

'Holy Conversations'

A series of meetings between the four downtown United Churches, and attended by East District representatives, has begun to examine some ideas for working more closely together in areas of common interest, our respective Ministries, how our individual Churches are characterized, our mission statements etc.

Attended by Rev. Bill and various representatives of the Wesley Church Council, the first meeting took place at St. James in June, the second in October at Wesley, the third in November at George Street with the next meeting scheduled for February at Cochrane Street. These meetings are not focusing on the concept of amalgamation at this time as many might think. While that may come up at some point in the future, these meetings are centered right now on how the four existing downtown Churches (Cochrane Street; Gower; George Street; and Wesley) might work together more closely and perhaps in some cases jointly. A number of issues have been suggested including an exchange of Church 'calendars of events' so that we are not in conflict with each other for fund raisers or special services, possibility of bulk buying of things like furnace oil or office supplies etc., occasional exchanges of clergy for services or joint worship services and things of this nature.

There are plans to expand these discussions within the congregations and organizations of each of the downtown Churches to ensure significant involvement and input from members of the congregation(s) as this initiative moves ahead.

Questions have been asked to the effect that, with this sort of discussion ongoing, should we continue to undertake repairs and improvements to our Church buildings (i.e. roof replacement at Wesley)? The answer is **YES WE SHOULD!** While there is much uncertainty in many cases as to any future changes and their timing, any such changes could be years away and we have to continue with basic upkeep and maintenance of our existing properties. There will be more on these meetings in the coming months.

BRIDGES TO HOPE

Bridges To Hope Food Aid Centre, located on Cookstown Road, provides food hampers for an average of 130 individuals or families per week. As the winter season creeps closer, the number of clients has been increasing as well, putting more demand on canned/package food items. However, they do not only provide a source of food relief, they also supply personal and hygienic products, household items and animal food. In the new year Bridges to Hope will have the grand opening of their community kitchen, in which they will begin the "Home Smart" Program. This program teaches participants basic cooking skills, healthy eating and how to shop wisely. Bridges to Hope is also in partnership with DayBreak in providing a Toy Lending Library in which individuals may take toys on loan and return them to check out others. This service allows parents to provide necessary tools their children need without the high cost. Also, this coming Christmas they will provide well over 300 Christmas Hampers to needy families. It is an extremely vibrant, busy and caring outreach of the United Church in St. John's – the two Presbyterian Churches are also part of this outreach. There are three paid employees and the rest of the work is done by many volunteers. Robert Driscoll is Wesley's representative on the Bridges to Hope Board and also volunteers in the pantry providing weekly hampers as does Mildred Cousens. Please take an interest in this outreach and visit the relatively new premises on Cookstown Road to see what they are all about and please remember the hungry and needy families of our society.



The Pantry at Bridges to Hope

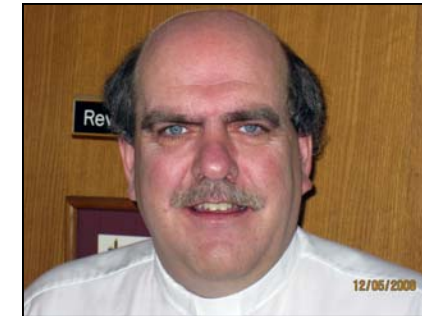


News from Wesley

December 2009

In this newsletter, you will find a section on memorable Christmas gifts that individuals have received. I was asked to contribute a memory for this particular section but I wanted to include that memory in my message here. Growing up in Toronto, my family lived in an apartment over a clothing store: Mark's Menswear. As a young boy, I could not pronounce the last name of the owner so I always called him Mr. Mark and his wife Mrs. Mark. Each year, on Christmas Eve, Mr. Mark would drop off two packages at our door to the apartment. Those packages were a shirt and tie for my father and for me. You can imagine how pleased my parents were to receive such a gift and how disappointed that I, as a young boy, would be to get clothing for Christmas. However, each year, until we moved from the apartment to Newfoundland, the same Christmas gift was left at our door.

As I grew older, I began to realize just how special a gift those shirts and ties truly were. When I could finally pronounce their last name, I realized that Mr. and Mrs. Markowski were Jewish. They celebrated Hannukah, not Christmas, yet, each year, they made sure that their tenants .



Rev. Bill Mercer

had a gift to celebrate our special holiday. Their kindness and generosity and their inclusiveness has stayed in my mind and heart my entire life. When I think about the gifts they gave my father and I, I am reminded of the gifts of the magi, the wise ones who came from foreign lands to acknowledge the newborn baby. They were not Christians, nor were they even Jewish; they were from foreign lands, of foreign ancestry and, yet, they recognized the significance of the birth of this child who would bring change to their world.

The Markowski's did not believe in Jesus Christ as the son of God but they did recognize the significance of the Christ-child to the lives of the Mercer family who rented the apartment from them. They were not threatened by our beliefs but, instead, did their part to help us celebrate and I will always treasure the precious gift they shared with us each year. As we celebrate this Christmas season, let us remember that precious gift

that came to us in the Bethlehem manger ~ a gift that was given to all the world. Emmanuel – "God with us" – the true reason for our celebrations. God chose to be born into the world, to live with humanity, to show us, by living example, the ways of hope, peace, joy and love. I pray that we will all be touched by the Spirit of God, once again, this Christmas season and that we will be enabled to share the gifts of God with any and all we meet. And, while not all the people we will meet will share our beliefs, all are to be viewed and treated as God's children. The Markowski's taught me a great deal about what it means to be a child of God and I shall be eternally grateful for their love and kindness. They reflected the kind of lives that God intends for all God's children

May this season remind us of that and may we honour the Christ-child by offering him our most precious gift – the gift of our hearts.

"For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given." Merry Christmas, my friends.

