



Christmas Letters

2021



Rev. Bri-anne Swan.

It has a great ring to it.

It sounds even better when it chimes with Rev. Norm Seli, and they both resound at Jubilee United Church.

Even better when you add Dianne Clare, Barb Secord, and Dr. Daniel Rubinoff.

Jubilee, you did it. You put together a team to lead, support and share the future of what God is calling Jubilee to be and do.

The world is changing and will never be as it was, but that doesn't have to be a bad thing. Many of us have spent time lamenting the lack of “being together” and noting that “it's just not the same on Zoom” or “virtual church will never replace in-person church” and so we can begin to forget the gifts that have emerged in these trying times. People who have found Jubilee to be a refreshing approach to a faith they once thought dead or irrelevant. People who once found the only church available on their screens to be damning, disappointing and dictatorial now have another kind of church on their screens as they follow us on YouTube and other social media platforms. Parents who just can't corral the kids on Sunday morning and folks who find moving about or sitting still for an hour to be challenging. People who are hungry for what we have celebrated at Jubilee for a very long time. I am reminded that the Apostle Paul couldn't be everywhere as the church was growing, and certainly, people wanted to see and hear him in person, but when that wasn't possible, he went to virtual media – he wrote letters. They may not have been as good for some as “in-person,” but those letters shaped communities, became Scripture, and continue to this day to share the word of God.



Soon, we will move from the longest night of the year, and the days will start to lengthen. More light in our days. That is the rhythm of creation: the days get longer, and then they get shorter... but each time through the cycle, things are a little bit different. As our days get longer and 2022 emerges, it is likely that Covid 19 will remain with us, and there will be disappointments and struggles amid the discoveries and the joys. We will be emerging into the longer days of a new Jubilee. Many things that we cherished before will return, but some others that we did out of habit may not return because they didn't really matter to us. And in their place, new things will emerge: things that we have discovered with the new connections and relationships. One of the big things that we will notice right away is that we have a new team. Bri-anne and I are both your ministers. We are not Minister and Assistant, Leader and Follower; we are in this together. As the new year takes shape, we will make clear to whom you should go if you want to talk about Sunday worship, virtual services, pastoral care, outreach, the Benevolent Fund, green Initiatives, youth, children, and many of the other concerns and aspects of our shared ministry. For now, talk to the person with whom you want to speak, and they will answer your questions or re-direct you if the other minister is in a better position to help. Just as you are learning about us, we are learning about working together and serving a community that we both love (even if one of us has been doing it a little longer).

As the days get longer, I am hopeful for a time of creation, re-creation and healing. Doing new things, restoring some of the old things and yes, healing. This time in pandemic has been hard on so many of us,

continued on page 2

and we have not made all of the right choices all of the time. Feelings have been hurt, faith has been bruised, people have been left out, and none of that is lost in the light of the successes that we've shared or celebrated. As we learn how to love each other as we deserve to be loved, as we learn to share God's love with a world that is anxious to be loved, we will discover together that not only are Rev. Norm Seli and Rev. Bri-anne Swan a great team, but all of us at Jubilee, young and old; confident and wondering, smooth and prickly, tender and bold, ready and hesitant, are a remarkable team in ministry together.



God bless you and us as our ministry together shapes a new year. **Norm**

*And just in case you've forgotten what your Leadership Team at Jubilee looks like, here is a picture of Barb Secord, Dianne Clare, Bri-anne Swan, Daniel Rubinoff, Norm Seli, and Jim Harbell standing outside so that we can smile at you without our masks! **Merry Christmas***



Christmas Letter from Bri-anne



I have a lot of holiday traditions that need to happen in order for me to feel like Christmas has actually occurred. Maybe you do, too?

I need to eat tourtiere on Christmas Eve.

I need to watch *Scrooge* (with Alastair Sim) at least twice.

I need to listen to *Fiddler on the Roof* as my family decorates the Christmas tree (long story).

These are all fairly straightforward traditions that are easily lived out every year. However, there is another Christmas tradition that has become more and more difficult as my brothers and I have grown up, spread out across the province, and started having families of our own.

In 1987, my parents decided to put their new VCR to good use and recorded about 6 hours of Christmas specials on an old VHS tape. Some of the specials are fairly classic: *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*,

continued on page 3

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, and *Frosty the Snowman* serve to anchor the tape. How is it that nearly all the good Christmas specials were created in the 1960s?

However, it also contains some more obscure selections: A Rankin/Bass version of *A Christmas Carol* called *The Stingiest Man in Town*, starring Walter Matthau (1978). *Casper's First Christmas* (1979). *The Bear Who Slept Through Christmas* (1973). The commercials are also pretty spectacular and nostalgic. But our favourite show on the tape — the one all four Swan Siblings sing along to — is a 1986 Jim Henson special called *The Christmas Toy*. It was filmed in Toronto and contains many of the puppeteers from *Fraggle Rock*. I recently discovered it's available on DVD or one of the streaming services, but it doesn't include Kermit the Frog acting as host and narrator, so my brothers and I are in agreement that it doesn't count. Each of us can recite the show line by line. Every Christmas, we do everything possible to meet up at my mom's house (the only one who still owns a VCR) and watch this Christmas VHS together, especially *The Christmas Toy*.

My youngest brother works in retail. The holiday season is his busiest (and often most stressful) time of the year. Last December, in an attempt to lighten the mood in his store, my brother started singing one of the songs from *The Christmas Toy* to his boss:

*You are lovely, Meteora.
So lovely, and smart, and brave, and strong...*

It would have been adorable... if his boss had ever heard of *The Christmas Toy*. She looked at him as if he'd lost his mind. He persisted. "You know, *The Christmas Toy*!"
"Er...no. I don't know that one."

My brother laughed at her as if she was the odd one for not knowing the song or the TV show it came from. He started asking his co-workers in the store, and nobody knew what he was talking about. He phoned me from the middle of the sales floor.

"Bri-anne, I feel like I'm in some sort of alternate universe. Nobody here knows *The Christmas Toy*. Is that even possible?"

My 29-year-old brother honestly thought that every single family in the country grew up watching *The Christmas Toy*; singing the same songs, crying at the same parts, rejoicing when the true meaning of Christmas emerges, and all becomes right with the world once more. Because it had been such an integral piece of his childhood Christmas traditions, he thought it transcended to other families as well. Nope. Just us. It made him so sad that something so important to him wasn't a shared tradition or even a piece of pop culture knowledge, everywhere.

As I begin my first Advent season at Jubilee, I find myself thinking about traditions, particularly Jubilee's traditions — and how I don't really know them all yet! Painting the windows and the giant crèche outside: these are new to me! Learning Jubilee's Christmas traditions feels like a really important piece of getting to know all of you, and how we might come to learn, grow, serve, and love together.

Jubilee's traditions aren't necessarily the ones I know from being part of other faith communities. Last week, for the first Sunday of Advent, I made the assumption that the service would begin with *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*. That's the tradition I know. It is not Jubilee's custom. I am learning as I go about what has been tradition for Jubilee in the past, but that we still aren't able to do because of the limitations presented by COVID. There will be no pyjama Sunday with the muffin band this year. This makes me very sad, though maybe not quite as sad as Norm!

However, new relationships pose the opportunity for new traditions to emerge. Once again, we will have an online "Cozy Christmas Eve" service with pyjamas, carols and hot chocolate. It's not the same as being

continued on page 4

together in our fuzzy unicorn onesies, but it may become a new Jubilee tradition; not to replace something we know and look forward to each year, but because we are starting a new thing together. We can add to the pool of traditions we draw upon, and we will add more songs that we can all sing along to together. I am so pleased to be in ministry with Rev. Norm and all of you here at Jubilee. As we journey together into a new year, I am looking forward to learning more about Jubilee's traditions, customs, loves, and hurts as we live out being in community together.

With every good wish for this Advent and Christmas season,

Rev. Bri-anne



Christmas Letter from Norm



Recently, I made a bet with the folks of Jubilee; that I could lose 10 pounds in 4 weeks. I'm in the middle of it as you read this. I have until December 19th to drop ten pounds. If I fail, I will donate \$1000 to Jubilee. If I succeed, however, the church is even better off as right now, I have been sponsored a total of \$400/pound to lose between 10 and 15 pounds.

I am confident that I will make it. Allow me to share the secrets of my anticipated success.

Actually, I have no secrets. There is no diet, no special regimen that I must endure until I make it. I have made a few simple changes.

1. Bread. I haven't stopped eating it – but eat a lot less of it. I have given up sandwiches for wraps and put away my morning bagel.
2. Water. I drink a lot of it. I drink still water, tap water, imported water, sparkling water... I drink it during the day; I drink it at night. Regardless of where I may be, I start with water. Wine may follow, but first, there is water so that when I drink something else, I'm not drinking for thirst but for taste, and I drink a lot less.
3. I try to eat slowly. I take my time and don't wolf down my food or attack it like a challenge. The slower that I eat, the less I eat. (Turns out, my mother was right.)
4. No fast food. No Skip the Dishes. If I'm in a rush, a protein bar is all I need.
5. I snack on crunchy sugar-free cereal instead of nuts and candy. As long as it crunches, I'm happy.
6. No Nachos. (They are evil. I love them, and they keep trying to sneak into my life... sometimes disguised as a cheese dip or sometimes the only thing on the menu that can be shared... but I must resist their hot salty goodness.)
7. I am walking more. I am surprised how little I have been walking since Covid invited me to sit in a chair and work from home so much. I walk a lot.
8. Finally... occasionally, I cheat. Every now and then, I forget about the rules – eat the bread, order the nachos, start with the wine. But then, the next day, I go back to my good habits. So, you can see that I don't really have a diet or a program that ends when I lose the weight – you can probably imagine that my personal goals go far beyond the four-week, 15-pound challenge for Jubilee. It is

continued on page 5

my hope and my firm belief that I will continue to lose weight until my body finds that weight that's right for me. I knew that it wasn't 293... It may not be 239... but, in time, I will find my correct weight. Like I said, it's not a diet; I hope that it's a lifestyle change.

So, enough of that. What about Christmas?

This year, I'm hoping that maybe... just maybe... for you, and for me, that we don't make it a special time of year. You read that correctly: I hope that Christmas is not a special time of year for you and your family. (Wouldn't that be a great Christmas Card?). The problem with Christmas being a special time of year is that it becomes something of a diet... We stock up on sweets and Christmas Food; we invite family and friends over, we greet strangers with sincere good wishes and "Merry Christmas," we participate in singing songs about God (imagine!), we give gifts to loved ones, learn to be gracious in accepting gifts and dare to talk about Jesus in public (even if it's just singing "Away in a Manger" in our masks while at church).

But then... come December 26th and the Boxing Day frenzy for sales and other things we don't really need... the diet is over, we congratulate ourselves on all that we've achieved and dutifully return to our old habits. By the end of January, we are back to our pre-Christmas, busy, anxious, and withdrawn selves. Gone are the public displays of kindness, charity, and "Merry Christmas," replaced by grumbling, complaints about darkness and slush, and a general sense of "if everybody would just leave me alone!!!"

So how about it? This year... let's not diet. Let's not have a "special" time of year, but instead, let's try for a lifestyle change. Allow me to suggest a few ways that might work for you – beyond December 25th.

1. Smile. At people. At yourself in the mirror. At nothing... just smile and imagine that someone is noticing and that you are inspiring them or cheering them up.
2. Sing. Out loud. In the car. Under your breath. At home. To your children. To your partner. To yourself. Sing Christmas carols, sing arias, sing anything that comes into your heart.
3. Give gifts. Not large extravagant gifts, but simple little thoughtful things... give them to neighbours, to friends, to family... maybe even strangers. (Incidentally, you can still give large extravagant gifts to members of the clergy, if you so desire...)
4. Go for a walk at night. Not to see the Christmas lights, but just to see the neighbourhood. Walk slowly and enjoy the evening... warm or cold, it beats what's on TV (guaranteed).
5. Think about God. What is God trying to tell you... not just by coming in the flesh as a baby in a manger, but into your life right now. Where is God in your life? What does it mean to have God in your life... think about it and wonder, just as you wonder at Christmas, what the whole crazy story is all about.
6. Talk about Jesus. I don't mean that you have to become some kind of missionary or bring people to church (although you are certainly free to do so...). But talk about this person and who he is to you. Teacher? Example? Friend? Saviour? Divine in flesh? Question? Really great guy? Talk about him and allow yourself to listen to what others have to say; allow yourself to change your mind.
7. Dare to believe in miracles. If that's hard for you, then, dare to live with mystery... smile and celebrate even the things you can't explain for fully understand.
8. Finally... pray. Seriously... just every now and then, close your eyes and open your heart. Pour it all out – even if you're not sure where it's going or how it's being heard.

If you do can these things, as part of a lifestyle, not just a diet... I promise that you will see results, and these results won't disappear as soon as Christmas is over; they will last. I don't know if you'll find your waistline becoming narrower, but I am sure that you will find your faith becoming broader.

This Christmas... let's not make it special, let's make it real.

God Bless,

Norm

Welcome Home



God Happens Here!

Advent & Christmas at Jubilee

Saturday, December 11 at 4:30pm

Scarborough Harmony Chorus performance outdoors on the labyrinth hot chocolate and carol singing after the performance. **In-person.**

Tuesday, December 21 at 7:00pm

The Longest Night

A gentle break from the hustle and bustle of the season. Chanting. Readings. Candles. Silence. **In-person or online.**

Friday, December 24 at 4:30pm

Children's Christmas Eve

A fun, child-centred telling of the Christmas Story. **Online**

Friday, December 24 at 7:00pm

The Big Service

Quartet. Candles. The family service you know and love. **In-person.**

Friday, December 24 at 10:00pm

Cozy Christmas Eve

Just want to cozy up in your jammies with a hot chocolate? Join Rev. Bri-anne for a time of stories and carols. A friendly time to welcome the Christ Child. **Online.**

Friday, December 24 at 11:30pm

Communion

God is here among us, and we celebrate their arrival with the Eucharist. **Online.**

Saturday, December 25 at 10:30am

Christmas Day Service
Online.

Sunday, December 26 at 10:30am

Regular Sunday worship.
Online.

There is a lot happening this Christmas Season at Jubilee and it's even better when you are a part of it, in-person or virtually. **Please note that there will be NO in-person services on December 25th and 26th**, but there will be virtual services for each of those days. You can access our services from the Jubilee Website www.jubileeunited.ca and you can hear condensed audio versions of our Sunday Services, December 25 and 26 on the phone at 416-219-8749.

However and Whenever you are able, please join us in the celebration and hope of Christmas.

