at the Church of the Ascension, Port Perry, so I hope that means we are well matched for travelling together. Thank you to so many of you who have given me opportunities to get to know you. I now know that you put on great events around food as a church - and I have discovered that in your homes gathering around a meal is to touch the sacred.

I am enjoying the St. John's neighbourhood: jogging the park, coffee at the Alternative Grounds, the occasional breakfast at the Sunset Grill. I have had to make some adjustments: Walking the dog on a leash and carrying a plastic bag (this move has been harder on Maya than on me!); driving around the city takes longer than I expected; and would you believe that, in Port Perry, it is not uncommon to stop at a roadside stand and ask if the corn was picked in the last 12 hours!

I am now completely unpacked and settled in the Roncesvalles Village, and delighted that it is only a 15 minute bike ride through the park to work. I am also unpacked in my office at the church, and very grateful to those who helped with the renovation. I really wanted my office space to be comfortable for work, visiting and small meetings, and I am happy to say that, so far, it works wonderfully. There is an intimacy to the worship space, maybe it is the layout, and maybe it is you, who are very comfortable with being laid back. Thank you for the welcome.

As I said, it has also been intense. I moved my home, my job, and my life - and joined your life, which is a whirlwind in itself. I don't know if you give yourself

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permission to take a little break once in a while. I just had one. With thanks to Bruce Alton (I have never had an honorary assistant before - a surprise blessing, as I am sure you already realize), I was able to go away on retreat over the November 11th weekend. I thought of it as a time for my insides to catch up with my outsides. I wrote in my journal, prayed with the community at Madonna House, went for walks...and I put together a photo album. What a great way to celebrate where I have been, and to thank God for that part of my journey - what a gift. And to close the book and put it away and open myself to a new chapter.

It is also natural in the quiet to mull over what I have learned of St. John's so far. Let me try this one on you. You are laid back. You are inclusive. You have a great mission statement - and the people who visited for the induction sure appreciated it. You have such obvious caring for each other. And still! I can tell that some of you are discouraged. Yes, you have been through some hard things - the merger, the sale of the building, dealing with being small - and I haven't been here to walk these with you. But this is what I wonder: If you are carrying around DISCOURAGEMENT as your story, your script, doesn't it shape how you feel about our future together?

I was telling a friend about starting at St. John's. I guess my enthusiasm was showing. I said all the things that I found exciting. And my friend said (with comparison to other churches no less), "Oh what fun!" I wish you could each have a t-shirt with a St. John's logo, and printed in big, the words "Oh What Fun!" Then people would ask you, and you'd tell them the parts that are fun for you, and it would be infectious.

Would it help you to have this approach if we started something that is future-oriented? I have discovered that this year is St. John's 120th anniversary. And I am very grateful for a report, offered by Cynthia Ledgley to the Publicity Committee, on how to make the 5 year lead up to the 125th anniversary into a BHAG. That's business terminology for a "Big Hairy Audacious Goal". Something to get excited about, to get rallied around, not just as a point of arrival, but the whole trip. Cynthia's report suggests having a focal point, like getting those bells working again. I know I'd love to hear them. And I bet it would generate some excitement in the neighbourhood too. Sure, along the way we would need to do some stewardship. So you know that's coming! And let's not forget that along the way, while we are having fun, some of us are going to fall totally in love with God. The ways Jesus introduces him to us. The ways we start to go deeper in our personal lives. The ways our relationships become more profound. The ways we start to live gratitude for each moment.

Let's write it on a t-shirt, "St. John's - Oh What Fun!" I'm having fun already. Thanks for the great welcome.

The Rev. Gary van der Meer

