

## Minister's Ponderings:

Sometimes life brings us difficult decisions that change all our plans. This week, the Omicron COVID variant changed everything. We went from planning one Christmas Eve service, to planning two separate worship services with lots of children and singers and candlelight. **Then everything changed!** Now we are back to an on-line service only with no in-person worship until further notice. It truly was a case of the heart saying one thing and the head saying another, as the Transition Steering Team made their decision. But in the end, both our hearts and our minds were one. We care deeply about the well-being of our congregation. We know that Christ calls us to love one another and to look out for each other. This newest variant is so contagious that it spreads quickly and even masks cannot keep it at bay. **So, things did not go according to plan.** Now that reminds me of the Christmas story. A pregnant teenager named Mary; a fiancé named Joseph who was thinking of breaking off the engagement; no hotel reservation in Bethlehem - so the young couple were homeless, sleeping in a barn where the baby was born; shepherds leaving their sheep to head into town and wise men following a star that led them on a merry goose chase that ended not in a palace but in a barn. **Yet God was there in that story, entering our world then as God enters our world now.** Even when our lives do not go according to plan, God enters and we are reminded that in all things God is...so we worship on-line with hearts filled with gratitude for the presence and love of God and opportunity to still worship together on Christmas Eve.



## Worship:

As previously announced on Sunday December 29<sup>th</sup>, due to the spike in COVID cases, **there will be no in-person services on December 24<sup>th</sup>.** There will be one livestreamed service in its place, which will be available for viewing by 4:00 p.m. Be sure to join us in this virtual service with the traditional participation of our children and our favourite animals on screen.

**Please note that there will be no service on December 26<sup>th</sup>.** Livestreamed services will resume on January 2<sup>nd</sup>. **Please see the important message below from the Transition Steering Team.**

Visit our website at [www.stpaulsmidland.org](http://www.stpaulsmidland.org) and use the direct YouTube link at the top of the page, or simply go to YouTube and subscribe to our channel. Just type in "St. Paul's Midland" and you will find us. If you are on Facebook, you can get St. Paul's updates that way as well.



## St. Paul's Zoom Coffee Hour:

The next ZOOM Coffee Hour will be on **Sunday December 26th at 1:00 p.m.** We invite you all to join. You can use the same link as before:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89969004401>



## A Message from the Transition Steering Team (TST)

The Transition Steering Team (TST) met on Friday December 17, 2021 to make decisions about in-person worship going forward, given the recent explosive increase in Covid-19 cases fuelled by the Omicron variant.

Our discussions very likely mirrored those that you have been having with your own family members about whether and how to celebrate Christmas this year with your family and friends. Many have already changed their plans to reduce travel and gathering sizes. These are agonizing discussions and decisions!

The TST has made the following decisions out of concern for the safety and continuing good health of all our congregants and staff:

1. **The Christmas Eve service will be on-line only.** Staff have made arrangements to video youth portions after church today (December 19) and so while **there will be no in-person Christmas Eve Service this year**, we know that you will enjoy the virtual service with the traditional participation of our children and our favourite animals on screen.
2. **There will be no in-person church services from December 26, 2021 until further notice.** We hope that you will continue to worship with us virtually, without worry about Omicron or winter weather. The Worship Team will prepare their usual excellent services for viewing on Sunday morning or whenever you choose to take a few quiet moments.
3. There are no meetings scheduled in the building until the second week of January. **The TST will meet during the first week of January to review the situation and make further decisions about small group meetings, based on further guidance from the Public Health Unit.**

As health officials have requested, St. Paul's staff will continue to work at home as much as possible and maintain strict safety measures when they do come into the building. Their health is a priority for us as well as the health of our congregants.

The TST wishes you all a safe and healthy Christmas and New Year!

## Congregational News/Updates:

Just a reminder that the office will be closed for the holiday season starting December 24<sup>th</sup> and re-opening January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, at which time Louise will be working from home.

**Please note:** There will be no weekly update during the week of December 26<sup>th</sup>, 2021

## From our Stewardship Committee:

**Any year-end donations must be received no later than noon on December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021**, for 2021 tax purposes. Even though the office will be closed, mail will be picked up at the church throughout the Christmas season.

## A COVID Christmas Poem by Claire Bertran

Twas the night before Christmas, but COVID was here,  
so we all had to stay extra cautious this year.  
Our masks were all hung by the chimney with care,  
in case Santa forgot his and needed a spare.

With COVID, we couldn't leave cookies or cake,  
so we left Santa hand sanitizer to take.  
The children were sleeping, the brave little tots,  
the ones over 5 had just had their first shots,

And mom in her kerchief and me in my cap,  
had just settled in for a long winter's nap.  
But we tossed and we turned all night in our beds,  
as visions of variants danced in our heads.

Gamma and Delta and now Omicron,  
these COVID mutations that go on and on  
I thought to myself, "If this doesn't get better,  
I'll soon be familiar with every Greek letter".

Then just as I started to drift off and doze,  
a clatter of noise from the front lawn arose.  
I leapt from my bed and ran straight down the stairs,  
I opened the door, and an old gent stood there.

His N 95 made him look pretty weird,  
but I knew who he was by his red suit and beard.  
I kept six feet away but blurted out quick  
"what are you doing here, jolly Saint Nick?"

Then I said, "Where's your presents, your reindeer and sleigh?  
Don't you know that tomorrow will be Christmas Day? ".  
And Santa stood there looking sad in the snow  
as he started to tell me a long tale of woe.

He said he'd been stuck at the North Pole alone,  
all his white-collar elves had been working from home,  
and most of the others said "Santa, don't hire us!  
We can live off the CERB now, thanks to the virus".

Those left in the toyshop had little to do.  
With supply chain disruptions, they could make nothing new.  
And as for the reindeer, they'd all gone away.

None of them left to pull on his sleigh.

He said Dasher and Dancer were in quarantine,  
Prancer and Vixen refused the vaccine,  
Comet and Cupid were in ICU,  
So were Donner and Blitzen, they may not pull through.

And Rudolph's career can't be resurrected.  
With his shiny red nose, they all think he's infected.  
Even with his old sleigh, Santa couldn't go far.  
Every border to cross needs a new PCR.



Santa sighed as he told me how nice it would be,  
if children could once again sit on his knee.  
He couldn't care less if they're naughty or nice,  
but they'd have to show proof that they'd had their shot twice.

But then the old twinkle returned to his eyes,  
and he said that he'd brought me a Christmas surprise.  
When I unwrapped the box and opened it wide,  
starlight and rainbows streamed out from inside.

Some letters whirled round and flew up to the sky  
and they spelled out a word that was 40 feet high.  
There first was an H, then an O, then a P,  
then I saw it spelled HOPE when it added the E.

"Christmas magic" said Santa as he smiled through his beard,  
then suddenly all of the reindeer appeared.  
He jumped into his sleigh and he waved me good-bye,  
then he soared o'er the rooftops and into the sky.

I heard him exclaim as he drove out of sight,  
"get your vaccines my friends, Merry Christmas, good-night".  
Then I went back to bed and a sweet Christmas dream,  
of a world when we'd finished with COVID 19.

**May the peace and joy of Christmas be with you  
today and throughout the New Year.**

**Blessings everyone,**

Rev. Karen Ptolemy-Stam, Minister, St. Paul's United Church

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