



Joy

TO THE

WORLD

Dec 2025 / Jan 2026

SA **ST. ANDREW'S**
GROWING. LIFE. TOGETHER. WITH GOD

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CONNECTIONS



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Leaping with JOY!

A message from Rev. Laurie

Have you ever been caught off guard by a leap in your heart?

Most recently this happened on a drive home when the sunset was so spectacular that my heart leaped with joy. At that moment, the radio announcers were also commenting on the magnificence of sunset. It made me realize that the same heart-stopping moment was being offered to everyone on their commute home, to everyone who was walking their dog, or on their way out to meet friends. My own personal experience of a leap of joy at such a beautiful gift from the Creator was being shared with all of creation. To the birds soaring through the air, wrapping themselves in the colour of the cosmos! To the land that was put to bed after the harvest. To the fish leaping in lakes and rivers. To all of creation, a gift of beauty that makes us feel at one with all things, and a small part of a much greater universe. Humbling that God would make us in such a way that our hearts could leap with joy.

As I prepare for Advent, I read how Mary visited her much older cousin Elizabeth, who was pregnant. On hearing Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's unborn child leaped with joy.

In a loud voice, Elizabeth exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favoured that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!" Luke 1:42-45

Joy can be experienced with tears, laughter, awe, and contentment, individually, yes, but usually in relation to something or someone beyond ourselves. How is God revealing to you that sense of relationship to others, and to a much higher power?

May you have a moment of joy that can be savoured, remembered, and shared with others during this season of pondering and wonder.

With Joy that we are not alone, thanks to God's grace in Jesus.

Rev. Laurie



Session Highlights

- Please set aside **March 8th, 2026**, after the service to attend our **Annual Congregational Meeting**. The Finance Team will be present to share the proposed budget for the coming year.
- There is still time to sign up for the Monday evening online Bible study, "**Calling All Angels: An Advent Study of Fearlessness and Strength**," hosted by Rev. Laurie. The study begins **December 1st** and runs for four weeks. Please contact the office if you would like to join.
- Our **Youth Group** continues to grow and meets every **Friday evening**. We are thrilled by the enthusiasm this group brings each week. If you know a youth Grade 6-12 who might enjoy being part of an energetic, supportive, and fun community, please connect with Matt and Lauren Nolette.



Nov 30	Morning Worship	10:00 am
	<i>Advent 1: HOPE - Waiting in Hope</i>	
Dec 7	Morning Worship (<i>Mitten Tree</i>)	10:00 am
	<i>Advent 2: PEACE - Are you stumped</i>	
Dec 14	Morning Worship	10:00 am
	<i>Advent 3: JOY - Hear! See! REJOICE!</i>	
Dec 21	Morning Worship	10:00 am
	<i>Advent 4: LOVE - Lessons & Carols</i> 🎵	
Dec 24	Christmas Eve Service	4:00 pm
	Children/Youth/Family Service	

Come at 4:00 pm and decide who you would like to be in the 'Pick-up Christmas Pageant'. A king? A sheep? A shepherd? Get your musical instrument in the Sanctuary, and join in a Christmas Carol Sing Along, followed by an enactment of the Christmas Story.

Dec 24 Christmas Eve Service 7:00 pm
Candlelight Service - Hear the good news of Christ's Birth and sing the songs of Christmas

Dec 25 Christmas Day Service (YouTube - anytime):
The Ministers, Evan, and office staff have created a short Christmas Day service you can watch ANYTIME on or after Christmas Day, on our YouTube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/@StACalgary>

Dec 28 Morning Worship 10:00 am
Worship Leaders: St. Andrew's Elders



Elder Profile *Judy Bridgemohan*



I am Judy Bridgemohan, and I was born on the tiny Caribbean Island of Trinidad and Tobago and was baptised at the Tabaquite Presbyterian Church as a baby. Growing up I worshipped at Point Fortin Presbyterian Church. I came to Canada in pursuit of my education in 1988. I did my Grade 13 education in Toronto and came out to the University of Alberta to pursue my Engineering degree. I have been a part of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church since December 2004 when my mom (Indra) and I moved from Husky Energy in St. John's Nfld to Calgary. My move to Calgary occurred because I had joined ConocoPhillips Canada to work on the Canadian Arctic projects team. Being new and not knowing anyone I thought I would ask my colleagues for a reference to a Presbyterian church to worship, and Ian Denniss (former member of St. Andrew's) suggested St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. My brother Arnold joined us from Toronto in 2006. In 2008, Arnold and Maribeth were married by Rev. Peter Coutts at St. Andrew's. Spencer was born in 2009, and he was baptised by Rev. Peter Coutts followed by Stephen in 2012, who was baptised by Rev. Jan Hazlett. Spencer is now in Grade 12 and getting ready for university, while Stephen is in Grade 8.

As a Petroleum Engineer for three decades and working overseas for most of that time, it allowed me to serve on a part-time basis at St. Andrew's and at Grand Lakes Presbyterian Church in Katy, Texas. My job took me to several countries: Angola, USA, Trinidad and Qatar. During my time in Doha, I continued worshipping online with St. Andrew's and every Sunday Alice Post would check with me to see how I was doing, and she would offer me words of encouragement. At this point in my life, I saw the need to deepen my faith in God, and I felt the need to give back to my community which had been so good to me. So, in 2022 while I was on an assignment in Doha, Qatar, I decided it was my calling to return to Calgary and take up a more permanent role at St. Andrew's. On April 30, 2023, I was ordained as an elder to serve our congregation for six years.

I have held several roles in activities such as the Audio Visual and Sound Board, Blessing of the Animals, Stations of the Cross-Easter 2021, and a member of the Communications Team during the Covid period. In addition, I was Session liaison for the Personnel Team in 2024 where I had the opportunity to brush up on my Human Resources skills and presently I am the Session liaison for the Finance Team where I can apply some of my MBA skills. As a Care Connector, I am meeting new congregation members. All these opportunities have given me a better understanding of how a church community works, and it has made me more integrated into our church community.

If you are asked to be an elder at St. Andrew's, you may prayerfully consider taking on this role to support the church community. You will enjoy working with our ministerial staff and the members of our Session because there is always someone there to help you. There are many unexplored opportunities for you to discover as our church ministry continues to navigate complex social and theological issues like LGBTQ2S+ inclusion and reconciliation with Indigenous people.

Submitted by David Townsend

We appreciate Judy writing this interesting and engaging article for us. St. Andrew's has been blessed to have her serving as an elder for the last two plus years.





Another Successful Bazaar!

The morning of Saturday, November 15 dawned clear and bright with the promise of a good day ahead when months of preparation came together in a successful 2025 Christmas Bazaar.

Based on our success last year we again welcomed vendors from outside our faith community to join our Vendor Market providing them the opportunity to promote their products and thereby deepening our connections with the neighbourhood.

Thank you, thank you, thank you to all who lovingly supported the Bazaar with contributions of your presence, your donations, and your purchases.

It was especially heartening to see our young people so enthusiastically engaged in this event. Also greatly appreciated was the support of our

Heritage Seniors members who joined us on the day!

God blessed our efforts and we raised approximately \$14,000 which will go toward continuing the important work of this place as we continue to

Grow Life Together with God.







Introducing Christina Thanisch-Smith

You may have noticed a new face in the choir over the past couple of months. I'm delighted to introduce **Christina Thanisch-Smith** as our **Artist-in-Residence** at St. Andrew's.

So what does that mean exactly? Christina is a professional singer who has joined the soprano section of our choir to help lift our voices and build our confidence.

Why bring in an artist-in-residence? Many choirs in our city - including Grace Presbyterian, the Cathedral Church of the Redeemer, and Christ Church Elbow Park - partner with professional singers to enrich their sound and strengthen their ensembles. Having Christina with us allows us to explore a wider range of repertoire, grow our musical skills, and sing with greater assurance.

In addition to singing with us most weeks, Christina will offer occasional vocal solos and assist with our choir workshops as we prepare for our most demanding musical seasons - Advent/Christmas and Easter.

To help everyone get to know her a little better, I asked Christina a few fun questions about her life in (and out of) music:

Q: What's your first musical memory?

A: Starting off strong! My first musical memory is from when I was three years old, still living in Fredericton. My best friend in preschool and I were completely obsessed with "I Feel Like a Woman!" by Shania Twain. I can't quite remember how that obsession began, but we thought it was truly the best song ever. We would run around the playroom with pretend microphones, belting the chorus at the top of our lungs. I guess we were manifesting my singing career before I even knew it!

Q: What kind of training goes into becoming a professional singer?

A: A lot, more than most people might imagine. I started private singing lessons when I was eight years old; by then I had already been taking piano lessons for three years and wanted to do even more musically. Right after high school, I was accepted into the Faculty of Music at the University of Manitoba, where I began my Bachelor's degree in Voice Performance. Five years later, I moved to Montreal to pursue my Master's and Graduate Diploma in Opera and Voice at McGill University.

After three incredible years in Montreal, I was invited to join Calgary Opera's prestigious McPhee Artist Development Program, spending two years in residency there. Outside of formal schooling, singers also attend summer programs, residencies, and continue private coaching. Thanks to this training, I've had the privilege of performing across Canada, the United States, and Europe.

Q: Do you have a favourite role or piece you love to perform?

A: I love singing German art songs. My family is originally from Germany, and I have fond memories of my Omi singing German folk melodies to me as a child. Many of those same melodies appear in art songs by composers like Schubert, Brahms, and Schumann. I also speak German, so singing in the language feels incredibly natural and close to home for me. I absolutely love it.

Q: When you're not making music, what do you enjoy doing?

A: This past spring, I earned my personal trainer certification, and I now coach at two gyms in Calgary! I love being active and spending time outdoors, so if I'm not making music, you'll probably find me teaching a fitness class, running a training session, or hiking in the foothills.

Q: What are you listening to these days?

A: Lately, I've been enjoying Keely Smith's album *Politely*. Keely was a jazz singer in the late 1950s with an incredible voice. As we get closer to the Christmas season, I naturally gravitate toward listening to jazz.

Q: Where else around town can we hear you sing?

A: I recently performed at the Jack Singer as the soloist for *Carmina Burana*. My next major performance will be in Winnipeg, where I'll be singing with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra in the new year.

Q: And just so we all get it right — how do you pronounce your last name?

A: I've heard many creative versions of my last name, but the easiest way to remember the correct pronunciation is to think of the words "*thanks*" and "*Spanish*". Thanisch and Spanish rhyme! Take the "th" from "thanks" and the "anish" from "Spanish", and you get Thanisch.

Please join me in giving Christina a warm welcome!

Yours in music,

Evan Mounce

Focus on St. Andrew's Youth!

Sunday November 2nd you may have noticed all the youth who were up at the front of the sanctuary helping Rev. Laurie during the Children's time. While you may not see them every week, we have a lot of faithful youth in our congregation who are steady contributors to the life of our church. These youth read scripture, take up the collection, help with church school and Take 150, clean up after communion, knit and crochet prayer shawls, sew Christmas blessing stockings, garden, make coffee, bake for the bazaar, volunteer at the Salvation Army toy drive, shop for the mitten tree, organise and lead the children's room for the bazaar, sing in the inter-generational musical and so much more! Did you know that we even have youth in our congregation helping to plan an upcoming Presbyterian youth conference? We are SO blessed for the heart of service of these young people!

Update

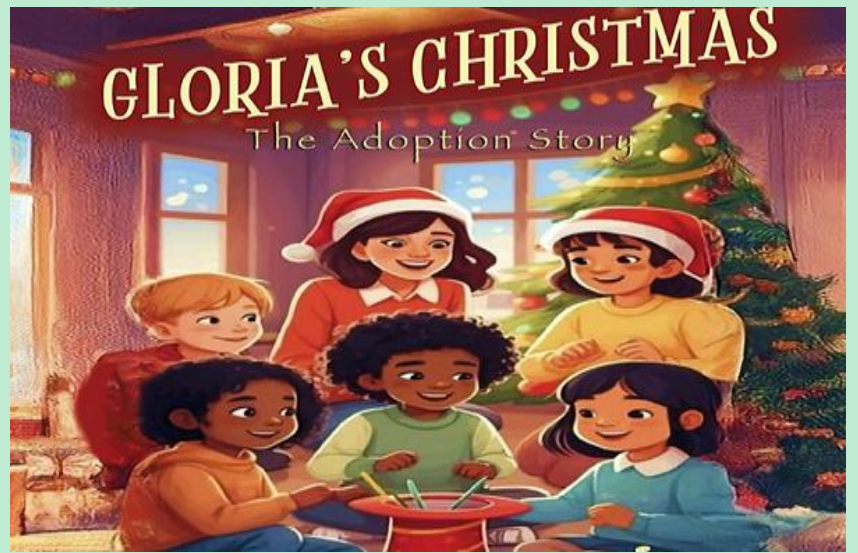




Rainbow Tapestry Church School Project

Picture this, six kids ranging from grade 1 to grade 10 and two adults sitting on low stools around a table in the church school room, each person choosing a strand of yarn in their favourite colour to add to a rainbow tapestry. We are all part of God's beautiful tapestry of life, and the message in Sunday school on November 9th as we worked on our rainbow yarn craft was that God's love includes everyone, without exception. God loves families with two moms. God loves families with a grandma in one house, and a boy and his parents in another house. God loves families with two dads. God loves families with one grandma and one kid. God loves families with a mom and a dad and two kids. God loves all kinds of families. To that message, one of the children wisely said, "God wouldn't be God if he didn't love everyone". Praise God for that wisdom! If you want to see the finished project, pop down to the church school room to see our rainbow tapestry, complete with a St. Andrew's rainbow button, our visual reminder that God loves everyone!





Do You Know David Kurtz?



As you may know, David has been a key person on the St. Andrew's Audio / Visual (AV) board for many years. We recently caught up with David and asked him to tell us a little about his background at St. Andrew's and what keeps him motivated and inspired. The following is his response:

"It has been easy serving at St. Andrew's. When I walked through the doors about a decade ago sometime around 2016, I entered looking for a church to call home. Well before the service even began, I was greeted by a handful of people, welcomed with great warmth and generosity which I felt has always been a hallmark of the church. That morning, I met Bill Judd and the following week I joined his Bible study. A few weeks later, I was invited to operate the sound board, muting and unmuting the mics for, who at that time was, the Revs. Kevin Lee, Jan Hazlett, and Jared Miller. Kevin and Jared soon invited me to their book study where Carolyn Jerrard asked if I would join her in leading the Youth Group. In all this, a verse comes to mind which reads, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we might walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10). God is always in control, but He asks me to participate. I never sought the variety of activities that would define and bless my last decade at St. Andrew's. All I ever needed to do was say 'yes' to the opportunities God has set before me through key people at St. Andrew's Church."

Barbara and Kevin MacFarlane have worked with David for many years and wanted to share the following:

"David is being very modest about his contributions. He has developed a significant talent in the video aspect of his A/V work for St. Andrew's. During COVID, he took over Live Streaming our services from Britten Bannerjee, who left in 2021 to join Global Television and later Law School. David has also coached many others to administer the cameras and run the livestream software. He has mastered this visual technology to provide superb experiences for both those watching online and in the sanctuary. Many do not realize that there are 2 visual signals that he creates: one which goes out to the public on YouTube and another one which goes on the screen in the church! "

And from Debby Dorcas, who has worked with David since he became our AV Coordinator:

David is indeed very modest. Can you imagine having a job where, if something goes WONKY (my favorite computer term) ~ you have to figure it out in the next 5 minutes before the service starts and the Livestreaming begins? Since day 1, David has been calm, cool and collected, and you would never know when something has gone WONKY. And it HAS! He stays composed, focused, and kind, no matter what is going on. AND he is the most accommodating person, always willing to fit in a special practice or service whenever he can. He is a treasure and a blessing.

From ALL of us at St. Andrew's, thank you, David for ALL you do!



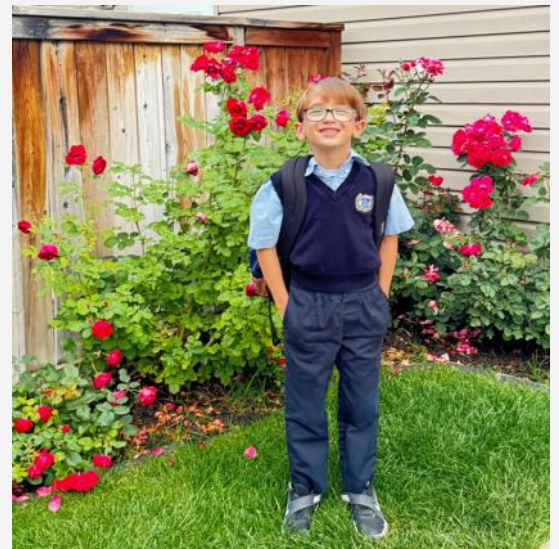
THE GIFT OF JOY

In May, 2022 Thelma Wagner sent Andreas a gift - a rose to help nurture and grow. He was so excited when it started to sprout!

Because of this thoughtful gift, it reminded my husband of his childhood in Cyprus - his father used to nurture a rose garden in their backyard. Soon, the little rose became too big for the little box it came in so we planted it in our backyard. Michalis thought it was too lonely so he purchased more roses to keep this one company. I took this photo this morning while taking Andreas to school.

Look at the joy Thelma brought to our home with a beautiful rose garden of our own - lots of joy here :)

Submitted by Lorna Andronikou



February / March
2026

No Greater Love

Look for our next issue of

CONNEXIONS



Is this my journey toward reconciliation?

Submitted by Bill Judd

I didn't really know what 'reconciliation' was. The federal government's work over the years had led to an apology for some harms done that I knew little about and now we had a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report that included a long list of recommendations including a few directed specifically at churches, and by extension, church people. What did I / we do?! Well, it was clear that I had done nothing in particular, but lived very much

in the 'privilege' that had grown out of exploiting the riches of this land and in the process marginalized a lot of people, the original inhabitants here, or at least the ones that were already here when the European new-comers 'discovered' the land. Some have described what happened as 'cultural genocide' and with the demeaning of a peoples' culture, a whole society and its people were threatened.

Wait ... what? So, I read up on the TRC recommendations to the churches at least and found that even our Presbyterian Church in Canada had been involved in some of this, specifically with the Residential School system. Rev. Peter Coutts helped me to understand some of this history. It was real and its effects are still felt by those people / communities even today.

A few of the people I knew at St. Andrew's seemed to know more about this stuff and were concerned about it. Jim Hope-Ross had been deeply involved with helping businesses and government negotiate deals with Indigenous groups and had helped our national church develop its policy. Conversations with Jim were very enlightening. By now, I was noticing more of a public discourse on 'reconciliation', but still not sure where I fit in. Surely, I / we had to do something.

That search for 'something' lead to a series of information events, including what was called 'The Blanket Exercise', as well as presentations on issues at the time (e.g. individual residential school experiences, update on the murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls issue, short video on 'the Pass' system, a talking circle where we could ask questions and share our own growing dismay at what we were learning, etc.)

St. Andrew's decided to put its shoulder into this and at least try to make a difference. Brian Hawco stepped up to help us organize a full-day Indigenous awareness and friendship day (May 2019). It turns out Brian was already on his own reconciliation journey - I think there is another story there. Anyway, I got to meet Ernie Poundmaker, our Elder and guide for planning and presenting our special day. There was Indigenous ceremony, culture, regalia, teachings, food, dance, handicrafts, art and just a good time - a nice mix of St. A folk, nearby neighbours and interested Indigenous folk from the surrounding area.





Ernie made himself available for a number of meetings, including a fun golf game with myself and Jim Hope-Ross. It made such a difference to have ... well ... a budding friendship with Ernie - a real person, with real trauma in his history and still a strong and good spirit aimed at building respectful connections amongst all of us. He called our friendship day a Pow-Wow - a true community celebration - and applauded us for being the first that he had ever heard of to host a Pow-Wow on church property. It seemed very significant to him and I was encouraged that there was something I could do ... and keep doing ... that might make a difference.

More recently we have been joined by Rev. Laurie who adds her own stories about reconciliation to our growing mix. And there was our extra-ordinary Indigenous Neighbouring Day, just last year in September, when we had another wonderful day of Indigenous teaching and culture sharing. Peter Coutts led this one and helped many more of St. Andrew's folk become acquainted with the fun side of Indigenous ceremony and culture. A definite highlight of the day was presentations from Bruce Starlight a chief and Elder from the Tsuut' Ina Nation, Carmen Lasante, the captain of Métis Region 3 and the apology from the Presbyterian Church shared by Rev. Dr. Patricia Dutcher Walls, our Church's Moderator. And thankfully the weather co-operated and we were able to be even more noticeable to the surrounding neighbourhood. I think it made a real difference.

In addition to the event itself, was a growing, on-going set of connections / relationships - e.g. Krista White and the folks at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre in downtown Calgary where St. Andrew's people now contribute monthly support with a big batch of soup for lunches at the centre.

Since then, I've noticed, and been encouraged by, a growing interest and concern with this issue among my friends, especially my friends at St. Andrew's. A small group of us support a friendship time over coffee and breakfast at Claire House where we have met a number of Indigenous people and families. They all have stories they are learning to live with and working to find their way in this modern world, while rebuilding their own knowledge and respect for a culture they have mostly lost. I think we are all touched by the humanity of their respective quests. Also, you know those land acknowledgement briefs we've been hearing as we gather for worship? - I really appreciate the many new perspectives I am getting there.





Most recently, I've joined with Linda Humphreys, Margaret Bruhjell-Homes and Rev. Laurie to help 'stir the pot' at St. Andrew's with respect to what else we can be doing at St. Andrew's to help make a difference. They've taught me about an on-line course called 'Indigenous 101'; they've brought in 'Hearts Exchange' program with Rev. Layne Kilbreath and Alphonse Nepoose (a Cree Elder and new friend for us from Claire House); Margaret has built-up a connection with Anita Crowshoe at Heritage Park that lead to St. Andrew's participating in the recent Truth and Reconciliation Day activities at Heritage Park, where Rev. Laurie made a presentation about our fledgling reconciliation efforts as a congregation; we worked with Rev. Layne and Alphonse to support a Reconciliation Journey walk; Rev. Layne introduced us to Kate and Willy who operate Neechi-Mart, a food and spiritual support program that now operates most Wednesdays out of St. Andrew's Trinity Hall - these two are teaching us what real mission work is about ... feeding the hungry, clothing the needy, comforting the forlorn ... they are tireless workers and wonderful examples of humility and grace.

And now, I really feel I am indeed on a journey toward reconciliation. I have no idea what the next steps will look like or how long it will take. What it feels like, so far, is that God, our creator, is with us and I should keep going. I think there is room for all of us on this journey.





Update on Sudanese Congregation

A small group from St. Andrew's has recently reached out to our friends from the Sudanese congregation to connect and explore how we can continue to support one another. Did you know that the Sudanese congregation has been worshipping at St. Andrew's since 1998 when Rev. Robert Breitwieser first welcomed them into our church home? They have now been part of our St. Andrew's family for 27 years!

On September 28, 2025, Lorna Andronikou, Tom McIntyre, and Rev. Peter Coutts joined Rev. Laurie McKay in attending the Sudanese worship service. During the service, Rev. Laurie had the joy of ordaining several new elders and youth group leaders who will help guide their growing community.

The Sudanese congregation worships with enthusiasm, particularly through their singing. We were blessed to share in prayer and to share the experience of the vibrant music offered by both the children's and adult choirs. We also enjoyed a delicious meal together in Trinity Hall.

We are truly grateful for the faith, warmth, and fellowship the Sudanese congregation brings to our shared life at St. Andrew's as we continue

Growing Life Together with God.

Our connection with the Sudanese congregation is a beautiful reminder that God's love unites us across cultures and generations.

Submitted by Lorna Andronikou, Tom McIntyre, and Rev. Peter Coutts



Celebrating
THE BIRTH OF
Christ

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