

75TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Matt's Media



The Newsletter of St. Matthew's Anglican Church, Islington

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Basement Church, 1948

From the Editor

Since its inception, *Matt's Media* has chronicled the life of the parish of St. Matthew's, Islington. It has informed and inspired and, most of all, it has connected people. From the person in the pew next to you to the friend online and as far away as Barbados, this newsletter unites our remarkable St. Matthew's family.

Within these pages are memories of the place St. Matthew's holds in our hearts, of the support and caring we have both received and provided. In celebrating 75 years of our church building, we also celebrate all those who have called St. Matthew's home.

Lisa and I hope you enjoy this special anniversary issue.

We thank everyone who has contributed a photo, a memory, or an interview with Tatiana Saliba and Bryan Tran. Many records have been collected; quotations were extracted to highlight common themes. Remarkable activities in recent years have been described by lengthy articles, somewhat abridged. The original texts are available in our archives. We hope to publish some (with permission) in our blog, website, or future issues of *Matt's Media*.

~ Kathie Oakden, Editor & Lisa Tait, Parish Administrator

"How constant had been their vision, how strenuous their efforts, how generous their giving, how powerful their sense of fellowship in the Gospel, as they had planned and worked and sacrificed to achieve their goal of a completed Church."

(From One Generation to Another, Harry St. Clair Hilchey, p. 16)

From the Pastor

Rev. Philip Stonhouse

Hello to my St. Matthew's family,

"I remember you day and night. I pray to God as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience. I thank God always for you." (2 Timothy 1:3)

To celebrate 75 years of ministry and life together is an amazing experience. We can look back on our own lives and think about what 75 years (or less) of change, growth, relationships, and faith have brought about in ourselves. Now multiply our personal experience a few hundred-fold to imagine the effect of St. Matthew's presence over its 75 years. St. Matthew's has always been intentional about sharing the gospel in our community, whether it was Rev. Stackhouse knocking on doors in a newly formed neighbourhood to invite people to our newly formed church, or now, as our Sunday Services, Messy Church, and many other events invite new people to approach God in innovative and traditional ways.

I have been a part of this community for three years and I can remember from the get-go feeling like this church is family. Somehow, even amidst COVID-19, even while we kept our distance, I felt like I was with all of you and a part of something special. Was it the Wardens (Karen, Stuart, Lianne, and Shantelle at the time) who were so welcoming and wanted to make sure the rectory could be our home? Was it those who dropped off food at our doorstep? Was it that small community in the church that kept worship running every Sunday? Was it those who made a purposeful effort to call and care for one another? Was it the way you all intentionally stayed connected to worship, discipleship, Messy Church, and community even when it was difficult? Yes, it was all of these things and more and I am thankful for every bit of it.

Today, I can genuinely invite to this church someone I have just met, and know that they will experience the same kind of welcoming and love that I was offered. I know that here they can experience a little bit of Christ, which is an amazing gift to me as a leader, and to everyone who walks through the doors. I pray that more and more people have the opportunity and courage to experience this and grow in it.

With all these immense gifts which you have been given through the Holy Spirit, I have so many hopes for you and for us as a community for Jesus Christ. I have a strong sense that the Holy Spirit has made you to become something even more wonderful and powerful for His Kingdom. This brings with it great opportunity and joy, but also responsibility and challenge.

Can we join with the Holy Spirit in this work? As we look back at 75 years, can we also faithfully and devotedly follow Him through the next 75 and more? How can we prepare ourselves to welcome people not just into this place, but also into our hearts and a relationship with Jesus Christ? How can we invite others so that they too can grow in the love of Jesus Christ that we know? How can the Holy Spirit move through us, so that God's Kingdom is met and known through our weekly lives? We should be asking these questions and consistently challenging ourselves. I do, but you and I already know this takes more than just one person.

I have already seen some amazing things in this place. I have seen how the Holy Spirit has led people to walk through these doors. I have seen how COVID became an impetus for people to check us out online before coming in person. I have seen how the gesture of a wave led to membership. I have seen how your personal invitation has led to new life.

...continued

From the Pastor *(continued)*

I have even seen how we have been able to say goodbye with such hope and promise. The amazing thing is that through the Holy Spirit and our growing devotion to faith in Jesus Christ, this can all grow and become even more. If we have seen all of this in three years, in the midst of COVID and everything else, imagine what the next 3, 6, 10, 30, and 75 years could look like. Yet, we know it can be more than that because God can do 'more than we can ask or imagine.'

“Creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.” (*Romans 8:21*)

In the faith of the Father, the hope of Christ, and the love of the Holy Spirit,

Your brother,

Rev. Philip Stonhouse, Incumbent



From Rev. Stephen Blackmore, Incumbent 2013-2020

Dear people of St. Matthew's,

I struggle to find the words to express what my time at St. Matthew's has meant to me. I came to you as someone who was recovering from some major life changes and together we found a way to care for one another as we discerned God's leading. You showed me such grace as I stepped into a leadership position that had been handled so well by so many previous incumbents. You displayed courage as we ventured into the unknown of new worship experiences and a reconfigured church space. I am deeply grateful for having served alongside such excellent lay leadership, wise clergy, and highly competent staff. I regret that the pandemic made our closing days together particularly difficult, but I look forward to seeing you all at St. Matthew's 75th anniversary celebrations!

Grace and peace be with you all,
Stephen ("the younger")

"Helping with Sunday School when I was about 14, I asked Bruce (Gleeson, then superintendent) to talk to the kids, who had a lot of questions. And he said, there are tons of facts, if you want facts and you want science about Jesus, we can fill you with all of the science and knowledge and facts. But at some point, as a Christian, you're going to take this one big step of faith. You are going to choose to believe that is your faith. It just stuck with me. And that has informed my whole faith journey. When we see all the stuff out there in the world and I feel doubt, I say I am just taking a step in faith every day." (Lianne Thompson)

Rev. Canon Dr. Merv Mercer, Honorary Assistant 2013-Present

A couple of years ago, Dawn and I had a short holiday in North Cyprus; we were blessed with the use of a family member's holiday apartment for a week and it was truly a memorable break. Cyprus has a fascinating and turbulent history, full of differing conquests by assorted nations; it was hard work to sort out that history, but endlessly satisfying as well.

What I remember most about that trip came on a day we went to visit Salamis on the northeast coast of the island. There are only some mainly Roman ruins now, but I was most interested in the remnant of the harbour that would have dated back to New Testament times. You'll recall that Cyprus was the home of Barnabas, perhaps my favourite New Testament character, and Salamis was the site of Paul's arrival on his First Missionary journey, together with Barnabas and John Mark. I suppose it's not surprising that Barnabas wanted to share the Christian story in his homeland and accompanied Paul there.

It was that sense of arrival that I experienced on the day we visited. I really felt that I could sense the arrival of that team of missionaries as they landed in that port on the northeast coast. The sense of the Gospel I had at that moment was even stronger than on my much earlier visit to Jerusalem as a theological student:

“When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper.” (*Acts 13:4,5*)

Several churches in Cyprus carry the mark of their efforts to this present day.

This experience has led me to the observation that the presence of the Holy Spirit has a truly long-lasting power and that the Gospel, once planted, can be felt for a very long time, in spite of the vagaries of subsequent human history.

As I think about the decades that St. Matthew's has stood for the Gospel in southern Etobicoke, the same power of the Holy Spirit in a place comes to mind. It is a testament to all of the Godly people who have lived and worshipped there over the decades. In spite of the many who are no longer with us, the Spirit that empowered them still resonates in the life we now share.

I was reminded of this recently when Tatiana told us of her experience of coming to the parish. In walking by St. Matthew's one day, she sensed the presence of God in this place, and has subsequently become an important part of our congregation together with her partner Bryan.

For those of you who have been here for a long time, you need to be encouraged that nothing done for the glory of God is wasted and will certainly live on after you. If you are newer to life with us, you too must continue to be aware that God's presence is powerful and long-lasting. Everything you do on God's behalf will be here in this place long after you. As the early Christian church grew and outstripped the early Mediterranean world, from Jerusalem to Salamis and far beyond, the power of the Holy Spirit has continued to activate God's mission to our world. For that we are thankful and blessed. Amen.

“Coming from a Protestant background, I am enjoying the more traditional elements of the Anglican church. Being in service, I feel held up by history, and deeply loved by the people of St. Matthew's. With great delight to me, my five year old, Evangeline, called Rev. Philip “the King of Church.” We have had so many special moments already, being a newer family to the parish.”
(Amanda Palias)

Greetings from Rev. Stephen Drakeford, Incumbent 2002-2011

Greetings good people of St. Matthew's and congratulations! Seventy-five years and thriving—that is a blessing. You are a blessing to each other, to the neighbourhood and to the world. It is hard to believe that I came to St. Matthew's a month before we started our yearlong 50th celebration. And now we are at 75!

I arrived as your Associate Priest on December 1, 1997, with a two-year contract. I don't think any of us (including me) imagined I would be with you for over 14 years! I was privileged to be your Associate Priest, then Interim-Priest-in-Charge, and then (and this was a first in the Diocese) as the choice of the Selection Committee Bishop Anne Tottenham appointed me your Rector in 2002.

On September 11, 2001, I was sitting in my office talking with the Ven. Harry Hilchey as we worked on his job description—he had been appointed by Bp. Anne to be our Interim Associate. It was the day our world changed and as North Americans we were now governed by the politics of fear, hate, and mistrust. We held a prayer vigil that night as panicked Toronto office tower workers came home needing solace. The early 2000s were challenging years at St. Matthew's and around the world: SARS, the war in Iraq, and global climate change. The Anglican Communion struggled with division over LGBT+ rights and we certainly felt that here in this diocese. In 2008, we managed the global financial collapse. The world had changed rapidly. But further, here at St. Matthew's we felt change most deeply and much more personally; year after year we mourned the passing of the founders of this community—we lost many friends and neighbours, brothers and sisters in Christ, with whom we had shared the pews for 40, 50 and 60 years.

With the global changes as a backdrop, and the ongoing loss of loved parishioners, we nonetheless managed and had some wonderful years together. The 'A' team of the early 2000s now included Janet Read-Hockin, and I asked Harry to stay on as our Honorary Assistant after the gentle John Purser died. I continued to teach well-attended Bible courses, Janet administered pastoral care like no other, and Harry always had wise counsel and a very practical ministry we all enjoyed. And we looked forward to hearing each other's sermons—we all had such different perspectives and gifts.

With the staff in place, we had the capacity to supervise Wycliffe and Trinity students and curates: Fariborz Khandani, Kyle Norman, Bahman Kalantari, Quinn Strickwerda, Nick Trussel, and Michael O'Hara and, after Janet moved on, Karen Hatch as our Assistant Curate. And then, of course, we brought on our Associate Priest Stephen (the Younger, the Second) Blackmore who became your next incumbent. They were all supervised and trained here. They were good years and wonderful people.

Of the things I am most proud during my time of service at St. Matthew's would be our decade-long commitment to the people of Bolivia through Hands Across the Nations, our ongoing commitment to Out of the Cold, the numerous Bible Courses I taught and, most importantly, the handful of people I introduced to Christ. And I hope I was of comfort to you all.

My last Sunday happened to be Christmas Day, 2011, almost 12 years ago already. Now, when I look back on those 14 years, what I remember most are you, the people. I remember those who are no longer on this earth and those of you who still are! When I think of you, I feel all warm and fond and grateful. I'm so very grateful to have served you all those years.

With continued affection,
Stephen (the Elder! The First!) Drakeford

Reflections from the Rev. Canon Bill Kibblewhite

Incumbent 1983-1996

Forty years ago this past May, Linda and I arrived at St. Matthew's with our daughters Susan, age eight, and Sarah, age five and a half, to a very warm welcome from the parish family. It marked the beginning of an incredible partnership in ministry that lasted for thirteen years, and friendships that have lasted to this day.

In a letter written to me at the time of my appointment to St. Matthew's, the late Dr. Reg Stackhouse, the founding rector of the parish, wrote that I "could not expect to find a better opportunity anywhere in the church." How wonderfully true those words were. Our thirteen years together were a time of significant growth and development, because the members of the parish family were receptive to spiritual growth and eager to share in ministry. It was also a time when my faith in Jesus grew and deepened.

It was a great privilege to have begun preparations for the parish's 50th Anniversary celebrations and to have been invited back to be the guest speaker at the 50th Anniversary Banquet on November 21, 1998. Then on November 14, 2008, I was invited to share the cake-cutting with my successor, the Rev. Pat Blythe, at a dinner to mark the parish's 60th Anniversary. On December 1, 2018, Linda and I were also present for a Family Reunion Reception to mark St. Matthew's 70th Anniversary. I was invited to share reflections of my time with you, along with the Rev. Stephen Drakeford and the Ven. Jim Boyles.

This year, you are marking your 75th Anniversary as a multi-cultural, multi-generational parish. Through your worship, fellowship, pastoral care, and outreach, St. Matthew's has had a dynamic and impactful ministry in the heart of West Etobicoke (Islington).

The 1980s were a time of great change in the church. It was a deeply challenging time, but we found our lives and faith greatly enriched. Women were finally ordained to the priesthood. We had two curates who were women. The Book of Alternative Services was introduced to the worship life of the church. Children were welcomed to worship with their families and receive Holy Communion together. As with many in the wider life of the church who became more aware of what it meant to worship as a community, we began to realize the joy and richness of celebrating the Eucharist together. Of great importance, the laity became much more involved in both the liturgy and ministry of the parish. Because we were able to become multi-staffed, we were able to minister to all ages. As a result of that, the parish continued to grow. Over fifty years ago, I was trained to do ministry by myself. However, I soon came to realize that the role of the clergy was not to do all the ministry, but to equip the parishioners—the people of God, to use their gifts by doing the ministry to which God calls them.

I think of the James E. Harvey Memorial Narthex which was built in 1988 with tremendous lay leadership. It included an elevator lift, making St. Matthew's building among the first to be fully accessible. Around the same time, the diocese began a major outreach fundraising program, half of which was to go to the diocese and the other half was to be retained by each parish.

St. Matthew's raised around \$190,000, which was in addition to its annual budget. The temptation was and still is for parishes to use its share of such funds for building costs and projects. Instead, St. Matthew's sent one third of its share to the Arthur Turner Training School in Pangnirtung, in the Arctic, one third to help start up the Dorothy Ley Hospice in Etobicoke, and one third to hire a Christian Education Co-ordinator. We joined St. George's on-the-Hill as founding financial

Reflections from the Rev. Canon Bill Kibblewhite *(continued)*

partners of the hospice and I was invited to sit on its first Board. Whenever I hear of the compassionate caring ministry of the hospice, I think back to the foresight, generosity, and sense of mission the St. Matthew's parishioners had.

I recall with much joy the lay-led Come Togethers, with the music led by the Magnificats, the formation of the children's choir, the Children's Christmas Pageants, and the parish Valentine dinner dances at the Canadiana Restaurant, to name just a few. Of course, I couldn't forget winning the shoe toss at the parish picnic and all the kidding about it that I have happily received down through the years.

Linda and I have worshipped at St. Peter's, Erindale for the past fifteen years. In "retirement" I served as an associate priest at St. Peter's for three years and as an honorary assistant for another ten years before my third and final retirement in 2021. A parish committee, of which I am a member, has just begun preparations for our 200th Anniversary in 2025. Imagine, a parish in Canada with almost a two hundred year history of service to our Lord! As you mark your 75th Anniversary, highlighting your past, present and especially your future—your ministry and mission—may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit continue to guide you.

Linda and I wish you and the Rev. Philip every blessing during this special year. We look forward to joining you for your 75th Anniversary Church Service on September 24th.

Sincerely in Christ,
Canon Bill

Rev. Cole Hartin, Discipleship Ministry Assoc., Youth & Club Matt 2014-2018

Amy and I were part of St. Matthew's for about five years. By many measures that's not a very long time. On the other hand, it was a very formative period for our family. A lot happened. It was during this time that we welcomed our first two sons, Ambrose and Isaac, into the world. They were baptized at St. Matthew's. It was also during this time that I discerned a call to ordained ministry and became a postulant in the Diocese of Toronto. St. Matt's was my parish throughout all of this.

And though the time at St. Matt's might have been short, we developed deep and meaningful friendships in the parish. We got to know many people who were truly gold—thoughtful, caring, godly, and self-giving folks. It was where we both learned (amidst long-suffering parishioners) to preach a homily. It was where we learned to identify a paten, an alb, and which candle needed to be lighted first during each service. We shared great feasts at Messy Church and shot off fireworks (sometimes in dangerously close proximity) on Victoria Day. We met with folks at coffee shops, and studied the Bible at Scruffy Murphy's. We witnessed the baptism of the young and grieved as our older friends passed into glory. We shared the Eucharist every week.

St. Matt's really felt like a family. And after having worshiped and served in many parishes, I see how special this is. As Amy and I look back on this time, we see it as a real gift, and we are grateful that the parish is celebrating its 75th anniversary and heading into this next season of ministry with joy.

I Remember...

"I shall always remember the beautiful 'spirit bouquet' that had 40 red roses, each with a scripture verse attached, when we celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary. And the rejoicing when our daughter was married, even though it was the day of the 'second flood' and Rev. Philip May announced a rain delay to await the arrival of guests struggling to navigate the storm on the 401. By far the greatest festivities were reserved for the day John celebrated the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood. A wonderful cake, countless good wishes, a lovely bouquet, and Bruce Gleeson's fantastic poetry made that day very special." (Margaret Purser)

"St. Matthew's had two boys' hockey teams (the Beavers and the Flyers) that played in a Church league on Saturday mornings at High Park rink. I could barely skate at that point in my hockey career, but all were welcome on the Church hockey team. It was my first time playing on a team of any kind and I remember it fondly because of the involvement of the parents that came out to coach and to watch on those cold winter mornings. My Dad would tie my skates tight to support my wobbly ankles that would then cause my feet to go numb. Thanks to the support of those parent volunteers, I stuck with it and I thank them to this day as I still enjoy playing the game twice a week. [Church teammate] Kevin Day also still plays and occasionally we get out together for a skate." (Richard Smith)



"Entering St. Matthew's, I immediately recognized the organist, Colin Nusum. I had sung with him in a choir back in Trinidad. I didn't get a chance to speak with him that day and wasn't sure he even noticed me. Later that day my phone rang and to my delight, it was Colin on the other end. He simply told me that choir practice was at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday evenings. This small gesture meant the world to me." (Nesta Burgess)

"I first came to St. Matthew's in 1956 as a baby. I have great memories of St. Matt's as a child: Singing in the children's choir, playing hide and seek with Glenys Jordan all over the church, going to Junior Auxiliary (JA) and Girl's Auxiliary (GA), getting into trouble for giggling with Glenys, as teenagers, at the back of the church during the service. Church picnics in provincial parks with 200 to 300 members were always a highlight that signified the beginning of summer." (Helen Prankie)

"One year we did a reading of the [Christmas] story and the kids were on these risers that were just great plywood planks with iron feet. The girl who was the angel Gabriel came out and stood on the edge of the platform and raised her wings and the platform started to tilt. Bill [Kibblewhite] and I were sitting in the front and we were on the edge of our seats until it went back down. Then there was the time we did the *Littlest Angel*, and the Martins' older daughter, who was playing the angel, threw the "cloud" ball so that it was heading right for the big candles!" (Bruce Gleeson)

"I arrived at St. Matthew's in September 1967 with my husband Bob and daughters Linda and Wendy. We felt very welcome and before long we became active members. Our highlights were JA, Girl Guides, Youth Group, Wardens, Inreach Chairman, Venturers, Pastoral Care Chairman. Through all these activities, Sunday services, and study groups, our Faith slowly came alive. I am very thankful that God directed us to this wonderful, faith-filled community." (Ann Sim)

Welcoming

Florence and Al Thompson's journey at St. Matthew's began more than 60 years ago when they were searching for a church to call home. The defining moment came when they met the pastor, who greeted them with open arms and remembered their names the following week. This simple act of hospitality left a profound impact on their hearts, drawing them to a community that exuded warmth and acceptance. From that day forward, St. Matthew's became more than just a church—it became their family.

Six decades and many priests later, Lisa Oppitz had a similar experience: “Rev. Philip couldn't possibly have known how much I was longing to be known by name when I first started attending St. Matthew's. After only one visit, not only did Rev. Philip remember our names as he shared warm greetings, he continued to speak our names weekly during the rite of communion. The first time I heard those words, ‘Lisa, the body of Christ, broken for you,’ I was moved to tears.”

In each person's story was an immediate feeling of welcoming and connection—of home and belonging.

“I had a very good feeling the first time that I visited St. Matthew's. This feeling was reinforced by Stephen's powerful sermon, and by the warmth of congregation members as they greeted us after the service. It was quite evident to us, after we left the church, that Jesus was, indeed, the chief cornerstone of the life of the church.” (Carlisle Kemp-Jackson)

“I was very nervous coming into a new church environment and remember feeling welcomed and seen. The first time I went to Messy Church, I was amazed at the lengths the team went to in order to create a fun and dynamic experience for the kids and as a parent I felt cared for. It was amazing.” (Gui Palias)

“We were driving along Bloor when something caught my eye. It was a beautiful Sunday morning and I could see a man standing in front of the church, leaning on the handrail, openly facing the street. He was wearing clerical attire and appeared to be enjoying the warm weather with a peaceful gaze. It was the quickest glance but I was struck by the notion that I don't recall seeing a Priest standing outside before. They are almost always tucked away inside the church, available exclusively to those who already belong to the congregation. It made me smile to see this Reverend standing in front of the church as though he was beaming an invitation to all who passed by. That day I checked out St. Matthew's website and watched a beautiful welcome video demonstrating what to expect during a service and I knew we would absolutely love to worship here.” (Vanessa James-Locke)

“Looking for a home Anglican Church to attend, Gail and I attended Sunday Services at different churches in the area. We were running out of churches and decided we would check out St. Matthew's. Decker out in our Sunday best off we went one Sunday morning. We parked the car on the street as there was no parking area, ran up steep stairs, opened the door to step in and whoops!... discovered it was the Roman Catholic Church. We ran back down the stairs and found St. Matthew's in the next block. We immediately felt welcomed by Bill (Kibblewhite) and knew we had found our church home.” (Cathy Cross)



Welcoming *(continued)*

"I attended St. Matthew's as a child, but moved away as an adult for several years. Returning to the area, John and I chose to come back to St. Matthew's. When I came back I felt like I had come home. So many people remembered my mom. In fact, many kept calling me Ruth, my mom's name. I loved the continuity and the community I remembered as a child. Both my sons were servers for several years and involved in the Sunday School and the Scouts." (Helen Prankie)

"When John retired from active ministry, all roads seemed to bring us to St. Matthew's. There was an immediate sense of belonging as friendship and love were shown by clergy, staff, and the people in the pews. We were sure we were in the right place when our first grandson was born and was named Matthew!" (Margaret Purser)

"Everyone was welcoming... it didn't feel like I was like a stranger. Everyone is like your own child or like the one you know, so they treated me that way. I felt that warmth, and then I kept coming. And this September it will be two years." (Blessington Velagapalli)

"I appreciate this 'come as you are' feeling. Where you don't have to get dressed up in a particular way, you don't need to be at a particular point in your faith or level of knowledge of scripture... And I'm still welcome." (Simon Wukasch)

"The people at St. Matthew's are a welcoming, close-knit and caring community. We think of everyone at St. Matthew's as friends and are grateful to be part of such a special group of individuals." (David Oakden)



Belonging

“We first tuned in online during the pandemic. Eventually we decided to go in person. It was a big leap of faith for us, never having attended an Anglican church and not knowing what to expect. But as we continued to come out, whether there were few people or more, we were moved closer to God through the reverent worship, the Spirit-inspired teaching that was always grounded in a walk with God and lots of time to ponder scripture, to pray together as a community, to take communion, and to just be in God’s presence. I began to really look forward to each Sunday morning, knowing I’d experience God in a needed way.” (Michelle Lorimer)

“St. Matthew’s fosters unity and intergenerational connections. It’s a unique experience being part of a community where people of various ages come together for the same purpose. This diversity allows for different perspectives and experiences to intersect. I feel renewed and accepted, like values are shared.” (Erika Sitko)

“St. Matthew’s makes me feel like a sun! I love coming back because I see everyone who is nice to me. I love to sing hymns and have prayer time.” (Henri James-Locke, age 10)

Reflecting on their early experiences, Florence fondly recalls how the church members embraced them as newcomers. Different individuals reached out to Florence and Al, extending invitations for dinners and making them feel right at home. In this nurturing environment, they discovered that St. Matthews was not just a congregation, but a family united in faith. (Florence and Al Thompson)

“I am fortunate to have history in this place. There was a time where I was related to more than 30 parish members, with seven different surnames. St. Matthew’s has always been a welcoming family, whether you are related or not. We have a history and a faith that unites us.” (Linda Harrison)

“It’s a community [that] really provides for every facet of our faith life, which we’re really happy about. It’s really easy to get the family involved.” (Tyler Versluis)

“You’ve come to the right place. You couldn’t find a warmer place.” (Nesta Burgess)

“St. Matthew’s has been our anchor over the past 35 years; it provides meaning to our lives. I know that if we’re here on a regular basis, the rest of my life is a little more grounded. It helps us stay focused on what’s important.” (Sandra Watt)

“Sometimes I wonder, why did we even go to Church today? We just went to church to wrangle our children. But we’re hoping that our faithfulness is meaningful, even in those moments. Like the very act of going to church, bringing our children and putting ourselves there gives the sign that it’s a priority. Another family like us might say, “Oh, there’s children at this church” and that might matter. Just being present.” (Simon Wukasz)

“St. Matthew’s is a happy place for me to come to. I feel good when I’m here. It’s very grounding for me; I feel at peace, I can talk to God, I enjoy the music, the community, and I listen and try to absorb what the priest is saying and how it connects with everything else.” (Stuart Watt)

“St. Matthew’s has always been a sanctuary for me. Whenever my life was difficult, I could come to church each week, to be in God’s presence. I needed the peace and the rhythm of the service to help centre me and support me for the coming week. The one thing I will always keep in mind—despite all the changes to the services over the last 75 years, the purpose of why we come to church, to worship God, has never changed.” (Helen Prankie)

“Going to church feels like leaving home to go home.” (Bruce Gleeson)

Growing

Jenna and Simon value the genuine acceptance they find at St. Matthew's, where they feel welcomed regardless of their stage in their faith journey. They appreciate the emphasis on being authentic and the understanding that growth and learning come through collective engagement. They have encountered a diverse group of individuals at St. Matthew's who challenge and inspire them, fostering a sense of unity and shared spiritual growth.

“St. Matthew's is very definitely a place to grow your faith. It is a community of kind and loving Christians. We have had a succession of priests who have really engaged us according to their own strengths and interests.” (Ken Boughton)

“There is always something at St. Matthew's to trickle charge your battery. Always something happening to sustain me and to move me forward a bit.” (Bob Holloway)

One notable trip for Nesta [Burgess] was a Holy Land Tour to Israel in the 1990s. She joined around 12-15 members of the congregation and Reverend Kibblewhite for this enlightening and spiritually enriching experience. Such trips not only provided an opportunity for personal growth but also fostered stronger connections within the St. Matthew's community.

“Dawn's Bible study group is a wonderful gathering that allows deeper exploration of the Bible passages and serves to reinforce the sermons. Rev. Jim Harvey, our first minister here, was one of the founders of Camp Koinonia, a Christian Camp near Parry Sound. Several parish families went for a week of family camp or teen camp each summer. We were fortunate to spend a week at family camp each summer for eight years. Our faith deepened and we made many friends.”

(Dave Oakden)



G.I.F.T Group 2021

“St. Matthew's has offered me a lot of opportunities to develop as a Christian and as a leader. I've learned the importance of giving back and being a part of many different ministries. I love being able to help and share my faith with others. St. Matt's is full of people you can rely on, who are supportive and open minded. Most importantly, St. Matthew's has given me a home away from home, a family rooted in faith and a love for God.” (Emily Crump)

“Attending church has led me to people of diverse backgrounds (age, abilities, interests, origins, health) and widened my horizon beyond my family. Our common morality encourages our trust in each other.” (Kathie Oakden)

“We watched in awe as God brought certain individuals, whether off the street, from far away countries, or from other broken church experiences, into community at St. Matthew's, and it's been such a delight and wonder to watch how the Holy Spirit is working, healing, inviting us into service and community, and challenging us to renew our faith in ways we need to, and to then share it with others.” (Michelle Lorimer)

“That's at the heart of a Christian life, that these are my brothers and my sisters and we're responsible for one another and are one another's spiritual growth.” (Simon Wukasch)

Caring

“Regardless of what happens in the world or in my crazy life, my church family will always be there for me, without a shadow of a doubt. It's so funny, you must have noticed this, you don't have to be there very long and all of a sudden you're really close with people. It feels like you've known them for 20 years. There's this closeness that I haven't found in any other place. The people at St. Matt's are very close-knit, but also open to everyone.” (Diana Lewis)

“For me, what defines St. Matthew's is that warmth, that caring, the fact that there is a desire to know people and welcome people. I have built meaningful relationships with people of all ages and it really doesn't matter—the age doesn't make a difference. I feel there's a genuine concern for people and a genuine... almost like looking out for each other. There's thoughtfulness as well. There's attention to detail and I see that in some of the events.” (Mary Anne Perta)

“The essence of what kept me coming to St. Matthew's: It's partially the teaching but it's also the knowledge that there are people there who love you and would do anything to support you. It's family. We call it our faith family. This is my place. There's a warmth here. And every new person who comes into the church brings something different.” (Bob Holloway)

When asked about St. Matthew's, Youth highlighted the sense of support and acceptance. They described it as being like a family, with open arms and no judgment. The church community is seen as a place where individuals find encouragement and assistance, regardless of their life circumstances. They feel that St. Matthew's would always be there to help them.

“Both my children came here as babies [adopted from China] and St. Matthew's just embraced them. And me as a single mother. St. Matthew's went nuts in terms of support. So there was not one, ‘Are you crazy? You're single, right?’ There was a huge baby shower—the whole church. I knew that this faith family totally supported me. I think this is why Bria and Cassidy feel it so much—people just surrounded them with love. It fills my heart with joy every time they come to church for anything. They are both always like ‘You need something there? We're going to be there.’ I feel very grateful that my children grew up in that environment and that's still another one of the reasons I come.” (Lianne Thompson)

“As well as celebrating the many highlights of our life, St. Matthew's has always extended a caring spirit during the valley experiences.” (Margaret Purser)

“It was in December and I was in the hospital for two days. I'm laying there and I kind of opened my eyes and who's at the end of my bed but [Rev.] Philip. That has been wonderful for us. Very supportive. In terms of, you know, why we love St. Matthew's. We love the people there and they're very, very strong Christians, quiet Christians.” (Ron Landry)

“Susan wasn't doing well that week. She was proclaimed palliative and I said to the doctor, is that days or what are we talking? He said oh no, it's months. Wrong. On the 19th, right before Christmas, we moved the bed downstairs and she seemed to go right down. Like she'd accepted it was going to happen. On the Thursday night Lianne got a group of people—there were about 40—old, and young, Stephen and Merv, and some friends. And they all came and stood in the backyard with candles and they sang Silent Night and other carols. Susan was crying, because she was in the choir for a time. It was just a quintessential St. Matthew's moment. That they would do this for her and that they would all come on a freezing cold night and that they would just do it spontaneously. She died on the Monday after that, and that was the day before Christmas Eve.” (Nancy Hurn)

Messy Church

Dawn Mercer

Messy Church is a way of being “church for families and friends,” including all ages from grandparents to babies. It is a warm, welcoming place for people who are not familiar with church. Everyone has an opportunity to explore the Christian faith by engaging in creative activities, fun games, celebratory worship, and a communal meal.

In late 2014, we became aware that our St. Matt's children need an opportunity to explore their faith in social, family, and worship settings. They needed to play and pray together, to know each other better, and they needed a place where their friends could see what church is about. Neighbourhood families needed an open environment to explore St. Matthew's. Having seen the impact Messy Church had on other churches, we decided to offer a Messy Church program at St. Matthew's in the spring of 2015.

Our very first Messy Church celebrated Pentecost with balloons, streamers, paper airplanes, wind chimes, and worship in the sanctuary. Children and their families loved Messy Church and wanted more, so we created a regular schedule for the last Saturday of each month. Children would create, play, worship, and eat together with loving help from teens and older adults. Messy Church has continued regularly since then with only one cancellation in the first month of COVID.

During COVID there were very lively online Messy Church events. One challenge to protect a raw egg that could be dropped from a height and not break (exemplifying how God protects and cares for us) continued for hours after Messy Church Zoom closed. We even ate together at the end of each online session. To make these programs possible, the Messy Church Team prepared and delivered supplies to each household that registered so all the kids would have the materials and equipment to participate together.

With the easing of COVID restrictions in September 2021 and working within safety guidelines, we carefully began meeting face to face wearing masks, keeping a good distance and with good ventilation. At this *Every Child Matters* Messy Church we made our own Orange Shirts. In September 2022, we resumed eating our meal together.

Messy Church themes have ranged from exploring children in other countries (with examples of Bed Kits from Sleeping Children Around the World), to the resurrection (using *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* story), to God's gift of a wide variety of animals (with the visit of a travelling petting zoo).

Described as “Church but not as you knew it,” Messy Church has become a strong outreach to our community, friends, and family, and a fun place to explore faith for long-term members as well as peripheral St. Matthew's families. Families in the neighborhood have dropped by Messy Church; some have subsequently become involved in other ministries at St. Matthew's, and some would simply say that St. Matthew's Messy Church is **their** church.



Alpha

Alpha is a program designed to explore the Christian faith with others. It provides a series of sessions and videos focused on questions about life, faith, and meaning. Each session has food, a talk, and space to discuss. There are sessions for individuals and for couples.

“St. Matthew’s has offered the Alpha program several times over many years in many different spaces: in the church, twice at the Hurns’, at the Oakdens’, the Rectory, the Parlour/Lounge, the gym, and online during COVID. I have served food at three and attended three. I have had meaningful experiences and developed relationships both serving and attending.” (Kathie Oakden)

“The Alpha marriage course felt like an incubator for our marital journey. We felt well-held and cradled by the love of the St. Matt’s community. The course is rich in content, but perhaps more so in Spirit and Love. Even though the course ended some time ago, it’s still pretty alive in our relationship as we apply the different modules and teachings in our marriage.” (Tatiana Saliba)

“The timing of the Alpha marriage course was serendipitous. We had just started taking an online marriage course two weeks prior, as our marriage at the time was in need of support. With diverse couples, relevant



Marriage Alpha

examples, and a light-hearted touch, when serious topics were introduced we felt comfortable to investigate and dive deep. This was also encouraged by the amazing and supportive environment. We learned specific tools to help in our communication and understanding of each other. Most importantly we fostered a sense of renewal in our relationship not just with each other, but with God. I was taken aback by the overwhelming generosity of spirit in which the marriage course was delivered. We had just joined the church a month prior and we were being treated as family. It was a very heartwarming experience.” (Bryan Tran)



Alpha 2019

“The years pass and we all remember some of the same events differently, but that is what makes each of our stories unique. This faith community of St. Matthew’s has always been and is still an active place of love and welcome.” (Linda Harrison)

Music

Bruce Gleeson

Since our founding, St. Matthew's has been blessed with talented musicians who have used their gifts to inspire our choirs and enhance our worship.

Our earliest musical reference, in an archived service bulletin, credited Mrs. Frank Hubbard as pianist. In 1953, Mrs. Donaldson was referred to as organist. In 1958, Terry Tarleton became St. Matthew's Music Director and Loretta Neale the church organist. The choir of 30 choristers sang outreach Evensong, Easter, and Christmas services at Toronto reformatories in addition to their regular Sunday services at St. Matthew's. They led Wycliffe College Carol Nights and, before Mr. Tarleton left in 1967, he and the choir produced an LP record.



During Colin Nusum's 25-year career at St. Matthew's, he is reported to have never missed a regular Sunday service. During those years, the choir visited Black Creek Pioneer Village to sing Christmas carols and joined with the choir of Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church for a combined Advent Carols and Lessons service, alternating church venue each year. For much of Colin's tenure our services were very traditional Anglican in style until Rev. Bill Kibblewhite, his wife Linda and a group of parishioners visited a congregation in Darien, Connecticut led by charismatic Rev. Terry Fulham, where they experienced a more contemporary form of worship which they found quite uplifting. After returning to St. Matthew's, Colin Nusum and Linda Kibblewhite encouraged the formation of a contemporary music group that became known as the *Magnificats*. Colin played piano, Linda and Sally Martin sang and played tambourine, Linda Dickson sang and played the flute. Ted Smith and Mark Dickson played guitars, George Anstey the bass guitar, Bruce Gleeson the banjo, and Doug Cuttle the violin. Student minister John Coulman played drums. The group provided contemporary music for regular Sunday worship as well as monthly evening *Come Together*s of music and testimony.

Tom Bell, along with his wife Susan (now Bishop of Niagara), came on board next, bringing a very British flavour to our music. Tom had been a choir boy at Salisbury Cathedral and brought a choral director's perspective while Susan added her beautiful soprano voice to our choir. Tom studied organ with Ian Sadler (Stratford) and the choir took part in a *Floral Choral Evensong* at Ian's huge Presbyterian Church on Stratford's Main Street. One Christmas Tom composed the winning Carol in a competition, *Once As I Remember*, which we sang that year at our Christmas Eve services. Developing his skills through a productive, illustrious career, Tom is currently Music Director at St. James Cathedral and also at Trinity College Chapel, University of Toronto (UofT).

Mark Rutledge became our next music director in 1998 while studying at Emmanuel College, UofT. Mark was comfortable with contemporary evangelical music and added an element of upbeat, syncopated Southern spiritual music to our traditional Anglican repertoire. Mark was an energetic, outgoing leader who often used gentle humour to get across a point. He tried to get us to relax and sing out instead of singing so 'sedately.' "Be like Luther," he'd say, "Dare to sin greatly!" We won't ever forget the Sunday service when we sang *Walkin' In The Kingdom* wearing dark glasses.

When it came time to replace Mark, his words that we "should not be reluctant to choose a candidate just because they were young" felt prophetic. We soon hired Pam Ashbourne, a young

Music *(continued)*

candidate whose energy and enthusiasm attracted sufficient members of our Youth Group who, in turn, brought school friends to help form a Youth Choir that performed several musical dramas during Pam's stay: *A Technicolour Promise*, *Rescue In The Night*, *The Promise of A King*. Each time we put on our blue choir robes, I remember Pam, because she organized their purchase during her time with us. When Pam (now Doyle) left to study at Western University, we bid her farewell singing a song, *Pamelot*, to the tune of the Broadway musical *Camelot* in which we highlighted all her talents and her demands as a director.

Colin Persad followed Pam in 2004, bringing an energetic Caribbean enthusiasm and sense of rhythm to our worship music. If you could hum a few bars of a song, Colin would be able to play it, and when one of our sopranos, Marj McConnell, would protest that he wasn't playing it as written, Colin would reply, "Don't worry Marj. It will be alright. Make a joyful noise unto the Lord!" Under Colin's direction, the choir provided musical accompaniment for the three years St. Matthew's presented a reading of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* sponsored by the CBC. When we organized our own program, *Christmas Comes But Once A Year*, for the following two years, Colin organized the music to accompany the readings.

In 2008, Michael Tansley returned us to our British Anglican roots. *The Oxford Book of Easy Anthems* became a regular source of anthems by Handel, Purcell, Fauré, and John Rutter and as part of our 60th anniversary garden party, the choir sang 'madrigals on the grass' in the church garden. Our Advent Lessons and Carols service at Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church was followed with Benjamin Britten's *Festival of Carols*.

Anne Marie Page brought husband Gary and his trumpets, their two daughters, and several gifted musical colleagues to enhance our music program. She broadened the range of music we used in a blended approach to worship music and is remembered for her *Christmas and Candlelight* concerts.

Jenny Cheong, a gifted young cellist, became our next music director while completing her master's degree in music at UofT. The focus and precision Jenny brought to her playing characterized her choir direction. She would go over each anthem painstakingly, add 'red notes' for the men, and move choristers to achieve a more balanced sound.

Thomas Gonder, an accomplished concert organist, brought his own energy, enthusiasm, and humour to make choir practices entertaining as well as productive. One of his pet peeves was hearing final 'r's being sung with a Texas-like 'twang': "Please, no 'r's like John Wayne!" During his tenure, and after 40 years of faithful service, our Baldwin organ needed replacing and Thomas was instrumental in recommending the Phoenix Organ Company who loaned us one of their organs to use while they built ours. Our new Phoenix organ was installed for Easter 2018, and shortly thereafter Thomas performed its inaugural concert, *From Bach to Gospel*, featuring the world premiere of *Elegiac Canadienne* by David Briggs. In November we held a 'Singalong Concert' to thank all Organ Fund donors.

Current music director Dr. Tyler Versluis had only three practices with our choir before the pandemic lockdown took effect in February 2020. With priest Stephen Blackmore, technician Colin Hall and a single masked chorister, Tyler was able to produce weekly online services for the first months of the pandemic. In September, he and new priest Philip Stonhouse taped three inspirational Evensong services and Tyler assembled a group of talented musician friends to create taped and live performances for a traditional Advent Lessons and Carols service as well as

Music *(continued)*

Christmas Eve and Day services. Then Tyler and his wife, soprano Erica Sitko, hosted a *Twelfth Night Zoom Carol Sing* to complete a joyous online Christmas. In the new year, Tyler provided weekly video sequences of a variety of Lenten music, and combined each choir member's recorded part of *Jesus Christ Is Risen Today* to produce a choral anthem video for our online Easter Day service. By Christmas Eve 2021, services were both in person and online, with the music at the candlelight service sung *a cappella* by our choir. Tyler recruited Michelle, Sophia, and Josh Lorimer and Lauren Kolgis to form a Worship Team whose vocal and instrumental performance adds greatly to our worship. The success of a piano/organ concert featuring Damien Macedo on organ and Tyler on piano led Tyler to create a chamber music concert series which he dedicated to the memory of Sally Martin, whose musical gifts as Jr. Choir Leader, choir member, *Magnificat* member, and occasional pianist were a blessing to St. Matthew's. In addition to increasing our appreciation, enjoyment, and awareness of how music can enhance our worship, Tyler regularly contributes articles to *Matt's Media* on the challenges and rewards that Christian faith provides.



Worship Band & Choir 2023

In addition to our music directors, we were fortunate to have the gifted musical support of Kelly Galbraith and Lydia Pedersen as interim directors, and Eddie Norfolk, Sally Martin, and Beryl Smith on keyboards.

I have enjoyed the unique pleasure and privilege of having sung for all these musical directors with the exception of Terry Tarleton, Loretta Neale, Mrs. Hubbard and Mrs. Donaldson.

Others note: "We have been blessed with excellent choir directors over the years. Two of them have gone on to be music directors at Cathedrals. Colin Nusum, my first choir director, had remarkable skills. Tom Bell wrote a piece which he dedicated to his mother and gifted to St. Matthew's. Michael Tansley moved on to an historical church in Niagara. Tyler is an amazing individual likely to achieve impressive musical positions in the future." (David Oakden)

"The music is very important to me. We've been blessed with a lot of very good organists. They're all different, and they all have their talents and I've really appreciated that." (Sandra Watt)



St. Matthew's During the Pandemic

Mary Gleeson

The year 2020 was off to a good start with a well-attended pancake supper and the hiring of our new Music Director. Then, because of the rapid spread of the Corona virus, our world changed in early March as almost everything shut down, including churches.

Our administrative assistant worked from home, keeping us all informed of parish news. Technical experts in our congregation enabled us to connect with most of our members online through Zoom, or by phone. Music for services was played from a home and later on from the church with only the priest, organist, a choir member and a tech wizard involved. While this helped to keep everyone connected, the sound and experience were not the same as worshipping in church.

With the Easter season approaching, alternate plans were put into place. Palms had been ordered and parishioners were encouraged to stop by the church at the side door to pick up a palm or ready-made cross. Messy Church and Club Matt packets were hand-delivered to homes. Sadly, Rev. Stephen announced on Palm Sunday over Zoom that he would be leaving us to take a position at a church in Hamilton. We were unable to have a proper farewell, but had a Zoom celebration and then a car procession by the rectory to wave goodbye.

Rev. Philip arrived in July, unable to meet most folks in person. The parish put together a get-acquainted video to assist him in getting to know us. He and newly hired staff worked through a difficult time lacking in-person contact with congregants.

When we were finally able to worship in person, strict safety protocols were in place. A team of volunteers sanitized all surfaces and thoroughly cleaned the church. Another group taped off pews, floors, and the entrance so that we would be properly spaced. Masks were available and mandatory, and hand sanitizer was placed conspicuously, readily available for use. Rev. Philip and his wife Mary Anne created a video showing what to expect when arriving for church, keeping in mind the established protocols. There were no in-person coffee hours, just online after-service chats.

During the time of the pandemic many positive adjustments were made. We established the Soup's On program, where volunteers met weekly, masked and at separate tables, to chop veggies for soup that was then delivered to the Toronto Urban Native Ministry. Messy Church and Club Matt materials were hand-delivered and sessions conducted online. With Colin Hall's departure, a technology team was established, which still enables our online services. Tyler recorded each member of the choir separately and put together a Pentecost anthem on Zoom, as well as recording three Evensong services to be viewed online along with other musical presentations. Rev. Philip offered drive-through communion at the side door. Welcome Committee members phoned many of those concerned to see how they were coping or if they needed extra help, a task that continues still. Some events, such as pizza dinners, were held outside during the warmer weather, enabling families to reconnect with each other. A very successful auction was held, with bidding done online for items contributed by parishioners. Under the challenging circumstances, our faith family rallied, and events and worship continued, albeit in a different manner.

While many of us are "tired" of Zoom, it offered the opportunity to continue to come together as a community in our services, meetings, Bible studies and special presentations such as the *Jesus Christ Superstar* evening and *Gospel of Mark* dramatic reading. While we are glad now to gather in the church, online participation is a continuing blessing for those unable to come in person—an unexpected benefit of an incredibly difficult time in our history.

St. Matthew's Sponsors Ridwan Nure Ali

Marguerite Locke

St. Matthew's response to the world refugee crisis, sparked by the dire need in Syria, is a shining example of living our mission of *Sharing Jesus' Love*. Late in 2015, we formed a team to organize our sponsorship of a Syrian Refugee Family, working with the AURA organization. (Anglican United Refugee Alliance).

By February 2016, the need for sponsorship of families fell. Happily, in May 2016, AURA asked us to sponsor Ridwan Nure Ali, a single young man, with no family, in HIGH need of sponsorship, living in a refugee facility in Kenya. The Rev. Stephen Blackmore, on behalf of our M25:40 (referring to the Bible verse in *Matthew*) team, presented the opportunity to the parish at a Town Hall meeting. It was agreed that we would use a portion of our refugee fund and the grant from the Diocese to sponsor Ridwan.

Now the fun began in earnest as we focused on how to support Ridwan in his entry into Canadian life. He arrived, not in late summer, but in frigid early February, 2017. What a way for an Ethiopian to meet Canadian weather! But our team was ready with a welcoming party (Rev. Stephen and Stuart Watt), good winter clothes, and a cozy place to stay with Theresa Kane and her family for about three weeks. Theresa remembers that there was a light snowfall shortly after Ridwan arrived which left him concerned. "As I stepped out of the house to shovel, he was worried that some danger would befall me. Once that failed to happen, he happily picked up a shovel to help." On a trip to Niagara Falls with Ridwan, "He was stunned by the view and thrilled to see the U.S. across the river."

By early summer we had found a terrific apartment for Ridwan and set him up with our collected furniture and supplies, including a computer and TV. What a heartwarming scene. Picture Marguerite, Theresa, and Sue helping him position his furniture and arrange his bedroom and set up his kitchen cupboard. What a great culture shock to a single Muslim gent having all these women in his home, directing traffic. Stuart Watt provided most of his day-to-day support while the late Pat Rickards met frequently with Ridwan to speak English.

Ridwan turned out to be a very industrious, intelligent, pleasant, and athletic individual. In his first months in Canada, he attended English Classes, learned to travel by TTC, found his Mosque, learned to recognize and prepare Canadian food, and generally dedicated himself to becoming Canadian. After his initial ESL courses, he enrolled and completed a Physio Assistant course, plus he undertook on his own studying for and passing his Citizenship exam. Stuart and Sandra Watt and Marguerite Locke joined him for his online (due to COVID) ceremony a couple of summers ago. He proudly sang with us the National Anthem, waving his Canadian flag. He has a car and supports himself with various gig economy endeavours. He is happy and healthy, and truly grateful to the St. Matthew's community for making his new life possible.

For the Watt family, the sponsorship of Ridwan Ali had a profound impact, resonating deeply with their sense of compassion and their commitment to living out their faith. The process of welcoming Ridwan into their community became a personal mission of love and solidarity and reaffirmed their commitment to serving others.

The M25:40 Sponsorship Committee:

Rev. Stephen Blackmore, Rev. Canon Dr. Merv Mercer, David and Sue Hampton, Shantelle Hampton, Theresa Kane, Marguerite Locke, Helen and John Prankie, Stuart and Sandra Watt.

St. Matthew's Indigenous Issues Group (SMIIG)

SMIIG was formed in 2017 to discuss the Church's role in coming to right relations with the Indigenous people in Canada. The group has been led by Nancy Hurn who, in her position as Archivist for the Anglican Church of Canada, found and made records available to the Indian Residential Schools' Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and to various Indigenous people.

Nancy notes, "In light of the Anglican Church's apology for the treatment of students at the residential schools, St. Matthew's has tried to live out the healing and reconciliation process by learning about and responding to the TRC's Calls to Action. Visits by a number of Indigenous leaders to St. Matthew's over the years have led to a better understanding of our mutual history."

Under SMIIG's leadership, St. Matthew's has held clothing drives, experienced a Blanket Exercise, viewed and discussed the film *Doctrine of Discovery*, created a learning environment for our Messy Church children, and created a Talking Circle. During the COVID pandemic, St. Matthew's prepared a weekly meal to assist the Toronto Urban Native Ministry's program to provide for the unhoused. We have welcomed Indigenous clergy, including Retired Indigenous Priest for Toronto, Rev. Andrew Wesley and his wife Esther, and National Indigenous Anglican Archbishops Mark McDonald and his successor Chris Harper when Rev. Harper was Indigenous Priest for Toronto. The Wesleys continue to be frequent guests of our National Indigenous Day of Prayer services.

Each time we worship, St. Matthew's now acknowledges the Indigenous heritage of our location.



Nurturing Orphans of AIDS for Humanity (NOAH)

NOAH emerged as a response to the overwhelming need to provide care and support for children who were vulnerable or orphaned due to HIV/AIDS. St. Matthew's became involved in 2005 through parishioner Ken Boughton, who organized our response, connecting with a parish in South Africa that was well known to him.

Over several months, we contributed towards garden and food supplies at one ARK, Insika, in a school in the city of Durban. Club Matt made and sent Christmas cards to the children. The card from one of our children, named Noah, caught their attention immediately.

Additional South African outreach came through a Toronto Diocese Project, where St. Matthew's was twinned with Holy Trinity Parish, Grahamstown, South Africa. Over three years we made a small but significant effort. One fundraiser sold their Christmas decorations made by AIDS sufferers.

The outreach team comprised Ken Boughton, Duncan Green, Margaret Purser, Dorothy Sharp, Kathleen MacInnes, Jean & Larry Smith, Joan Corbett, and Maryka Marais.

"Our dear friend Betty Polley always told us that when she had done something wrong (sinned) she would say that God would pick her up and dust her off and tell her she was forgiven, and to be on her way rejoicing!!" (told by Ann Sim)

Cochabamba, Bolivia

Marguerite Locke, Linda Aldridge

Marguerite's story: Dennis and I and our two daughters, Jacqueline and Diana, became involved in many activities in the church over the years, but the outreach projects to Bolivia were truly transformational. Through the leadership of Rev. Stephen Drakeford late in 1998, the youth group was invited to participate in a mission trip for three weeks during the summer of 1999 to Cochabamba, Bolivia. The group would work with a Christian charity called *Hands Across the Nations*.

This first trip provided a springboard for several other trips with many parishioners participating over the next 15 years. I estimate that more than 30 people from our parish participated on one trip or another. Our purpose was to work alongside the local church community and assist both in hard physical work and financial support for various construction projects that their community deemed important for education, health, and hygiene.

Our older daughter studied Spanish through university, so she acted as translator on many of these trips and, in fact, moved to Bolivia for several years to teach ESL, coordinate the construction projects, and married one of the young men from Iglesia Neuva Eden, our son-in-law, Israel.

To say that St. Matthew's provided life-changing experiences for the Locke family would be an understatement. We have been privileged to participate in these outreach projects through the church and have learned a little of what it is to *Share Jesus' Love*.

Linda's story: In 2001, eight members of St. Matthew's joined Rev. Stephen Drakeford, then our Associate Priest, to take part in a missionary trip to Bolivia. Along with other volunteers, our major initiative was to clear and prepare a site in The Barrios for the erection of a three-story building to house a medical center and a training center for youth.

We stayed at a mission house in Cochabamba where we slept, ate, and then were bused each day to the various sites. At the main site in The Barrios, men from the group along with men from the community were digging an alcove into the side of the mountain. All the rock and debris had to be moved up the hill so we spent the first few days passing rocks uphill person to person. Ladies from the community came out in their housedresses to join the effort.

The church was also a community center. We had built and taken with us collapsible puppet theaters and handmade puppets to entertain the children, who came to the church two or three times a week to eat a substantial lunch prepared by community women in their outdoor kitchen. We had also taken guitars and managed to get the children singing and dancing.

Many women in Cochabamba are arrested and jailed. They can be kept for up to four years without actual charges. In jail they are expected to pay for their own cell, food, and upkeep. If they have children and no one to care for them, they take the children to jail with them. They set up small businesses in the jail—cafes or stitching and sewing, which they could send out for sale.



Bolivia *(continued)*

One school in which we were working, The Casa del Amistad (The House of Friendship) sent a bus to the various jails each morning to pick up the children and bring them to school for the day. They were fed, at times bathed, seen by doctors and dentists, and taught.

We repaired and painted playground equipment at the school and painted outside walls. One day we sang and prayed with the jailed mothers. On the weekend, we might do laundry or go to the market. One weekend we had the use of a bus and drove to the country areas, went to a monkey reserve, and stayed in a hotel.

In farewell, the community hosted a fiesta with music and dancing. Many saw us off at the airport, the end of a wonderful adventure.

Note: Marguerite's and Linda's full stories will be available on St. Matthew's blog.

Out of the Cold

Bruce Gleeson

Prior to creating our own Out of the Cold program, members of St. Matthew's congregation volunteered with All Saints Anglican Church. At St. Matthew's 1998 Vestry meeting, Duncan Green proposed that St. Matthew's consider establishing our own OOTC program on Sunday evenings, and a six-week trial period for January/February 1999 to determine if there was a need.

Each of the six nights saw a full complement of guests, and the next winter we offered a full program of 20 Sunday evenings from mid November through late March.



Duncan Green and OOTC crew 2003

We shared this outreach ministry with Our Lady of Peace Catholic Church, and we had support from many Etobicoke churches by way of funds, volunteers, and meals. When asked about the response from local churches, businesses, and organizations to our appeals for support, Duncan Green responded, "We cast our bread upon the waters and it came back buttered."

Each Sunday evening began with the OOTC Volunteers Prayer (St. Paul's Volunteers' Prayer). A typical Sunday saw 40-50 volunteers staffing ten teams to meet the needs of our guests as we provided safe shelter, a hot nutritious dinner, and an opportunity for a hot shower and laundered clothing. Our guests could receive new clothing and footwear, and in the morning after a hot breakfast, each received a bagged lunch and a subway token upon departure. During a typical winter we served 500 overnight guests, 328 additional visitors for Sunday dinners, 122 overnight guest showers, and 108 guests had laundry washed.

COVID-19 forced St. Matthew's to close the 2019/20 program early, and substantial changes over the course of the pandemic meant we had to discontinue the program.

For nearly 10 years we were privileged to provide for the needs of an ever-growing unhoused population.

Caring

“My church family were constantly comforting me, encouraging me, and praying with me, particularly Dawn and Philip. I knew I could call the Hurns and they would be here in a heartbeat. Marilyn Freidman gave me a lot of help and encouragement and support (when Ken was getting his knee surgery done).” (Diana Lewis)

“When I started [working] here, we were in a global pandemic. Things were tough, especially for families. And the community really took care of us, for which we're extremely grateful... they're always asking, Do you need this? Can we do this for you?” (Tyler Versluis)

“If I were to pick up the phone and call someone in case of an emergency, it's definitely someone from the church.” (Aina R'Abel)

“There's an outpouring of love and there's just a wrapping of people in a blanket of support. I think there's a lot of wisdom in the community. There's a lot of sharing of joy. There's a lot of support and genuine care and it goes both ways.” (Mary Anne Perta)

“As my parents aged, I was thankful that there were people from St. Matthew's who reached out to my parents. The support each person gave was greatly appreciated!” (Lynn Southward)

“Over the years, I have met many wonderful people at St. Matthew's. As I become older (and during the pandemic), I am thankful to worship and ‘attend’ the church services virtually. St. Matthew's is important in my life as I am uplifted by the Christian teachings, the words spoken, the support provided by the Clergy, my church friends, and the kind members of the congregation.” (Mary Wallace)

“During my time of need after the death of my beloved wife Bridget, the clergy, staff, and people of St. Matthew's stood by me with their thoughts, prayers, and encouragement. This is a debt of gratitude that I will never ever be able to fully repay.” (Richard Farrar)

“I appreciate my friendships with long-term as well as recent acquaintances. Being supported by the prayers and expertise of others during a crisis has removed my isolation and provided help and ideas. Sunday School provides children with friendships and support beyond school, sports, or neighbourhood. Attending as a family broadens the connections.” (Kathie Oakden)

FRIENDS for Friends are parishioners who stay connected with members of our congregation who can no longer attend church. (Friends Relate In Every Need as Disciples for the Saviour). They visit regularly and some are qualified to offer home Communion. Ann Sim coordinated this group for decades. Special effort is made at Christmas to provide gift baskets full of suitable treats, which are assembled and delivered by a larger number of parishioners. For years these treats were supplied by Leslie Portch.



FRIENDS Charlotte Weiler and Ann Sim

Did you know...?

Where St. Matthew's motto came from? In 1998, Club Matt had a motto competition. Jonathan Harrison (age 12) submitted “Sharing Jesus' Love,” which is still used today.

Many of the original wooden features of the church were built by Percy Jordan, including the Dutch door to the nursery and the slanted shelves that held baby bassinets.

Praying

St. Matthew's devoted prayer ministry, "Partners in Prayer," supports the faith family of St. Matthew's, their families, friends, neighbours, and others in need of comfort. Started more than 45 years ago by Moira Morris, the prayer chain is an integral and vital ministry. Now led by Bob Holloway, the Partners are closely tied together by belief and purpose but loosely knit by physical distance. Today, everyone receives requests almost simultaneously by email.

Reverend Merv speaks passionately about the power of prayer and the importance of expecting to witness God's action in our lives. He emphasizes the need to be attentive so we can notice His work in our lives, as it often exceeds our expectations and fulfills our true needs rather than our mere desires.

Prayer holds great importance in Florence and Al's lives. They discussed the practice of communal prayer within the church and expressed gratitude for blessings received. They emphasized the transformative power of prayer and the significance of expressing gratitude and seeking forgiveness in their prayers. (Al and Florence)

"We have received fabulous, wonderful prayer support throughout these illnesses we've had. In particular, Ron's was in the late 90s. And we didn't actually have this prayer chain that we now have online. It was a prayer support group that met once a week at the church to pray for him specifically. And we had a wonderful incumbent priest [Pat Blythe]. One of her gifts was prayer. She set up that prayer group and it was amazing, amazing support. And Bob Holloway with his prayer line is wonderful." (Barb Landry)

"We totally believe in prayer. I mean, we've got some amazing doctors and we're very thankful for that. But we also know that the church and our friends provide us with that protective layer of prayer. We feel surrounded by prayer." (Ron Landry)

Karen Lee shared the story of her late husband's battle with lung cancer, where the prayer group at St. Matthew's played a vital role in supporting and praying for both John and Karen. The community's unwavering support helped them navigate the journey, keeping John's spirit alive and demonstrating the power of communal love during times of grief and loss. John's faith, combined with the prayers and care from the St. Matthew's community, provided strength and solace during their challenging times.

"Bruce developed cancer soon after Elizabeth was born. We had many St. Matthew prayer warriors supporting us and our young family. There was joy throughout the parish with each clean bill of health over the years." (Linda Harrison)



Pizza Party 2023

I Remember...

“Starting in the early 1960s and into the mid 1970s, I regularly attended the Women’s Auxiliary (WA) on Wednesday afternoons. Its focus was mainly quilting, although it also included sewing bandages for the Canadian Red Cross and knitting hats and scarves for the Indigenous communities in Canada’s far North. Each WA meeting would also include a short bible devotional and tea would be served. I made wonderful friendships with the women in the WA—mentioning Alice Wormald, Lily Hutchinson, Lillian Cleal, Betty Polley, Audrey Carthew, Mary Bryce, and Isobel Chater. The women in the WA were all so dedicated to the work of the church.” (Mary Wallace)

“Mrs. Donaldson, the church organist, and Terry Tarleton, the choir director, taught the girls’ choir. We sang at the 9:30 service faithfully each week. This taught us to sing to the Lord! In Junior Auxiliary Mrs. Doyle taught us to give to those less fortunate than ourselves. It was fun learning to make stuffed animals for others. Mrs. Poulson, along with other leaders, taught Girl Guides to serve with our whole hearts, souls, and minds. Receiving the Religion and Life badge taught by Rev. Cathcart was an important accomplishment in my Guiding experience. Mrs. Bryce and Mrs. Jordan were instrumental in helping me teach younger children to love the Lord. My life at church was an important part of my life. St. Matthew’s was a safe place.” (Lynn Southward)

“Betty Polley was a mentor to many at St. Matthew’s. She loved bible studies and singing Christian songs that spoke to her spiritually. For many summers she was the camp director at Camp Koinoia and she also went on many mission trips around the world. At St. Matthew’s she belonged to St. Martha’s group of the ACW where they did a lot of quilting and participated in fundraisers that the ACW had. Betty will always be remembered.” (contributed by Ann Sim)

“Rev. Kibblewhite asked me to be the first female lay administrator. Back then you had to be “robed” to participate in the service, leading the choral chants, reading lessons and prayers. My son was born during this time and the ladies in the nursery would have to turn down the speaker volume so he wouldn’t hear my voice. I became great friends with new mom Linda Dickson. We got involved in many programs for the children and committees to encourage growth in the church. For a time it was said if you need something done, ask the two Lindas.” (Linda Harrison)

“The Milk of Human Kindness project came about as a result of time spent supporting a divinity student from Uganda. When it was time for him to return, the church wanted to do something special. Hearing that there was a need for improvement to breeding stock in Uganda, they arranged to purchase cows, which were delivered to Dick Jupps’ property at the corner of Laurel and Bloor. The Jupps family also donated the large stained glass window known as the Pentecost window.” (Percy Jordan through Graham Jordan)

“My parents, David and Beryl Smith, and I moved to the area in 1949 when I was three. We began attending St. Matthew’s which, at the time, was a mission church of St. George’s on-the-Hill. Reg Stackhouse, then a student at Wycliffe College, took the services. Upon graduation, he became our first minister. Initially the church was only a basement. My father was one of the early church wardens and after a fundraising campaign, the new church building with the current sanctuary was constructed. I remember the first service in the new church on Christmas Eve 1954. The church was the center of our community life in those early days as housing developments sprang up, and the Sunday School was full of kids. Alice Wormald was in charge and my mother played the piano for our gatherings. We met in a large house owned by the Church on what is now the east parking lot. I was the first captain of St. Matthew’s peewee hockey team.” (Ted Smith)

GROUPS & PROGRAMS

- ACW (St. Anne's, St. Theresa's, St. Margaret's, St. Martha's, St. Hilda's)
- Alpha
- Anglican Young People's Association
- Badminton
- Baseball Club
- Book Club
- Camp Matt
- Chancel Guild (St. Elizabeth's)
- Choir, Junior & Senior
- Club Matt
- Couples' Club
- Fellowship Dances
- Film Discussions
- Food Cupboard
- Four Seasons Group
- FRIENDS for Friends
- GIFT groups (Growing in Faith Together)
- Hockey Teams
- Interfaith Study
- Junior Auxiliary
- Lamb Suppers
- Life in the Spirit
- Magnificats
- Men's Breakfast
- Messy Church
- Painting Group
- Pancake Suppers
- Partners in Prayer
- Picnics & Pool Parties
- Readers & Servers
- Stations of the Cross
- St. Matthew's Indigenous Issues Group
- Vacation Bible School
- Valentine Dinner Dances and Teas
- World Day of Prayer
- Youth Group

PROJECTS

- Beyond Soup
- Clothing Drives (winter clothes)
- Food Cupboard
- Hands Across the Nations Bolivia
- Harry Robinson Mission
- Holly Bazaar (Christmas)
- Matt's Media
- Milk of Human Kindness
- Reconfigured Church Space
- NOAH (Nurturing Orphans of AIDS for Humanity)
- Out of the Cold (OOTC)
- Prayer Room
- Prayer Shawl Ministry
- Refugee Sponsorship
- Soup's On (during COVID)
- Talent Auctions
- Trunk Sale in Parking Lot
- ZOOM for COVID Church Services

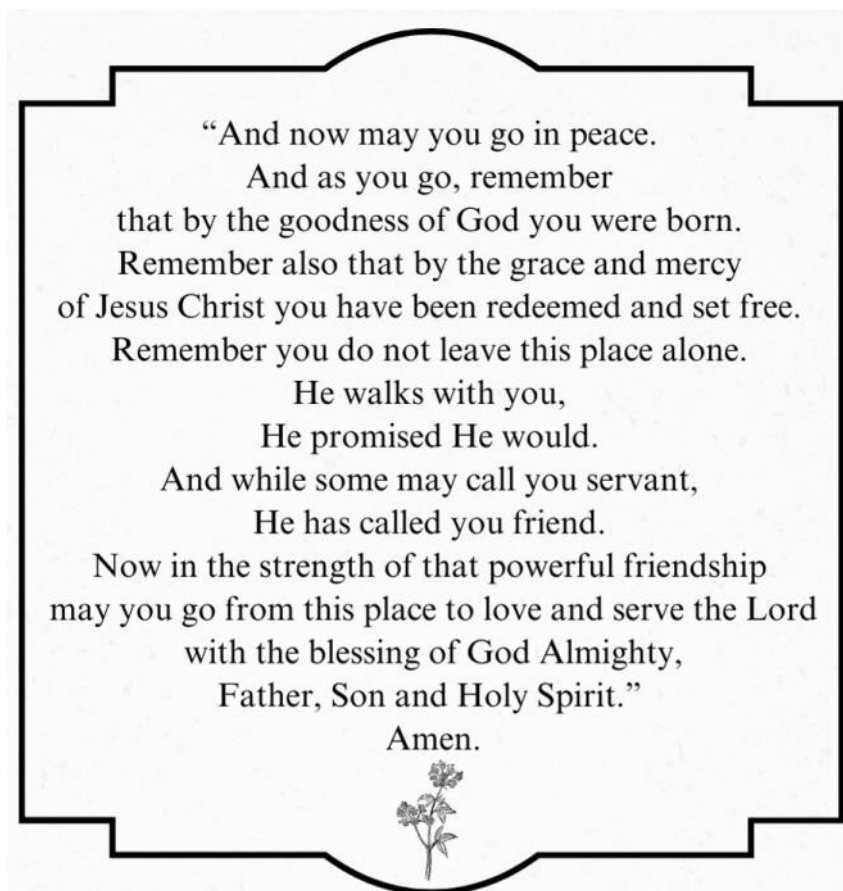
FUNDRAISERS

- Audio-Visual Equipment
- Bake Sales, Book Sales
- Bobo Boiler (furnace)
- Build Narthex, elevator, library
- Candlelight & Wine Turkey Dinner
- Choir Café, dessert auction
- Concerts
- Christmas Market
- Loonies for Leaks (roof)
- Matt's Mart
- Millennium Walkway Bricks (sidewalk)
- Organs: Baldwin 1980, Phoenix 2018
- Paper drives
- Paving Parking Lot
- Raise the Roof
- Signs: Message, Electronic
- Stained Glass Windows (buying, protecting)
- Talent Auctions

TENANTS

- Alcoholics Anonymous
- Community Meetings
- Elections
- English as a Second Language
- Film and Television lunch room
- Gamblers Anonymous
- Girl Guides & Scouts
- Great Big Theatre Company
- Kingsley School
- Kumon School
- Montessori School
- Music Recitals
- Swansea Dog Obedience Club
- Transmission Antenna

The Peachtree Benediction was given to St. Matthew's by Rev. Janet Read-Hockin as she left her position here as Assistant to take up her first parish in Barrie.



24 SEPTEMBER
3 PM

**JOIN THE
CELEBRATION**

Worship with Bishop Andrew Asbil
and the Viva Chamber Singers

Reception to follow

All ages welcome

StMatthew's
ANGELICAN CHURCH, ISLINGTON
75th anniversary

3962 Bloor Street West, Etobicoke, Ontario, M9B 1M3

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