



The Church of St. John the Evangelist, Kitchener

ON EAGLE'S WINGS

December 17, 2023

Available online at StJohn316.com/OEW

Family and Children's Ministry Summit recap

Sarah Howard

Before diving into a recap of our recent Family and Children's Ministry Summit, I think it's appropriate to share some reflection on my time at St. John's. When I began attending St. John's two years ago, many were still worshipping at home due to Covid, so my son Lincoln (a few months old at the time) was the youngest worshiper in the service and often the only child. I must admit that these first few visits to St. John's with my husband and baby were not without anxiety – getting out of the house with a baby (during Covid!) alone was daunting, much less to go to a church service where I was unsure how others might react to a fussy or crying baby (a feeling I'm sure many can relate to!).

Yet, it was quickly obvious that our family was welcomed in the service – without even asking, we were quickly told I could breastfeed anywhere I needed in the building, and that the noises our son made were not only allowed, but welcomed (I still get cheerful comments from others when Lincoln “joins” in the singing). Then, when Lincoln decided that his morning nap should happen precisely during the church service, we were immediately supported in finding a place we could set up a crib, with a member of the congregation even bringing their crib to the church so that we didn't have to bring and set ours up every week.

As time has progressed, it has been a joy to see more and more children in the Sunday services, and to now watch Lincoln running around with others during coffee hour. I have confidence the congregation at St. John's will continue to support the individual needs of the families that come – as they did for us – but it is also clear that with more families and children attending, it's an opportune time to have dialogue about family and children's ministry in a larger way, as opposed to reacting to each need (such as a place for a child to nap) as it arises.

Following the Come to the Table (CTTT) service on November 25, a Family and Children's Ministry Summit was held, to provide a space for this dialogue. Between those who participated in-person and those who shared thoughts in advance, there were nearly 10 families that shared thoughts on three main questions: 1) What is bringing you to St. John's/what is working well? 2) What do you hope for your children/grandchildren? and 3) What could family and children's ministry look like at St. John's?

In the discussion on what is working well, many of the comments mirrored my own reflections – St. John's is a community with a truly welcoming spirit. Those attending also appreciated the intergenerational connections within St. John's and the fact that children are part of the liturgy and the service, particularly through CTTT. We also asked the kids themselves what their favorite part of St. John's was, and we heard loud and clear that coffee hour (including the food) is a big hit!

As we moved to discuss hopes for our children, we heard that families hope St. John's will be a place where their children learn about God and God's love, a place they can ask questions, build on their understanding of the Bible, and also learn humanity. Aside from learning, families hope that St. John's will be a place of connection and community for their children – that they will have an identity here, feel safe here, and be involved in many different

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ways.

We ended by talking about possible actions and paths that would lead us towards the hopes the families had, and ended up with a nearly overflowing sheet of ideas that would allow children to be part of the St. John's community. These ideas ranged from Sunday School and weekday kids clubs to practical support outside of Sundays like meals for families with new babies or someone to simply come and hold the baby. We also talked about ways to integrate children into what's already happening, like bringing them closer to the front of the church or offering safe intentional spaces for kids in "adult" spaces like coffee hour.

Kids grow up quickly! So, transparency, timeliness and moving quickly is important to the families who joined us. In the discussion, we recognized that some of these items were long term goals that will need long term commitment to achieve, while others can be "quick wins" for us to focus on in the coming weeks and months. These quick wins include: a safe space in the service, a lending library with books for kids, enhancing safety and kid friendliness during coffee hour (including semi structured activities for kids, ensuring doors to the back stairs are closed, and having an open area for kids to play), having a change table upstairs in the washrooms, and having nursery space available with audio and video of the service for parents who need to step out with their kids. There will continue to be conversations on next steps for family and children's ministry at CTTT in January, and I hope you will join us.

Thank you to Preston, for instigating the summit and inviting me to support coordination, as well as to Su McLeod, for her facilitation and insight into what children and family ministry can look like. I'd also like to acknowledge all those who have supported and led family and children's ministry at St. John's over the years, and those who shared insights into what has previously taken place.

Short Bread Time

Once again Jean's Short Breads will be on sale starting on November 12 (1, 2 or 3 dozen). There will also be a crafts table (mitts, toques, Afghans, baby blankets and soft toys). Extra this year are beautiful Christmas cards at \$1 each. The money for the cards goes towards our refugee support. Money from shortbreads and crafts goes to ACW (Anglican Church Women). ACW supports your church as well as the needs of others.



Christmas Memorial Flowers

Anyone wishing to commemorate family and friends by contributing to the Christmas Flowers will find envelopes on the table in the Narthex and on the table at the Duke St. entrance. Offerings can be made by cash or cheque and the envelopes placed in the collection plate at either door to the church. Please make sure that you include your name and the name(s) of those you wish to have remembered.

ALL dedications should reach the office by 10.00am on Tuesday December 19th for inclusion in the Christmas bulletin. Thank You.

+++ Please Note +++ If writing a cheque, it should be made out to Saint John the Evangelist Anglican Church Women. The Bank will not accept any other wording--i.e. Do not abbreviate any of the words, otherwise the Bank will return your cheque to us. +++

Remembering Christmas 2006 in Malta

Sheryl Loeffler

We'd already spent one Christmas in Malta—Christmas 2005—during our year-long stay there. My late husband Douglas Haas ushered in that Christmas and his birthday at the organ of St. Paul's Cathedral, Mdina, in what was one of the simplest and happiest Christmases of our lives. On Christmas Day 2006, Douglas was going to be celebrating a Significant Birthday. When I asked him that June how he wanted to spend it, he said, *Sitting on the organ bench at St. Paul's, Mdina*. An invitation to play at both cathedrals (St. Paul's Cathedral, Mdina, and St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta) followed shortly.



From a journal entry, 21 February 2007:

Malta is a 316-square-kilometre archipelago at the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, 93 km south of Sicily and 288 km north of North Africa. Its population is 400,000 [535,000 in 2023]. Its official languages are Maltese (a Semitic language with Arabic and Italian roots) and English. Daytime temperatures during our stay in December ranged between 17 and 20° C.

The Maltese who celebrate Christmas (98 percent of the population) take it both more and less seriously than many Canadians who celebrate it. Religion is a presence in the day-to-day lives of most Maltese. Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and St. Paul raise their hands in blessing in niches on street corners. Christian icons are mounted next to their front doors. Many of their homes bear the names of faith. They cross themselves when they board buses. And after Easter, priests bless every home, every business.

Midnight Mass is the not-without-which of Christmas. Virtually everyone goes to midnight Mass somewhere. Some flock to their parish churches, great red- or silver-domed Baroque edifices towering over their flat-roofed, balconied, arch-windowed, honey-tinged limestone homes. Some to the cathedral at Mdina, hung ceiling to floor for all festival occasions in 200-year-old red damask panels lined with gold braid. In 2006, an open-air midnight Mass was celebrated at the Valletta Waterfront, overlooking Malta's Grand Harbour. The woman from whom we rented our December apartment told us that she was going there. *Midnight Mass*, she said on her way out the door, *is the only Christmas celebration anyone needs*.

The Maltese turn their windows and balconies into religious display cases. They make crèches there (or cribs, as they are called), laying the Christ Child in beds of a decorative, white-green plant called *ġurbiena* and lovingly surrounding him with stars and lights. Cribs are everywhere—life-sized cribs at Malta's international airport and at Mdina gate, miniature cribs, primitive cribs with all proportions askew, elaborate Neapolitan cribs. Cribs in the Neapolitan tradition are scenes in triptych. The Holy Family sits at the center of the triptych, not in the stable of scripture, but in the ruins of a Roman temple, meant to signify Christ's triumph over paganism. On their left is the busy

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inn that couldn't take them in. Musicians are playing, food is being served, games are being played, and the townsfolk are going about their business, oblivious to the drama unfolding behind them. To the right of the Holy Family are the Shepherds and Wise Men, lost in wonder and devotion. We saw a 150-year-old Neapolitan crib at the Wignacourt Museum in Rabat, taking up the better half of a small room, and a crib, nearly as large, made in Neapolitan style by restoration artist and priest Fr. Charles Vella at St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, both with dozens of realistic crib figures, or *pasturi*, in biblical or traditional Maltese dress. There are mechanical cribs, cribs in parish churches, in wall niches, on buildings, on mantles and sideboards of homes. One of my favourites, with no irony intended by its maker, I'm sure, was a crib set in an old TV console on display in the window of a small shop in Sliema, where we stayed.

But North American secular Christmas has invaded Malta, too. Santa Clauses (or Father Christmases, as they are called there) scale balconies in every town and village and ride cranes at building sites. Inflated Father Christmases bob in the wind. Mechanical Father Christmases at the front of shops raise their hands in greeting. Human Father Christmases *Ho! Ho! Ho!* in shopping malls (which are vertical, rather than horizontal, in Malta). "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town" has been translated into Maltese. Loudspeakers broadcast that and English "Jingle Bells" and "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer" and "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas" across palm-tree-lined streets that have never seen snow. *I understand the idea of snow*, one Maltese woman confided, *but I don't understand freezing rain*. Malta enjoys North American secular Christmas. I like to think of its adoption as part of the Maltese playfulness, unseriousness about Christmas.

The Maltese seem to have more fun with Christmas than we do. Perhaps they can be less serious about Christmas than we can because they are more serious about it. They certainly have more fun in Valletta. We spent most of our pre-Christmas days walking the streets of Valletta, Malta's great-walled, 450-year-old capital city. MERRY CHRISTMAS AND HAPPY NEW YEAR (*IL-MILIED U S-SENA T-TAJBA*) stood in huge, red, illuminated letters at the top of City Gate. *Karozzini* (horse-drawn carriages) vied with yellow buses and white taxis at the entrance to the gate (*Horsie? You want a horsie? The karozzin drivers call to tourists*). The smells of Maltese bread, baked goods, and Christmas confections—*imqaret*, deep-fried date squares, and *qagħaq tal-ghasel*, honey rings (subtract all *qs* and *ghs*, and you're on your way to Maltese pronunciation)—emanated from kiosk stalls and the stands of street vendors.

In 2006, a pavilion and stage, with a life-sized cardboard crib dominating stage left, were set up in Freedom Square, just inside City Gate—a much better idea than the tall, thin, pathetic, crooked Christmas tree of 2005. A TV crew was there, taping troupes of children and adults, who sang or lip-synched or danced or played instruments in costume for broadcast on national television. On our first Sunday back, the cathedral choir, in which we were singers, walked there from St. John's in choir gowns. Heavy, warm rain, then hail, was bucketing down by the time we got there, turning streets into rivers and waterfalls. But everyone cheerfully waited to perform under the shelter of the pavilion. Douglas ran across the street to a souvenir shop to buy an umbrella.

Giant, decorative arches of icicles hung over Republic Street, from City Gate to the Parliament Building, lights

2024 Anglican Church Calendars

Enid Emery

The 2024 Anglican Church Calendars have arrived, they are \$5.00 each and will be available at Coffee Hour next week and after the Carol Service in the evening. I also have one or two extra's if anyone forgot to order theirs.

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twinkling down, even during the day, like falling snow (*We think it would be nice to see snow*, a Maltese choir member explained).

Republic Street was a wall of people—workers, Christmas shoppers, tourists. But everyone seemed to be—I can hardly believe this myself—happy. There was none of our grim-faced pushing, even on the last day of Christmas shopping. It was crowded (Valletta is always impossibly crowded), but good-natured. And happy. Yes. Happy.

There were popcorn vendors, street musicians, a calliope, Christmas parades—not just one, but three, in case you couldn't make the first one—with small, fanciful, colourful floats, and young men on stilts, and puppies from the Maltese equivalent of the Humane Society, and balloons for the children. A giant bubble machine sprayed fat flakes of soap snow into the air, which fell on snow-curious children and shoppers. The lights on streets just off Republic Street flashed on and off in elaborate patterns much like those of summer *fešta* fireworks.

Douglas spent Christmas Eve as he'd wanted to spend it—at the organ of St. Paul's, Mdina. At midnight, the cathedral bells pealed. We were in the middle of the Gloria. Not a bad way to usher in Christmas. Not a bad way to turn a Significant Age. I caught his eye as we sang. We grinned.

After Mass, which ended at 1.15 a.m., we went out with the choir to the Mdina home of one of the choir members, walking the streets of this almost perfectly preserved walled medieval city in the ancient dark. The home, our host told us, was built on the site of Roman ruins. It was a showcase for Maltese restoration, design, and art. At 2 a.m., after mulled wine and mincemeat tarts, closed like Italian *panzerotti*, we walked through the city gate to our waiting taxi. There were children, about 10 of them, playing on a playground outside the walls, oblivious to the fact that in North America, Father Christmas comes only to sleeping children at midnight.

We sang Mass again with the cathedral choir on Christmas morning at St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, after three hours of sleep.

After Mass, our hosts, St. John's Maestro di cappella and his wife, took us to their home in Iklin for a Maltese Christmas.

There were four generations—from a great-grandmother, who was in her 90s, to a great-grandson, who was only a few months old. The living room had been turned into a dining room. One long table, stretching from end to end of the room, had been made from four. The living room furniture had been placed everywhere else—in the kitchen, the breakfast nook, the TV room, the dining room. After appetizers, we popped our Christmas crackers, put on our paper crowns, read our fortunes, and played with our prizes. Our hostess and her sisters brought out course after course: vegetable and chicken soup; arugula and a spiced olive tart (*kapunata*); chicken and pork roulades, Yorkshire pudding, potatoes, broccoli, peas, parsnips; cheese and biscuits; sweets (almond cookies, cinnamon balls, almond pears); and finally, a Christmas log.

When Christmas dinner was over, the long table was divided, two tables were put at each end of the room, the living

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Senior's Fellowship

Jennifer Uttley

Our next gathering is on Wednesday January 10th at 1:30pm at St. Columba's church. We have a guest speaker from Community Support Connections who will tell us about the services that they offer followed by time for fellowship and refreshments.

All are welcome. Several have joined us from St. Columba's and St. Andrews. I hope you can join us. For more information contact Jennifer Uttey at acw@stjohn316.com or call 519-578-6052.

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room furniture found its miraculous way back, and presents were piled onto the tables. Great-Grandmother said, *We must sing Happy Birthday to the Baby Jesus!* And they did. Four generations stopped to join in a Maltese folk carol, a carol that was theirs alone, sung in a language that few other people in the world know or understand.

We opened gifts, which went on for as long as it takes for 25 people to open gifts. Then another 10 arrived, third-generation singles in their 20s, girlfriends, boyfriends, young parents in their 30s, bringing more good cheer, more gifts. And when those gifts had been opened and we had all started to fade, we kissed each other Maltese style, first on one cheek, then the other, and said goodbye and Happy Christmas and went home to bed.

I recognized my Maltese Christmas in a description written one hundred years earlier (Thursday, 27 December 1906) by a writer in the *Daily Maltese Chronicle*:

The feast was observed in these islands with the usual solemnity and the enthusiasm inseparably attaching to the occasion. The eve was not remarkable for anything beyond the tide of promenaders who thronged the principal streets in association with a large proportion of purchasers who besieged the market, shops and establishments generally in search of these seasonable requisites which are expected to furnish the Christmas table. A very pleasing and interesting incident was afforded in the appearance of Messrs Blackley's establishment in Strada Reale [Republic Street], who was so crowded up to a late hour that it was to be wondered at that the stock of cakes, sweets and toys should have held out so heroically in face of such terrible odds. On the whole, it could scarcely be said that Christmastide in Malta was distinguished for animation, but the absence of this feature was fully redeemed in the exemplary behaviour which was observed by all classes, nothing having occurred to disturb the public peace or to mar the pleasure of the participants in the celebration.

They were happy.

So were we.

Rum Sauce for Christmas Pudding

Anne Hopewell

Beat 2 egg yolks

Add 1 cup of confectioner's sugar & mix

Add 6 Tablespoons of Rum & Beat until blended

In a separate bowl beat 1 cup of whipping cream until stiff

Fold in 1 tsp of vanilla

Fold egg mixture into the cream gently

Makes about 2 ½ cups of sauce

Refrigerate until serving

