

St. Matthew's United Church Easter 2006 Pastoral Letter



“But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen.”

- Luke 24: 1-5

“He is Risen” Artist He Qi

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Greetings in the name of our risen Lord! I pray this letter finds you well and enjoying the many signs of spring outside your window highlighting once again the immense beauty in God's creation. As you read this letter our St. Matthew's church family will be moving through the season of Lent in preparation for the wonderful celebration of Christ's resurrection at Easter. This journey of faith begins on Ash Wednesday, March 1st as we join with our friends at Christ Church Anglican in a service of worship and marking of ashes made from the palm branches of last year's Palm Sunday service. We have a special Lenten book study on Tuesday evenings in Lent (March 7 to April 11) that offers folks the opportunity to study our Christian faith more deeply as well as learn how to share that faith with others in a way that is practical and comfortable. The book we are studying is *Evangelism for Normal People* by Dr. John Bowen of Wycliffe College, University of Toronto. We are blessed to have John with us at St. Matthew's on Friday evening April 27 and Saturday, April 28 in order to lead us in a conference on sharing our faith.

Other Lenten activities include Rev. Maurice's weekly Wednesday morning Bible study and Rev. Laura's Friday morning Mom and Tots group called “Spirit Break” meeting in the Friendship Room and New Century Hall from 9:30 to 11 am. Calvin the Church Mouse's Secret Pal program continues with letters being exchanged between children in our Sunday School and adults in the congregation until Easter Sunday. The Sunday following Easter there will be a very special luncheon for Secret Pals following worship where their “real identities” will be revealed!

God's Holy Spirit is certainly moving and inspiring us at St. Matthew's through worship, study and service. There are many other ways for you to participate at St. Matthew's and practice your Christian discipleship from our breakfast program for children at Prince Charles School to our new Tuesday afternoon food bank program for members of our west hill neighbourhood to our monthly community lunches on Saturday afternoons. Please speak to any member of the Ministry Team for more details on how you can get involved.

God has been good to us this past autumn and winter at St. Matthew's strengthening and growing our congregation in both number and spirit. I believe God has a plan and purpose for us as a Church family and that our time together in the years ahead will be a great source of blessing for ourselves, our community and the broader world. In regards to connecting with the broader world I am excited to share good news with you. With the encouragement of our Council of Elders at St. Matthew's, I applied for the Doctoral Program in Preaching at McCormick Presbyterian Seminary in The University of Chicago. I am pleased to say that I received word in early February that I was one of a handful of pastors accepted into the program from across North America. This Doctoral program is especially designed for pastors to study while remaining in their busy congregations by using the standard three weeks of study leave to meet each year in late June in Chicago for a period of intensive study. The rest of the year I will send a monthly videotape of my sermon to professors in Chicago and do some online work (papers, discussions and so forth). The best part about this program is that is intended to engage the congregation and make all of you partners in this education. Together, as a church family, we will study and grow together in our worship life and service to the community around us. I am sure that this program will be a source of great blessing to all of us in the years to come!

Of course, as we move forward on this amazing race of faith together our upcoming steps take us through the dark season of Lent and into the brilliant light of the Easter morn. Please join us Sunday mornings at 10 am for our hour of worship during Lent where, as many of you know, I am sharing a sermon series entitled "Practice What You Preach" that focuses on practical ways to live out our Christian faith. If you happen to be away one Sunday always feel free to read my sermons on our church's website www.stmatthewsbelleville.com. The reflective journey through Lent moves us gently into Holy Week and I would like to highlight some of the important services coming up so that you can take advantage of these opportunities to deepen your relationship with God:

Palm Sunday, April 9, 2006 – 10 am

- Are you ready for a parade? Our Sunday School children will lead us in an exciting re-enactment of Jesus' triumphal entry in Jerusalem riding a donkey. The sermon on Palm Sunday is entitled "Donkey for Jesus."

Noon-Hour Worship and Lunch

- This is an exciting new program of sharing worship and a meal with our friends in local west Belleville congregations. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday will follow the same noon to 1 pm format with a short twenty minute worship service followed by lunch in each congregation's fellowship hall. Please join us at noon at the following churches:

Monday, April 10 – *Christ Church Anglican* (Coleman Street)

Tuesday, April 11 – *Salvation Army Church* (Bridge Street West)

Wednesday, April 12 – *St. Matthew's United Church*

- Maundy Thursday**, April 13 – 7 pm St. Matthew’s Church
- Please join us for this powerful evening service where we remember Jesus’ last meal with his friends in the Upper Room through an intimate sharing in Holy Communion.
- Good Friday**, April 14 – 10 am – St. Matthew’s Church
- On this solemn day we gather to remember Jesus death on the cross as an everlasting example of how God’s love for us was literally ‘to die for.’ The sermon on Good Friday is entitled, “What kind of God is this?”
- Easter Sunday**, April 16 – 10 am – St. Matthew’s Church
- Let the trumpets sound and voices sing “Alleluia! Christ is Risen!” We will gather as a church family to celebrate the amazing depths of God’s grace that not even death could contain God’s love for us in Jesus. Join us for an uplifting and powerful worship service that includes the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The sermon on Easter morning is entitled, “Resurrection – Hoax, History or Hallelujah!”

As you can see God is empowering us at St. Matthew’s to do great things in His name by creating an energetic and inclusive environment to both study God’s Word and practice our faith in daily living. I thank God for the amazing church family at St. Matthew’s and believe that there is an opportunity for everyone to engage God and grow in their relationship with Jesus at St. Matthew’s through their heads, hearts and hands. This vibrant ministry is made possible by your prayers, participation and financial support. On behalf of the Council of Elders and the Ministry Team I thank you for your faithful and generous support. You will find a special envelope enclosed with this mailing for your Easter offering. Please take some time in prayer after reading this letter and give thanks to God for all the blessings in your life and pray for the on going ministry of evangelism and social justice at St. Matthew’s. With this gratitude in your heart I then invite you to make your Easter offering in order to ensure that this vibrant ministry for the Lord continues to grow and thrive in the years to come.

Wishing you and your loved ones the grace and peace of Christ at Easter,

Rev. Ross.

The Rev. Ross A. Lockhart.