



# Ten Year Commemoration of the Fire

## And Thanksgiving Newsletter 2011

### Rector's Message

**Dear Parishioner,**

Everyone loves a good story! A good story can open our imaginations to interesting people and situations that can encompass all the experiences of life, from love to sorrow, birth to death, tragedy and joy. Here in the Maritimes, there are many excellent story tellers who have a real knack in drawing us close, keeping our interest and at times linking our lives to the story being told. The story of the Bluenose is one of the great stories of Nova Scotia and continues to be written and added to, even as we read this.

The Parish of St. John's has many stories to tell, going all the way back to 1753. It is always a delight to hear our guides and volunteers tell our parish story to the numerous visitors coming to St. John's. Last year, some 22,000 came to visit our church. I've had the joy of sharing our story with many folks, invariably, they are deeply moved by our history of faith and worship, the service to so many people and families throughout the generations and of course, the story of the fire and the restoration that has given us the church we now love so much.

You have many stories to tell! Some are being told in this edition of the newsletter, others are waiting to be told, some are written down in our archives. If you would like to add a story, please let me know and I will put you in contact with the right person. On October 15<sup>th</sup>, we are holding a special workshop called: Writing the Sacred, where you can enjoy telling the story.

Each Sunday is the Lord's Day, a time to gather to recall the Great Story of God's unfailing love for us and to support one another along the journey of life. In a busy world, taking time for the Lord and one another is the most important thing we can do. Thanksgiving Sunday is always an opportunity to say 'Thank you' for life. On Nov 1<sup>st</sup>, the Feast of All Saints, you are invited to join in a special service with our Bishop, as we mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church fire and give thanks for the many blessings that have led us forward.

Friends, Jesus came to unite the story of God and humankind with a bond that can never be broken. Enjoy this newsletter and do take part in the many activities as you are able.

God bless you,

*Michael+*



**‘Through the Eyes of the Parish Secretary’, by Mary Wagner**

I shall never forget that day, November 1, 2001. I had been the parish secretary for one year.

Like any typical work day, I was getting ready to head into Lunenburg to go to work. The phone rang and my daughter who was attending the Middleton Campus phones home to see if I had been watching the news. (I hadn't been) She then proceeded to tell me that St. John's Church was on fire and things weren't looking too good.

I drove to town and could smell the smoke. My heart was pounding and I wondered how I would get to work at the Parish Hall. I soon discovered that all roads leading to the church were closed to traffic. I parked the car at the bottom of Kissing Bridge Road and walked up the hill to the fire site. Choking from the smoke as I trekked up past Hillcrest Cemetery I wondered if I would be able to make it. My lungs felt as if they were ready to explode from the smoke and my heart pounded with fear as I wondered what things would look like once I arrived at the church. I had to brace myself for what I would see.

The church was ablaze and the community, not just the parishioners, wept as they saw the devastation from the fire. I remember telling myself over and over that the Fire Departments would soon get things under control. It wasn't to be!

I went to the office and everything was absolutely chaotic. People milled in and out of the Parish Hall, phones were ringing off the wall and the news media from everywhere were trying to get our story and wishing to speak to someone. They were not pushy as they went about their work, but there was a story unfolding that they wanted to tell the world.

The outpouring of love and support from parishioners, townspeople, the province of Nova Scotia and the world was overwhelming. Periodically I would travel down the hall to peer out the window to see how things were going at the church. To see the bells topple to the ground was indescribable. This was, for me, a wake up call to make me realize the absolute seriousness of the situation.

The church looked like a crumpled mess is how I would describe it. The altar, which although damaged was later to be restored. Several scorch marks were left on the altar to remind us of what we had been through. Some of the pews were scorched as well, but they were able to be stored until such time as the church was restored. People laboriously gathered up the broken pieces of stained glass, washing each piece and storing it for a time when a use would be found for it. The church itself suffered severe devastation.

For weeks the office was a central station of chaos. Jane Ritcey, warden of the church at that time, graciously relieved me by answering the phones and speaking with people as they streamed in and out of the office. We were faced with people from near and far, some crying in disbelief offering to help wherever the need happened to be. The offers of help, both physically and financially were amazing. At that point it was hard to know what we needed and how we could use their help. We were, back in those early days, reeling from the grief of the devastation. As well we learned that the parish office could not possibly handle the magnitude of what we were facing. The Restoration office was set in place to handle restoration business and we had the Parish office to handle parish business. Things became more manageable at this point.

**‘Through the Eyes of the Parish Secretary’, by Mary Wagner , continued**

Thankfully no church records were lost in the fire except for several entries in a new vestry book. All baptism, marriage and death records were housed at the Parish Hall.

I remember thinking back then, that my job would be finished because of the devastation of the fire. Here I am, ten years later and busier than ever. I thank God for the privilege to be working with such wonderful people.

Three things have really stuck with me personally over the past ten years since the fire at the church.

- The whole world cared about St. John’s Anglican Church.
- The congregation gathered for worship at the Parish Hall during the restoration period and became an even closer Family of God.
- A dear, sweet soul from western Canada sent a box of her handmade Christmas ornaments to the church to sell because she had no money to contribute. She made each ornament out of love.

***“How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”  
Genesis 28:17***

I have touched on some of the story as it unfolded during the fire and restoration period. There are many more stories, but I hope I was able to show at least in some small way how lives were affected and how the church survived this ordeal.

**November 2nd, 2001 - The Aftermath**

Photo Taken by Ed Jordan

## A Letter To Sad Goat

*The following is a letter written to Sad Goat, the CBC Radio Program hosted by Bill Richardson, by Amy Bennett, from Big Lots.*

There are small children rehearsing their lines for the Christmas pageant in the parish hall. There are junior choristers practicing their hymns for the Christmas-Eve family service. There are grown-ups trimming windows in the hall with garlands, as the early dark of a December day comes to this ancient seaside town of Lunenburg. Christmas is indeed coming. But it is coming to Lunenburg this year without the sound of the carillon bells of St. John's Church that have rung over the town for nearly a hundred years. Christmas is coming this year to Lunenburg without the familiar, welcoming light streaming from the fishermen's window in the bell tower of old St. John's church beckoning the faithful to celebrate within her cherished walls.

St. John's, this Christmas, is in ruins. There is not much left of the 247-year-old church beyond charred rubble and the scant timbers of her frame that remain still standing. This perhaps most beautiful of Canada's historic churches caught fire on Halloween night, and the terrible loss brought a town to its knees.

This was a structure crafted by shipwrights who gave the gift of their skills to the glory of God. This was a church with a soul of its own – a spirit that embraced all who entered. The warmth of the wooden interior; the breathtaking vaulted ceiling, with its hammered timber beams invoking the shape of a ship's hull; the gilded stars in the dome of the chancel, laid out in the very pattern of the constellations themselves; the pews where generation after generation of Lunenburgers worshipped, sought solace, rejoiced.

Since the fire, our children have become accustomed to the sight of their parents, grandparents and neighbours crying. Old men and young children sobbed openly on the morning of November 1 as the bell tower succumbed to the flames, sending the chime of ten bells tumbling to the ground. Volunteer firefighters wept as they smashed stained glass windows to get water to the blaze. Even now, weeks later, little things still bring us to tears. The sight of hundreds of signatures on letters of condolence. The smell of smoke that lingers in the ruins. The image of four-year-old Grace, her impish face for once serious, singing her heart out with the junior choir gathered in the hall.

"I am the church," Grace sings, brushing her hair from her eyes. "You are the church. We are the church together."

And indeed we are. We are celebrating this Christmas season without our beloved church building, but we are also celebrating without complacency. We will come together this Christmas Eve, hundreds strong in our parish hall where we will gather around the scorched and water-damaged altar, rescued intact from the rubble, scrubbed by teenage boys desperate to help in any small way. We will gather in this building and my twelve-year-old son, the last server to be commissioned in old St. John's just ten days before the fire, will lift high the cross as we raise our voices in faith, with hope and peace, as Christmas comes in all its glory and wonder to this wounded town.

This Christmas, for the first time since 1902, Lunenburg will not go to bed with the sacred sound of our bells chiming the hymn "Away in a Manger" But in the deep, profound absence of those bells, if you listen carefully you will be able to hear the sound of the people of St. John's, the people of Lunenburg singing – rejoicing – in the crisp, clear air of that holy night.

**Memories , by Grace Swan**

Once the decision to restore the Church had been made and I was asked to look after non-structural materials, like everyone else, I was keen to get started. Little did I know this job would become a four-year obsession. Enthusiasm was high and help was easy to get; I'd like to remember and share some of that spirit with you.

The restoration company that was hired removed all the textile items they found on site; no one had time to even glance at them before they were whisked away to be 'cleaned'. When I first tackled the massive volume of red fabric that was returned to us, I was overwhelmed. There were choir robes with huge burn holes, choir robes with scorch marks and choir robes that hadn't seen the light of day in decades; day by day, I sifted through them, throwing out the worst first, then the next lot and so on. For some reason, I couldn't seem to throw them away very easily and this continued to be, for me, the most painful part of the job. When we got down to only scorch marks, Sadie Hunt and I decided there *must* be away of cleaning them. Now, anyone who has ever tried to remove a scorch knows it just isn't possible, and as a textile person, I should have known most of all. I guess it was just emotion but we devoted hours of elbow grease to this useless task...and then, of course we had to toss them anyway.

Then came the vestments and hangings – more pain. It was interesting to see that the old delicate silk damasks survived well (except the colours bled) but the one synthetic chasuble that was left would never relinquish the smell of smoke. Sharon Findlay Hill hemmed and rehemmed a chasuble where the fabric had shrunk but not the lining (or maybe it was vice versa). Anyone who sews will know what a fussy chore this is. Each time, she thought it was perfect, hung it up, and, oops, started again. (We never did get it perfect, but it saw us through the time in the hall while we waited for insurance settlements.)

For the most part, the embroidered areas of the vestments and hangings were good and several were kept to display in the Interpretive Centre. The real problem here was that they were all embroidered on silk which was not colourfast; if you look at the dove on the hanging in the prayer Chapel, he has a distinct pinkish tinge. I hung onto all of these until quite recently, hoping for divine inspiration, I guess, as to how to put them to use. It never came and they are now gone.

Parks Canada was of infinite assistance to everyone of us working on these projects. Experts specializing in metals, paper, textiles, etc. were always available and willing to help. Their advice guided us when it came time to restore the colours of the West Nova Regiment. (Lil Hall had to teach me not to call them flags!) Once we knew *what* to do, it didn't appear to be a big job to remount them on new backing and repair some areas where the fabric had simply disintegrated. It had been done once before many years ago; this time Lil Hall and Sandy Jordan offered to spend 'an afternoon or two' stitching. This was a backbreaking task and I didn't knowingly deceive them as to the length of time it would take, but day after day, I found them hunched over a table in the Sunday School room stitching and stitching. Eventually we realized that as they stitched, the mere handling of the silk was causing it to further disintegrate and more and more stitching was required. Sadly, we had to call it quits before there was nothing left.

Bev Cluett organized the "Tuesday Morning Brass Gang" to tackle that monumental chore. Greasy black soot had to be removed before pieces were even identifiable as brass – not a task for the light-hearted. Brass is heavy and so men, including Howard Keeping, were recruited for lifting and lugging. One morning I was at work and Eric Croft, who is a member at Zion, came in and said, "I have to do something. They told me to talk to you." I had no idea what he meant; but it turned out, like so many people in town, he felt the need to be a productive part of the Restoration...and so, Eric joined the "Brass Gang". I don't know where it came from, but someone obtained a roll of bubble-wrap, and, as each precious piece was completed, Hazel Oliver wrapped it lovingly and stored it away until such time as we could return it to its rightful place.

### Memories , by Grace Swan, continued

The font proved to be a different challenge. The smell of the fire saturated the stone and there seemed to be no way to remove it. A baptism was being planned, the first to take place in the hall, but when the cover of the font was lifted, the odour was overpowering. Poor baby –what to do? Another call to Parks Canada. Amazing advice: cut the legs off pantyhose, fill them with kitty litter, tie up and put them in the font. Change every three weeks. This works! The font was kept full of ‘legs’ for months (except for baptism day), but I remember Rev. Irving Letto’s shock the first time he lifted that cover and discovered its contents!

These are only a few memories of that time. **What was accomplished could not have been done without wonderful leadership and much, much help.** Those remembered by name are just a very few who lent their time and talents so that we would eventually be able to return Home, and, **if we forgot to say “thank you”, it’s never too late.**

### Poignant Memories , by Susan Pratt

Although my stories of the fire and restoration are very personal, I have decided to share them.

The first day that I was able to help, I arrived to do what I could. It happened (was it ordained?) that the destroyed window that was being worked on that day, was the window given in memory of my Aunt Margaret who was tragically killed in a car accident at a very young age. It is the third window on the left from the front of the church given in memory of Margaret Kathleen Smith, by her parents, her siblings – one, my father, Wallace Smith and another Owen Smith, father of Ben, and our aunts Gladys and Jean, mother of Joan Carlson and Jim Morrow. This was a window that I had always looked at as a child growing up and attending church, sitting in the family pew nearby. I was often told that I reminded the family of their lost daughter and sister.

I took the pieces home and washed and washed them again to get rid of the grimy soot and ashes. Although I was told not to collect and wash the yellow glass from the hanging lights, I did not listen to the directions because my grandmother, Antoinette Smith, had donated those lights to the church. In her memory, I could not throw them out but washed and saved them as well.

My many tears were mixed with the cleaning water. I was so devastated that we had miserably failed all the generations that had gone before us who had built and cared for the magnificent building that was St. John's. As we all suspected Halloween arson at the time, I felt that our generation had failed our forebears, that we had allowed a culture where fire pranks were somehow tolerated, or at least something that was not strictly forbidden with immediate consequences of punishment.

A number of days later, I came to the church and near the front of the remains, there stood the toilet bowl from the wash room. My father, Wallace, was on the building committee of the church for years. The church never had bathroom facilities and everyone had to go to the parish hall which in fact was not very close, especially for children. Father was a very practical man and he was particularly proud that he was able to install that bathroom for the congregation. When I saw the toilet bowl outside the church, the tears again started to flow. Again, the feeling of failure, that this disaster had happened on our generation's watch. Later, I thought, this had to have been a somewhat bizarre situation – that someone would be crying over a toilet bowl!

All of us have vivid recollections of the shocking scenes of our devastated church, but for me one of the most poignant was seeing the exposed choir room. Although I had been in the choir prior to leaving home for college, my mother was a choir member for over 40 years. Seeing the red robes dangling from the



### Poignant Memories , by Susan Pratt, continued

blackened ruins and lying in clumps on the green, wet grass has been forever etched as one of my saddest memories.

On one of the first days after the fire, as I was leaving the jumbled mess of debris, I randomly picked up a stinky, sodden Book of Common Prayer. It was certainly not near what was left under the family pew, where the family religious books were kept. I opened the cover and to my total amazement (ordained again?), it was a Book of Common Prayer given by my Aunt Gladys to my father, acknowledged on the front page as that gift in my mother's handwriting. I telephoned someone I knew who did book restoration and he told me to put the book immediately in my freezer. That book has been totally restored, with my mother's inscription there but blurred from the water. I treasure it as a family and St. John's heirloom.

Although I still have concerns about today's laissez faire attitude and lack of structure concerning our youth, my faith in our generation has been restored because of the abilities and devotion to achieve St. John's restoration. **Those previous generations would be proud of what we have done!**

### How It Felt From Afar, by Brian Kenefick

People say they remember where they were for 9/11, but I can't honestly say that as I did not hear about it until almost six hours after it happened.

I do remember when I heard about St. John's burning. Living in Surrey, BC my morning started as usual at 5:30 and I switched on the kitchen radio as I prepared to go to work. The news was a shock even that far away and even though I had not worshipped at St. John's when living in Mahone Bay and working in Lunenburg, I knew the church and its history. I shared what many "*Gone From Here's*" living in other parts of the country must have felt, shock, sadness and a guilty feeling for not being near enough to help.

Throughout the following months I followed your efforts on the website and rejoiced that so many stepped up to the plate with funds to help you restore the church. I watched from afar your progress and successes.

For what you achieved all of you deserve a huge round of applause and you should accept it gracefully as only right and fitting. This church continues because of your faith and dedication.

St Lawrence told the Prefect of Rome, "*the people are the true treasure of the church.*" How rich in treasures St John's is!

### The Church Restored



### Writing The Sacred

Psalm Writing Workshop lead by Ray McGinnis  
Author of "Writing the Sacred",

Saturday, October 15th, 2011  
At St. John's 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.  
Register; 902-634-4994 Cost \$15

## Music At St. John's

### A note from Barbara .....

We praise God each week in word and in song. Hymns are chosen with particular liturgy in mind in keeping with the church year. It's a task I enjoy – becoming familiar with the wealth of hymns already in our blue hymnal but also exploring new material that becomes available to us. Hymns, well written, are a joy for our choirs to sing. Great hymn writing employs a wonderful usage of harmony, melody and rhythm that, when coupled with a theologically minded text, brings joy and lifts our spirits in praise of God. Occasionally you will hear a hymn that is unfamiliar to you. I ask you not to shy away but give any new hymn a chance to enrich your participation in the worship service. Opening and closing hymns as expressions of joy and praise and they frame the service with powerful messages. Naturally hymns we sing at communion are more meditative and hymns before and after psalms or scripture readings often complement those particular passages.

I found 'Directions for Congregational Singing' as written in John Wesley's *Select Hymns* (1761) and chuckled as I read them. Even though written in a language when this church was newly built, they still have relevance today. Here are some quotes from his writings of 1761 – "Sing *all* - let not a slight degree of weakness or weariness hinder you; Sing *lustily*, and with a good courage - beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength; Sing *modestly* - do not bawl, so as to be heard above, or distinct from, the rest of the congregation, that you may not destroy the harmony; but strive to unite your voices together, so as to make one clear melodious sound; Sing in *time* - whatever time is sung, be sure to keep with it. Do not run before, nor stay behind it; but attend closely to the leading voices and move therewith as exactly as you can. And take care you sing not too slow. This drawling way naturally steals on all who are lazy; and it is high time to drive it out from among us, and sing all our tunes just as quick as we did at first. Sing *spiritually* - have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim to pleasing Him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to do this, attend strictly to the sense of what you sing; and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve of here, and reward when he cometh in the clouds of heaven."

I shall be listening intently to see if you have noted any of John Wesley's helpful hints. And don't forget that our choirs are now in full swing and both Sharon and I would be delighted to welcome new members.

Warm regards, *Barbara*

## Upcoming Events At St. John's

**Sunday, October 2nd. At 2 p.m.**

**Blessing of the Animals Service** (on the Parade)

**Sunday, October 16th. At 7:30 p.m.**

**Chester Brass Band Fundraising Concert for St. John's**

**Tuesday, November 1st. At 7 p.m.**

Special Service to mark the 10th Anniversary of the Church Fire, Bishop Sue will celebrate with us

**Saturday, November 5th. St Cecelia Concert, At 7:30 pm**

**Iris Erica Huang** soprano, **Emily Hamper** piano - 'Eckhardt-Gramatté 2011 winner'

**Saturday, November 19th. St Cecelia Concert, At 7:30 p.m.**

**Carmen** by Georges Bizet

**Artists of Jeunesses Musicales**

Ann Leigh Martin, Luc Robert, Laura Albino, Alexander Dobson, Ellen Wieser, Rachele Tremblay, and Janelle Fung on piano

**Wednesday, November 30th. At 7 p.m.**

**35th Anniversary of Women's Ordination**

**Special Service of Celebration**

St. John's will be hosting a Conference of Ordained Anglican Women, including Bishop Sue, this week

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