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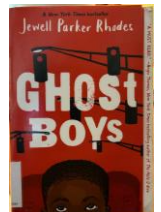
PASTORAL LETTER

April 19, 2024

One Sunday years ago I arrived to church with a major toothache. I commented on it at the beginning of the service that if I didn't make sense or if the sermon was short that was the reason why. After church while I was shaking hands at the door I remember people opening their purses and saying, "What do you need?" and when I commented on that the next Sunday one woman said to me, "I bet you didn't know you had a congregation filled with pharmaceutical reps, did you?"

I also have a congregation filled with readers. It's to the point where I'm not sure if this is a church or if it's a clandestine book club. Though, the argument could be made that the church is essentially a book club since we get together and talk about the Bible once a week. I like it when someone hands me a book and says, "You need to read this" or "I think you will love this" which meets my promise to a teacher from my home church who wrote in my year book, "Read excellent books."

Now I have a little pile on my table to look forward to reading. Even Eli loaned me a book called "Ghost Boys" that he read for school about a little boy who is black who was shot by police. As a ghost he observes the devastation unleashed on his family in the wake of his killing. As Eli said to me this morning, "It's sad but it has a good message." Lori-Ann read it with him and said I should read it, too.

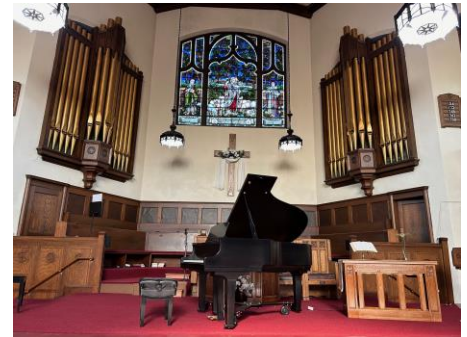


The other group we have a lot of in this church are people who make and love music. Not just in the choir but people who just love to sing. Last Saturday, while I was finishing my sermon, the choir were running upstairs and downstairs as they prepared for the soup luncheon the next day after church. I heard a lot of conversation, laughter, and pots and pans. They really worked hard and I could overhear them wondering what kind of dishes to use and how to serve everyone. So many details. When I went down to the basement to say hello they were busy working away talking and laughing. Even Rev. Mel was busy chopping!





On Sunday morning there were seventeen of them in the choir and they shared a lovely anthem which the congregation greatly appreciated. After we installed the Church Council, we also covenanted with the choir. I said to Rev. Mel after church, "They really blended their voices." At lunch time, they blended their soups too as they had the table set in the Owen Fraser Hall (named after our former organist) and soup coming out of the kitchen faster than the cars on the Vaughn Harvey Blvd. The buzz in the hall was beautiful. There were kids running around, people making new connections, and amazing desserts. When I finally arrived home that night, reflecting on the day I said to my wife, "If church never gets better than it was today, I'm ok with that."



Since Monday, we have had students taking music exams and performing at the church as part of the Greater Moncton Music Festival. They are both written and played on the piano. It's been a steady stream of little kids, some of whom are

dressed up in anticipation of their tests. We have to be extra quiet at the church so there is lots of whispering. Although, I find the quieter people have to be the louder they are. Everyone is so respectful carrying their little bags containing their music. They take it very seriously. That's one thing about music teachers I've always appreciated: you know they care a lot and you're a little bit afraid of them.



My music teachers over the years are legends in my mind. Absolute legends.

Helen Dunn taught me how to play piano but I was not her best student. (Her son is famous Canadian pianist Kim Dunn who has played with many famous groups and people.) She would threaten to string me out onto the light post. I also remember her absolute joy and her laugh and how she always rooted for me in school. "Go study for two hours and then play piano for half an hour to lock it in!" I remember hearing that she was dying so I went to the hospital to see her when I was home after my first year at Acadia. I didn't know what to expect but she was in a room surrounded by her large family. She was on

oxygen when I went into the room and I just remember her arms opening wide and the giant smile on her face.

My second music teacher whom I loved was a man by the name of Dan MacDonald. While Mrs. Dunn was short and small, Mr. MacDonald was tall and intimidating. We students called him Big Dan (but don't tell him that). I started off playing clarinet because I liked the look and sound of it but soon Mr. MacDonald moved me to bass clarinet to fill out the sound. One day he asked me to try out another instrument: the baritone saxophone which is like playing the tuba. I carried that thing back and forth to school which was a half hour walk. But, I took it on and I still have an affinity for bass instruments to this day, something David Gregory (who tunes the pianos at St. John's) and I have talked about. Mr. MacDonald took us on the road to perform at schools, malls, and hospitals. It was a great experience.

Shortly after I moved to Moncton, I was in North Sydney during the summer when I saw my former teacher sitting out on his veranda of his large, historic home. I slowed down and geared back into reverse. He was delighted to see me when I commented on his beautiful old home. "I'm cash poor and house rich," he told me. When he asked what I was up to these days he was delighted when I told him. He went to mass each week and was quite fond of the new priest. He worried about the younger generations not having any faith or church. But I wasn't there to solve that; I was there to say thank you. He didn't want to hear that and took me on a tour of his house. The funny thing about time is that it has a great capacity to hold people as they were as opposed to who they've become. I no longer saw the imposing man who stood in front of a high school class and held a baton; instead, I saw a lovely man who told me about his family, faith and his history. His humour was still very much intact.

I sometimes think of these things when my own kids go to piano lessons. Doris Sabean has taught them for most of their lives and they love Miss Doris along with their music teachers at school. She laughs with them, talks to them, instructs them, gently corrects their mistakes, encourages them to insert their personalities into their playing, and she has been that loving and kind person in their lives who has meant the world to us. During the height of the pandemic when we were all at home, Miss Doris was the reassuring voice that there were normal moments in abnormal times. Plus, as I have said over and over again, having other adults in my kids' lives means the world to our family – which is helpful that they have a congregation filled with surrogate grandparents, something all of our church kids have, to be honest. I always tell parents that you may not know all the people out there but they certainly know who you are and they pray for your kids.

I was so pleased when several members of St. John's offered to be references for my daughter Allie in her application for the music program at Mount Allison University. Sadly, the child has forsaken Acadia. I am pretty sure it was the tour of Mount A given by Dr. Vicky Meli that sealed the deal. Vicky, herself a singer who recently finds herself in the choir loft, is a huge influence on Allie and we're so grateful for her. I wish I could tell Mrs. Dunn that while I may not have been the star student, she would have loved Allie, and Allie is part of her legacy, too.

Last week I had a message on Facebook from an Anglican priest asking to get together for a coffee. The Rev. Brent Hamm and I have known each other for almost twenty years from when he was the priest at St. John the Baptist in Riverview. (The church musician there was one of my daughter's music teachers in junior high and high school, Mr. Snelgrove whose dad was a priest.) Rev. Brent is my age and he's now an archdeacon for southern New Brunswick. He has a new parish at St. Martin-in-the-Woods, Shediac. (Why do Anglican churches always have such nice names? My first church was called River and Lakeside Pastoral Charge – imagine if it had been called "St. Matthew's on the Bras D'or Lakes? Or if our church was called St. John's near Tim Hortons? But I digress.)

It was good to speak with him and hear his experiences over the past four years. He has two kids as well and his wife is a teacher. It was interesting listening to him talk because everything he said

I could have said, and his observations about current times were similar to mine. There's a humility to him that I really appreciate and respect. He's also really funny and seemed to tolerate my Cape Breton humour quite well. I tried to get the Anglican gossip out of him but he's bound by the Bishop, I think. The Anglican Church in our area is facing the same challenges and changes that the United Churches are as we attempt to re-organize and re-evaluate our ministry and our presence. I'm so grateful for colleagues who are faithful to the task of ministry, and I'm so pleased for the church in Shediac to have such a dedicated priest. I asked him, "How often do you see someone who does what you do in the run of a week, or a month even?" We both agreed that it was not very often and promised to keep in touch.



On Tuesday night the Christian Development Committee met to plan Sunday School, a possible retreat, a Harry Potter event, and Vacation Bible School. We met at Nancy Black's house and when I left I saw the most beautiful downtown sunset. When I arrived at my office after the

meeting, I made sure that my guitar was next to my desk to inspire me to play it more. As I talked to the kids out in the hall about their music I decided that I'd grab my guitar when I sat down again, which I did. I worked on a song that I love called "Calico Skies" by Paul McCartney and posted it to Instagram. I heard a ding on my phone. I'd had a message from my friend in Cape Breton, the Rev. Nick Phillips. He said, "Dude. Just watched your guitar video" as I anticipated a compliment Nick said, "How the heck did you get so grey??"



I know where the grey hair came from over the past few years, but I also know what's helped to keep me sane: music. So I am very grateful this week for all the young families who have come to the church for music. Thank you to our volunteers for making everyone feel so welcome.

Last night, I was checking email before bed. A note had come in that read,

"Hi Rev. Billard. I'm a mom you chatted with this afternoon during our breaks at the music festival and I just want to thank you (profusely) for taking the time to engage in conversation with me and my sons. You probably noticed it was rather stressful for me to manage with all of the waiting and the being quiet, especially on the 4th straight afternoon for my 6-year old, and having a pleasant chat with a friendly face was exactly what I didn't know I direly needed. It was like the TSN turning point to my afternoon - thank you for being there :)"

I hope this letter brings back some musical memories for all of you. And I hope you're holding on. There's a lot going on in the world right now which makes me even more grateful for all of you. Thank you again to the choir for a superb job bringing everyone together for a beautiful lunch and for making music among us last Sunday.

The Rev. Aaron Billard, Minister



*The bulletin and pastoral letter are dedicated
in Loving Memory of **our Aunts,**
M. Lois Matthews and Dorothy L. Steeves
by Shelly Steeves and Bonnie Steeves*

MEMORIAL

A donation has been made to the Mission & Service Fund in memory of

Anne M. Lake

(Truro UCW & Berwick Camp member)

by the Rev. Dr. Douglas & June MacEachern

NOTICES, UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS

Check our website at www.stjohnsmoncton.ca
for Sunday online Worship links, calendar, and more.

Apr. 21	Sun.	11:00 a.m.	WORSHIP and Sunday School - Thank Volunteers
Apr. 21	Sun.	3:00 p.m.	Concert – Choeur Beausejour (main floor & Sanctuary)
Apr. 25	Thur.	7:00 p.m.	Choir (weekly-Choir Loft/Fellowship Room)
Apr. 25	Thur.	7:00 p.m.	Pathfinders, Girl Guides of Canada (weekly-Social Hall)
Apr. 26-27	Fri. - Sat.		Facility rental
Apr. 28	Sun.	11:00 a.m.	WORSHIP and Sunday School - Grocery Sunday (see note)
Apr. 28	Sun.	12:15 p.m.	Worship & Music Committee (Norman Sinclair Room)
Apr. 29	Mon.	2:00 p.m.	UCW (Fellowship Room)

Announcements from other United Churches, Fundy St. Lawrence Dawning Waters Region 14 and the community are shown on the TV in the Owen Fraser Hall and also located on the bulletin boards located at the Alma St. entrance and outside the Church Office.

THANK YOU to everyone who supported our **Silent Auction & Dessert Extravaganza** last week. It takes a lot of hands to make this happen and we so appreciate all the help from our members and individuals outside the UCW group. So to the donors, the pickers and packers, dessert bakers, and shoppers, thanks again for helping us raise \$1,800. Special thanks to Gary Tower, Rheal Leger and Trevor Logan for doing the heavy lifting with the tables. Kudos to Lillian MacMellon who has organized this event for the past 25 years. You are indeed a legend!

THANK YOU - The choir, and the organ repair fund, would like to thank the congregation for their wonderful support of last week's **Soup Luncheon fundraiser**. We are also grateful for the many ingredients donated by our local Loblaws Warehouse, with special mention of Jennifer and Rod Fury who made that all possible. Finally, a big thank-you to choir members who chopped, diced, served and washed up cheerfully!

SOBEYS & SUPERSTORE GIFT CARDS are sold each Sunday in the Sanctuary before and after Worship and at the Church Office M-F, 9:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.

We make 4% on every card sold. Your support is needed and appreciated.



GROCERIES FOR KARING KITCHEN

(Apr. 28 – last Sunday of the month)

The Outreach Committee would like to bring your attention to the Karing Kitchen's need for these groceries: cream of chicken soup, cream of celery soup, pepper, flakes of ham.

White baskets will be at the main entrance for your donations. Thank you.



THE "BAKELESS BAKE SALE" has become an annual event of the St. John's UCW. This is a very popular and highly successful project.

We appreciate any amount you may wish to donate. Please have all donations in by the end of June. Envelopes are located at the church entrance. If you use SJUC box offering envelopes, an envelope is in your box. If you use PAR, an envelope is in your PAR envelope packet. Place your donation in the offering box on a Sunday morning, mail, drop off in the mail slot or use e-transfer.



SCHOLARSHIPS

The following scholarships are available to students who have been active, and are currently participating, within the congregational life of St. John's United Church. Applications are available on the church website and Facebook group, at the church office or by contacting the church office. Applications are to be returned by **May 22, 2024** to the church by: email, dropping the submission into the mail slot in the door or by bringing it along with you on Sunday morning.



Henrietta Potter Scholarship is available to students currently in high school and pursuing first-year studies at a post-secondary educational institution in the upcoming year.

Robb Scholarship is awarded to children to further his/her studies in music.

Charles E. Woodrow Memorial Music Scholarship is available to students currently in high school and pursuing first-year music studies at a post-secondary educational institution in the upcoming year.

STEWARDSHIP SECOND – There is a direct link between following Jesus and using our resources, including our money, to care for those in need.

ST. JOHN'S UNITED CHURCH CARES... To notify the Minister of personal concerns, anxieties, illnesses, hospitalizations or deaths, or to pass along a prayer request, contact Rev. Aaron Billard at 506-858-8289 or sjucrev@gmail.com

CHURCH MINISTRY PERSONNEL AND STAFF



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Pat Arsenault, *Custodian*

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 Secretary: Karen Teed
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