

Church School News

Christmas Joys

One of my favorite times of the year is the Advent and Christmas season. Wonderful family traditions, special get-togethers with friends and a sense of goodwill all around us as we look forward to the Celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus. However, over the years Christmas has taken on an even more poignant and special meaning as I have shared in the excitement with the children, teachers and parents of our Church School in the Advent Candle lighting and of course the preparations for the Annual Christmas Pageant.

The times spent with the children, Bobbie and Michael Cristofaro, Pageant Directors for many years, along with the McIlreavys, Peter Sabourin, Naima and so many of our volunteers, as well as Jonathan, Jordan and Andy has brought so much joy. Pageant preparations can be described as stressful, but it's "joyful stress"!!

Preparations begin in October with choir practices, casting, costume fittings, dragging out all the props from the basement, sending out invitations for the Family Dinner, etc. etc. etc. With only one day for dress rehearsal it all seems somewhat overwhelming as excited children fill the entire church building on Saturday afternoon and we wonder "How is this going to work out?" And by the grace of God, (Divine Intervention) it always does!!

We had children as young as 4 years old participating, as well as our senior class who helped with the readings, lighting, costumes and supervision of the younger children. It was a real team effort.

We had a wonderful turnout for the Pageant and it was delightful to have so many visiting children participate at the end of the Pageant by bringing up gifts to the Baby Jesus.

After the Pageant, we welcomed approximately 200 to the Family Christmas dinner which continues to be a wonderful time of fellowship for all. Throughout the evening everyone was treated to a slide show of Pageants throughout the years and of course the highlight was the arrival of our wonderful bagpipe-playing Santa!!

Another special service that I have come to look forward to each year is the 4:00 p.m. Family Christmas Eve Service. The Service was led entirely by the Church School children, with The Rev. Jim Armour assisting with the opening prayer as well as the Benediction. All the readings are done by the children, ranging in age from 6 to 18. Participation of all visiting children is encouraged and we had a huge number of children come up to join us decorate the tree – each

ornament being symbolic of the Christmas story. The Service was concluded with an invitation from The Rev. Armour to sing 'Happy Birthday to Jesus' and then share in some delicious birthday cake. This Service is becoming more and more popular each year. Praise God!

After a very busy Christmas, we had a few weeks to rest up but shortly after the New Year, preparations for the Annual Youth Retreat for our Senior Classes were under way. There were 33 of us in total, including counselors and young people returning once again to Villa St. Martin from January 16-18 to spend a wonderful weekend together. We invited the St. Columba Youth Group to join us and six of their students and three counsellors attended. A special thanks is extended to their minister Ian Fraser who led our worship service on Friday night, Our theme this year was "Caring Christians – Christian Role Models" with a focus on Biblical Christian Role Models, Christian Role Models in the Entertainment and Sports Fields as well as Christian Role Models in our personal lives. Our guest speaker was Alyssa Sklar who focused on cyber bullying and responsible use of i-phones, Internet, Facebook, etc. being mindful of the feelings of others.

We discussed the many ways we can "carry it forward" and remembered our Christian Role Model, Shuling Chen. It was decided to carry on Shuling's legacy with a Memorial Fund set up in her name in support of the Annual Youth Retreat which she pioneered. In that regard the Youth Group will be holding a Coffee House on February 20 which is detailed in the Youth Group Report.

A number of upcoming events to note in your calendars: Palm Sunday, when the children will be singing in church, as well as the Family Cabane a Sucre which is slated for mid-April – date to be confirmed. Looking way ahead, don't forget the Mother's Day breakfast, complete with wonderful entertainment provided by the Church School children.

As promised in the last InsideOut – total funds raised by the Church School and Youth Group at the November "Bowl-A-Thon" for PWS&D was \$1,379.00 Thank you once again for your support.

If you have any questions about our programs or would like to join our team, please contact me at the grammy.shani@sympatico.ca or phone 450-689-4379.

Sharon Dworzak, Church School Coordinator

Send Us Your Ideas for *InsideOut*

If you have ideas for future issues, please submit them for consideration. If you have a question about your Church and how it works, or if you have a question or comment about the Christian faith, we want to hear about it. Submit your ideas, articles, photos or comments to minister@standrewstpaul.com or sue.m.stevenson@gmail.com. Submissions should be no more than 500 words. Digital and scanned photos should be about a 1MB jpg file.