

CSCO Christmas Newsletter

Issue #14
Christmas Eve
2020



*Here we are: the end of school
for 2020 and the day before
Christmas. It's been a very*

different road that we've travelled to get here. I wear a medical mask covering my nose, mouth and chin every day, wash my hands more than usual, and sanitize them too every now and then, try to keep physical distance from everyone. I can't take the students on field trips, I facilitate the retreats in their classrooms, no more school Masses, I livestream the Liturgies with a small group of ministers from the conference room. I run my clubs using the Microsoft Teams platform. I go to school every day but that's going to change in January. A lot of changes for sure and we have risen to the occasion. The road has been bumpy and we keep going forward. Know that you're not alone; He is with us!

Thank you to the contributors for this issue of the Newsletter:

Jolene Smith, Don Hall, Andrew Hall, Joanne Belanger, Azniv Marie Jorge, Gillian Federico, Dean Woodbeck, Margaret Palmer, Susan Hookong-Taylor, Mary Defayette, Deacon Shawn Panio and Vincenzo Silvestro.

FALL PHOTO



- *Jolene Smith is the chaplain at St. Michael CSS in Niagara Falls and the President of CSCO*

Love is For ... Giving

Nothing is sweeter than love; nothing stronger, nothing higher, nothing more generous, nothing more pleasant, nothing fuller or better in heaven or earth: for love proceeds from God, and cannot rest but in God, above all things created.

~ St. Therese of Lisieux

In sharing these insights and quotes, it is my sincere hope they will be helpful to others. How do you know if someone is a blessing or a lesson in your life? Although it is possible for people to be both a blessing and a lesson, they are usually one or the other. Are you being loved or are you being deceived? Pause and prayerfully ask God for signs to help you discern. In the end, people never abandon people they love. People abandon people they are using. Too often, we love things and use people. We do not live in a black and white world and relationships are often

complicated and messy. We are an imperfect people in an imperfect world. St. Mother Teresa reminds us that “If we really want to love, we must learn how to forgive.”

Are you holding onto your friends too lightly or are you holding onto them too tightly? It is a delicate balance. Is there mutual compatibility? What happens when one person holds on lightly while the other person holds on tightly? There is no common ground. If you hold on too lightly, there is not enough to hold the relationship together. On the other hand, when you hold on too tightly, there is undue tension and stress. Often these friendships are short lived.

Be thankful and happy for the gift of friends and never take them for granted. Friendships are special gifts that need to be gently cared for, tended to and cultivated like a garden. It takes mutual commitment, genuine love, prayer,

sacrifice, communication, respect, trust, authenticity, honesty, discipline, patience, creativity, humour, maturity, timing, chemistry and the grace of God for a life-giving relationship to take root, grow and bear fruit. “To love is nothing, to be loved by someone is something but to be loved by the one you love is everything.” ~ Bill Russell

Genuine love is a decision of both the mind and the heart. It is not based on convenience, a passing feeling, a mood swing, the time of day or the season of the year. There is a world of difference between someone who is committed to the relationship only on certain days versus someone who is faithfully committed to the relationship every day. Are you viewed by the other as a priority or merely an option? Mark Twain wisely reminds us: “Never allow someone to be your priority while allowing yourself to be their option.” Are you being valued as a higher priority in the relationship with the passage of time? In contrast, when you are still seen as only an option in a long-term relationship, it is time to end the relationship and move on with your life. You deserve so much more. In relationships, we need to recognize that not everyone is ready to make a lifetime commitment. In addition, some are incapable to make such a commitment.

It is impossible to love someone if you do not love yourself. This is foundational and will determine what you accept and how you allow someone to treat you. Words are important, but too often they are cheap, dishonest and meaningless while actions are usually invaluable. Mixed signals and red flags are present for a reason and should never be ignored. When you are blindly in love, this is often difficult and almost impossible to perceive.

Balance is so vital in everything. For example, when a wheel is out of balance or if your workday is out of balance, you will soon know it and the results will take

their toll. There are times when relationships are out of balance for a variety of reasons. Do both people have a voice in the decision making? Timing is also a factor that should never be

underestimated. People have different needs, values, and priorities and these do not always remain the same over time. Are these predominately in sync or are they usually in conflict in the relationship? In the end, the writing is on the wall if the relationship is in a perpetual state of imbalance.

There is much to be said about the importance of moderation. At no time can love ever be rushed or forced. A relationship that heats up too fast usually ends just as quickly. Never beg to remain in a relationship. No matter who you are, what you said or what you did would not have made a difference in a one-sided relationship. When your intentions are pure, you do not lose anyone. They lose you. In contrast to the confusion that is common in a lop-sided relationship, when you are genuinely loved, you will know it. Authentic love is both a human and divine gift. The proof is always in the pudding. St. Therese of Lisieux summed it up beautifully: "Love proves itself by deeds. Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, hereby a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest things right, and doing all for love."

It takes two mature, honest, and committed people who know what they want, and joyfully and unconditionally love each other for the relationship to grow and stand the test of time. St. Paul reminds us that "there is nothing love cannot face; there is no limit to its faith, its hope, and its endurance." When you are mutually blessed with a loving friendship and relationship, do not ever let the sun set on your spats and disagreements. In the profound words of St. Francis of Assisi: "Love lightens all difficulties and sweetens all bitterness."

You are always enough. When this is not acknowledged and affirmed, the relationship is over. Although this is much easier said than done, do not give in to the temptation to ponder the million and one unanswered questions why the relationship ended because nothing will ever have made a difference. You will waste your precious time and only add to the disappointment.

If you have done everything possible for the relationship to grow and it falls apart, be at peace and trust that God is calling you elsewhere. Providentially, some relationships are blocked for reasons that we may never fully understand on this side of eternity. It is okay to not have all the answers and to not have complete closure. Let go ... let God and move on as you cannot live in the past. WONDERFUL blessings that you could never imagine await you in the future. When God answers our prayers, we are being directed. When our prayers are not answered, we are being protected. Trust that "there are more tears shed over answered prayers than over unanswered prayers. When we accept what happens to us and make the best of it, we are praising God." ~ St. Teresa of Avila

What is the one thing that people wish they could do if they had one more chance at life? Would we love more deeply God, others and ourselves in thought, word and deed? St. Augustine of Hippo succinctly describes what is the essence of love. "What does love look like? It has the

hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.”

True love begins when nothing is looked for in return.

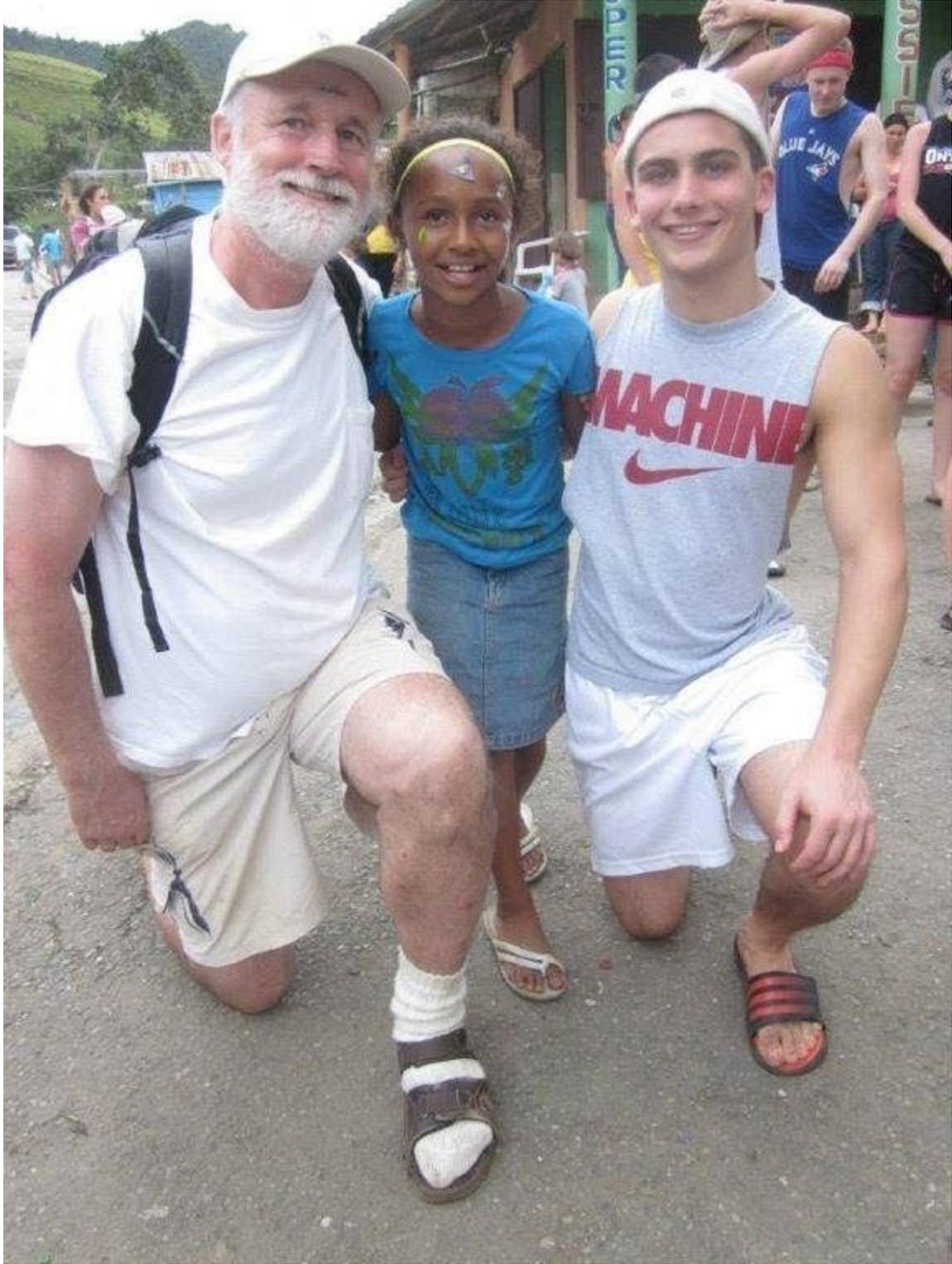
~ St. Therese of Lisieux

Don Hall serves as the Chaplain at St. Mary Catholic Secondary School in Hamilton. He and his wife, Maureen look forward to celebrating their 36th wedding anniversary. They are blessed with 2 children and 4 grandchildren.





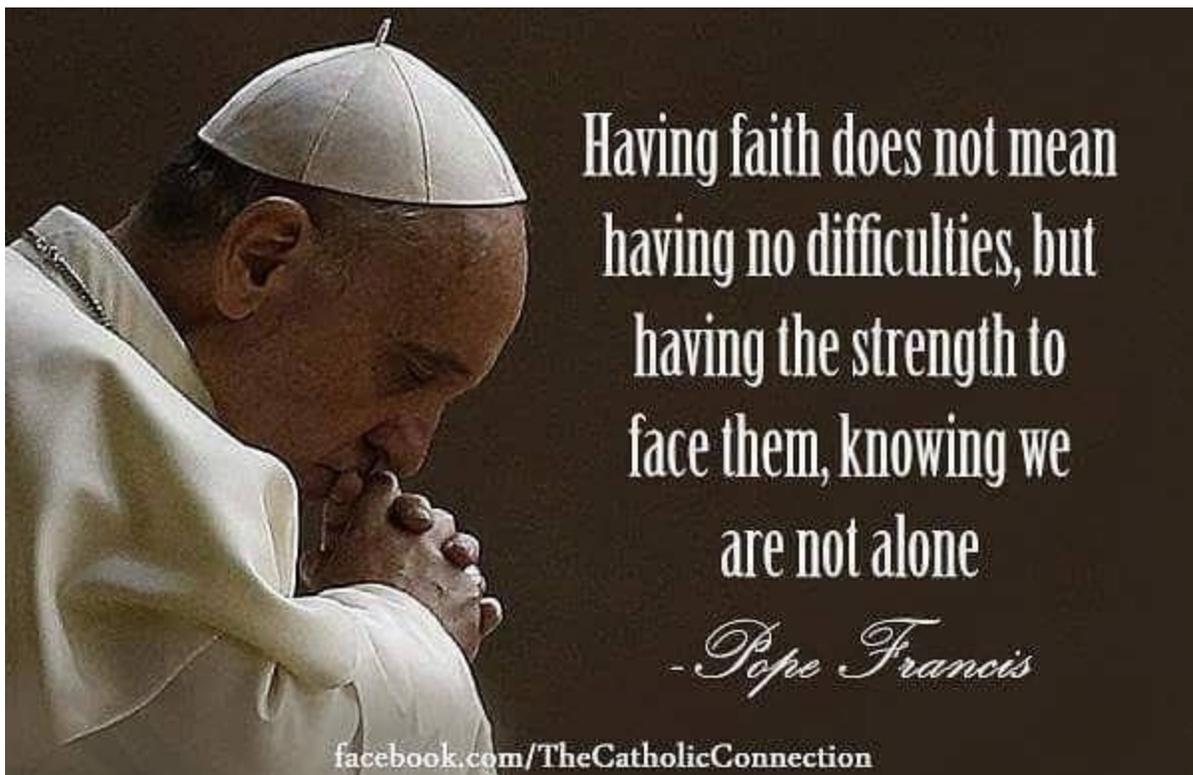
- *Photo taken by Don's sister, Rosemary Hall Komori*



Prayer of Pope Francis

“We spend our day running around and working a lot. We put effort into many things. However, we run the risk of reaching home in the evening weary and with our soul weighed down, similar to a ship laden with merchandise which, after an arduous voyage, returns to port with the sole desire of switching off the lights. Always living between the rushing about and the things to be done, we can become lost, withdrawn into ourselves and anxious over nothing. In order to avoid being drowned by this pain of living, let us remember to drop the anchor in God every day. Let us take to him our burdens, people and situations; let us entrust everything to him. This is the strength of prayer which connects heaven and earth, which permits the Lord to enter into our time.”

~ Pope Francis



- submitted by Don Hall

[International Languages Rosary](#)

"Ways to Give Thanks" activities (Oct 8th): the last activity was having classrooms write prayer intentions on paper rosary beads. Those prayer intentions were prayed for today (Oct. 26) by students as they led us in a decade of the rosary in ten different languages.

Check it out here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWbnOSpJf8c>

Andrew Hall
Chaplaincy Leader
St. John's College
Brantford

[Retired Chaplains Group has Launched!](#)

By Joanne Belanger

On November 25th, 2020, the brand spanking new, CSCO Retired Chaplains Group had its first meeting via Zoom! With six retired chaplains attending and one sending regrets – our 40 Zoom minutes flew by! Honestly, we have no business to report as the entire time was taken up with catching up! On screen we had Dee Sproule, Dominic Pullano, Cathy Cavanagh, Brenda Reinkeulers, Chris Forster, Eileen McGowan and myself! There were two regrets. So wonderful to see familiar faces and to share our retirement news! Because we still need to figure out what we want this group to look like – we have agreed to meet again before Christmas. So – if you know of any retirees out there who might like to join us – please let me know and I will make contact with them. My email is joannek.belanger@gmail.com – I would love to hear from you or them.

- *Joanne was a chaplain at Nicholson CSS in Belleville*

[BEAUTIFUL GIRL!](#)

Lucia Jorge: born on May 11, 2019 and has been a barrel of laughs ever since.

Currently, she enjoys emptying out all of the cupboards and bubbles.



Congratulations Azniv!

- *Azniv Marie Jorge is a Religion and Family Life consultant with the Toronto CDSB*

GRACE NOTES

Dear All:



One of the favourite appeals to my senses is the fragrance of the real tree with which I continue to decorate my house at Christmas. Such is the nostalgia generated by our olfactory sense that, when I smell the pine, I can remember Christmases long past with a fair amount of detail; I find myself trying to recapture some of the warmth and excitement of those days and share that with my family. Normally, I wouldn't even think of putting up the tree until Gaudete Sunday, when we would have a family gathering to deliberate over how to place the lights and which of the several hundred ornaments representing five generations of our family we would put up. This year I decided to be different; my husband and son went to cut a tree today and it is now permeating the house with its fresh scent. My usual custom is to keep it in place until Candlemas but it remains to be seen if my tender ministrations will keep it going until then. Unfortunately, the restrictions on gatherings means that I shall have to take a more active role in the decorating this year – perhaps alone – and who knows what conversations may ensue - as I have been known to talk to myself!

Right now, it stands as a sign of hope and expectation and I am enjoying it even in its nakedness; it is like a canvas waiting to be painted. Each new year is like that also, and we have the choice of how we will “decorate” the tree of our lives. Which senses will you engage this Advent? What will be the new traditions begun in your home this year? Which precious memories and practices will be kept strong because of the way they touch your heart? Is this the year when you may actually be able to have some respite



from the busyness of Christmas celebrations to spend time with the Lord whose birthday it is?

Something else I am appreciating in a different way is the amaryllis bulb I bought in a weak moment a few weeks ago. I am convinced that I can see it growing – as the measuring scale I have used in the picture shows. As I have never grown one of these before, I am watching the emerging bud with a sense of expectation and hoping that the result mimics even a little the profusion of blossom shown on the packaging. Wait with me. This could become a new tradition!

So often what we see advertised commercially isn't quite what is delivered. In contrast, God has been giving humanity the same message of love and constancy for centuries and, although we may change the way in which we choose to respond and interpret, God's love never changes. As we "wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ", let us remember that it is not just the infant in the manger whom we await but the coming anew into our lives of the risen Christ.

I have been enjoying the music in this link as I write; perhaps you also may find it inspiring. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H1c5LUdZOE4>

With every blessing for Advent,

Gillian

Grace Notes in Miniature Friday, December 4th

Dear Friends:

There is a fair amount of poignancy as I light my Advent wreath this year. This has always been a family event, done at dinnertime, and although I am still enjoying its warmth and light, it does feel odd to be

doing it alone. The Advent wreath tradition started in the homes of German Lutherans about four hundred years ago and has grown to be a part of many Christian traditions both in worship settings and in people's homes. As Catholics we are used to the arrangement of candles - three purple and one pink – which echo the liturgical colours of our vestments and draperies; however, in Protestant churches red or white candles are often used. In Eastern Rite and Orthodox churches, the wreath may contain six different coloured candles (green, blue, gold, white, purple and red, symbolising faith, hope, love, peace, repentance and communion) as they follow a six-week fast prior to Christmas. A German pastor, Johann Hinrich Wichern, is credited with the creation of the modern Advent wreath: he made a ring of candles on a cartwheel, with red candles for the days of the week and white candles for the Sundays. These were lit to track the days, much as we would use an Advent calendar today. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OkQVGu6McTE> Various traditions identify the candles as hope, peace, joy and love, or the Messiah (prophecy), Bethlehem (Mary and Joseph), shepherds' and angel's candles. In the United Kingdom, they are named to relate to the readings of the Common Lectionary as: the hope of all God's people (week one), the Old Testament prophets (week two), John the Baptist (week three) and Mary the mother of Jesus (week four).[1]

Wreaths of candles are also part of the celebration of St Lucy's – Lucia's – Day on December 13th, when a young woman clad in white and crowned with a wreath of candles helps us prepare for the Light of the World - Christ - coming to us on Christmas Day. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NEKXFVG26nA> In Scandinavian countries, in the Julian calendar, St Lucy's Day fell around Winter Solstice, recognised as the shortest – darkest – day of the year.

Many special saints' days and observances occur in Advent. This week we had the memorials of St Francis Xavier and St John Damascene; this Sunday is the Feast of St Nicholas, celebrated in many countries as the day on which children receive toys and sweets; on December 7th we remember St Ambrose, one of the Doctors of the Church; and, on December 8th, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. This last recognises the Catholic dogma that Mary, herself, was conceived without sin by her mother, so that she in turn would be a fitting mother to Jesus, the Christ Child; people often confuse these two doctrines and it may help to remember that Mary is often referred to as “the Immaculate Conception” referring <<*Virgo* by Josef Moroder-Lusenberg) to her state at birth and not to her motherhood. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UI7CLPd14JQ> On December 9th we recognise St Juan Diego whose encounter with the Blessed Virgin gave us Our Lady of Guadalupe (December 12th); our Lady of Loreto is celebrated on December 10th, and St Lucy on December 13th.

There are many delightful traditions around the world – from the Irish practice of putting a candle in the window to let the Holy Family know that they are welcome there, to the Posada in Mexico where people process through the streets trying to find Mary and Joseph a place to stay. Nativity scenes or crèches – believed to have been introduced by St Francis of Assisi – are popular in France and Italy, and community nativity plays in parts of Spain. Here at home, some have begun the “reverse” Advent calendar where one does a good deed or makes a donation when opening the doors on the calendar. Many children (and young at heart) are very glad that the penitential season of Advent for us does not require giving up chocolate!

Lord Jesus,

Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas. We who have so much to do and seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day, We who are anxious over

many things look forward to your coming among us. We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom. We whose hearts are heavy seek the joy of your presence. We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light. To you we say, "Come Lord Jesus!" Amen.

- Henri J.M. Nouwen

With every blessing,

Gillian

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advent_wreath

Gillian Federico is the System Chaplain and Faith Formation Lead of the Halton CDSB.

CHAPLAINS' CHAT

On Thursday December 3, a group of chaplaincy leaders from across the province gathered virtually for an hour of reflection and chat. It was one of a series of advent reflection times that the Executive of CSCO is hosting, Krista Wood hosted for this time and I can truly say it was a godsend for this guy in the far west of our province. We gathered in prayer and then spent some time getting to know a small group of colleagues answering questions about ourselves. It was a great opportunity to meet and get to know some CSCO members from various parts of the province. After regathering as a large group for some reflection on the Gospel of the day once again we were 'sent' to a small group gathering to share our own reflections on the Gospel and our experience of our ministries in this time of COVID-19. It has been a challenge for most of us during this time when so much of our normal routine and practice of ministry has changed. The opportunity to share this challenge with one another seems to have lessened the burden and served to remind me that God is our rock, and we need to support one another in whatever way we can during this time. As we continue to journey on this path of Advent may we always remember to call on our God and one another for support as we bring the love of God to our students, staff, families, and communities. God is good, all the time. Happy Advent to you all.

- *Dean Woodbeck is the chaplain of St. Thomas Aquinas HS in Kenora (Kenora is in the Central Time Zone)*

CHRISTMAS REFLECTION



Merry Christmas to You and your families during this most unusual time.

Our journey through Advent to Christmas too has been unusual and has given us many areas to think about in our preparation. Simplicity is what the season brings us today and how our Savior came into our world. They too were in a small bubble which allows us to celebrate with them that same way. Something we are not accustomed to especially with all the traditions at Christmas. Trying to remain hopeful that this Christmas would be more than reminiscing of past Christmas's.

It is more! The birth of Jesus has given us salvation and an intense love for God! This is our ministries/vocations in serving others such as our students and one another, we to follow the Golden Rule. I heard a story once where a carpenter was carving a bird into one of the beams way up above in a Cathedral and a co-worker said to him "why are you doing that? No one can see it," and the carpenter said, " God will see it."

God sees all that we do in the simplest actions just by saying good morning to our students as they enter our school or classrooms or have a good lunch and or have a great afternoon as leave our school, we are putting faith into action, we are welcoming and including many into our community.

Know how much you are admired for what you are instilling in our students and for building up the Kingdom of God. You may think no one sees, except GOD sees.

Blessings to You and Your Families!

Take Care, Be Safe

and know

GOD Loves You All Very Much!

Vincenzo Silvestro

https://youtu.be/qJ_MGWio-vc



[Official Video] Little Drummer Boy - Pentatonix

NEW ALBUM 'THE BEST OF PENTATONIX CHRISTMAS' OUT NOW!BUY:
<https://smarturl.it/bestofPTXmas?IQid=ytSTREAM>
M: <https://smarturl.it/bestofPTXmas?IQid=yt A PENTATO...>

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- *Vincenzo is the chaplain of St. Andre Bessette CSS in London*

GRACE BEFORE MEALS

Hello everyone;

Each year, I give the staff in our schools a grace to pray at their Christmas table with their family.

With this year being so discombobulated, I thought I would share it with all of you. I hope it brings you and your staff members Christmas 2020 unexpected graces and beauty.

Blessings,
Margaret Palmer



Christmas 2020 Grace

God of all seasons and times,
we gather for this Christmas feast
aware that our hearts are holding family and friends
who are celebrating elsewhere.

We give Thanks and Glory to You
for this gathering
and for the simple truth

that You have the power to bring our goodwill, prayers and blessings to everyone everywhere- in Heaven and on Earth.

So Bless All of Us, O Lord - here and elsewhere.
Bless these Thy gifts - at table and beyond;
which we know we receive from Your bounty
through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

By Margaret Palmer

- *Margaret is the system chaplain of the St. Clair CDSB. The CEC is in Wallaceburg.*

HYMNS AT HOME

Susan Hookong-Taylor is featured in Salt and Light Media's Hymns at Home series and the Hymns at Home Christmas special. You can check out the videos at the following links:

[Hymns at Home - Susan HooKong-Taylor](#) (regular series)

[Hymns at Home Christmas Special](#)

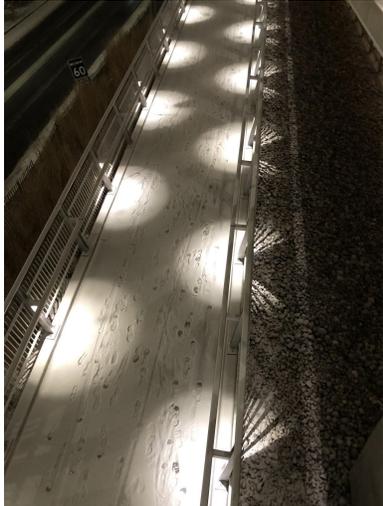
- *Susan is a Religion and Family Life consultant with the Toronto CDSB*

SEASONAL PHOTOS



I am blessed to work at a school located next to a UNESCO world heritage site- the Rideau Canal. If I look out the window of my office, or any of the windows in the chapel, I see glimpses of the waterway as well as beautiful trees and pathways. My walk to and from school takes me past beautiful buildings, over interesting bridges and through tree-lined neighbourhoods. Sometimes I pause to take in the sites- and every so often I whip out my cell phone attempting to capture the beauty. The sky was clear and the air crisp, ice was beginning to form on the canal. I paused on the bridge- Joni Mitchell's *River* lyrics came to mind when I took this photo-

“It’s coming on Christmas, they’re cutting down trees, they’re putting up reindeer, and singing songs of joy and peace, oh I wish I had a river I could skate away on...”



The next morning I paused in a different spot on the same bridge....this time my mind went to *“Footprints in the Sand”* If you look closely at the photo you can see footprints in the snow-

“You walked with me. Footprints in the sand, and helped me understand where I’m going. You walked with me when I was all alone...”



It snowed much of the day- I was walking down the hall toward the south wing of the school when I paused and looked out the window. Can you see the little guy sliding down the hill? Little people have so much fun in the snow. Winter is my favourite season- so much beauty! So much fun!



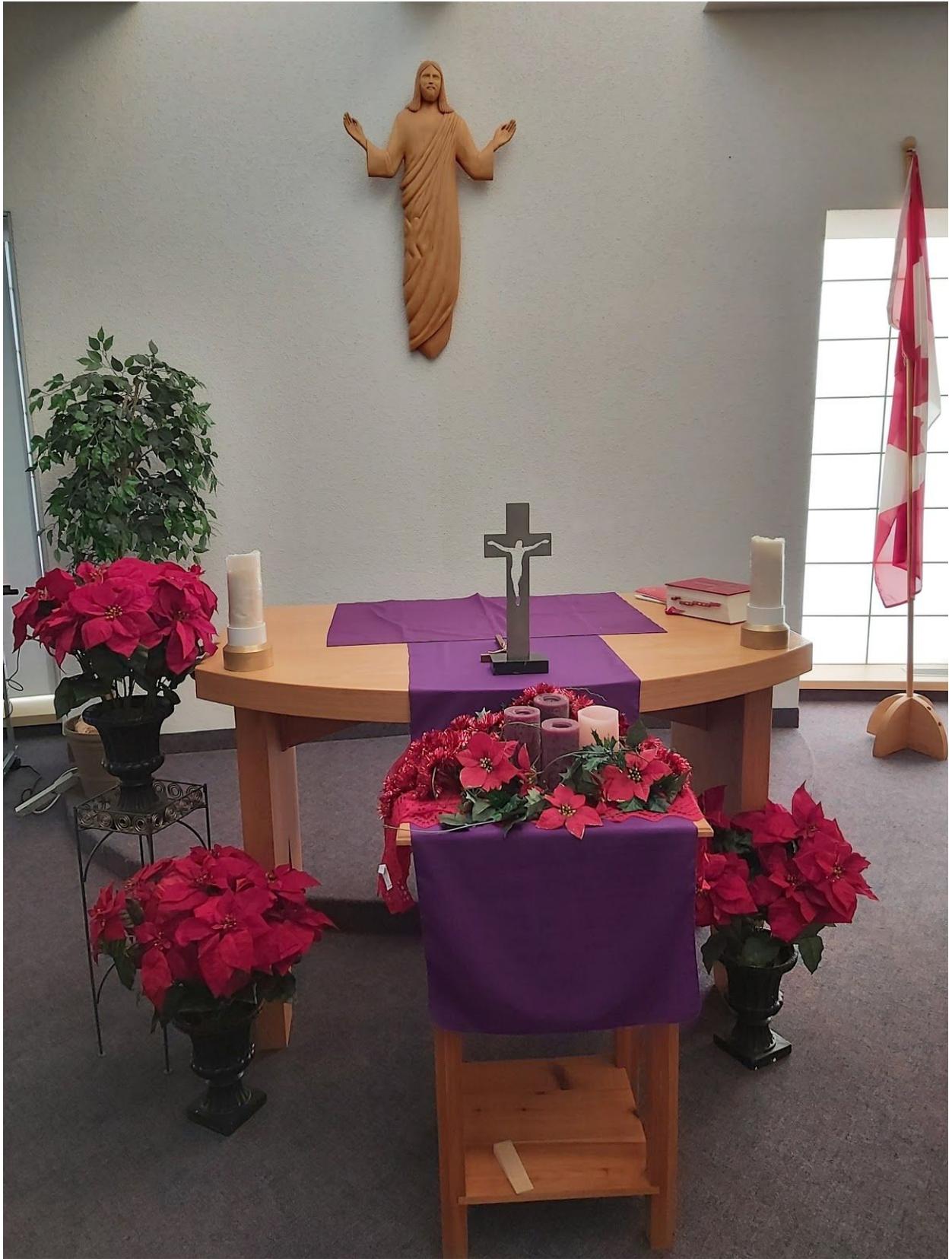
I took this photo on my walk last night. It is the Museum of Nature- view from Elgin Street-
So much beauty surrounds me whether I am in the city or in the country- truly blessed.

- *Mary Defayette is the chaplain of Immaculata HS in Ottawa*

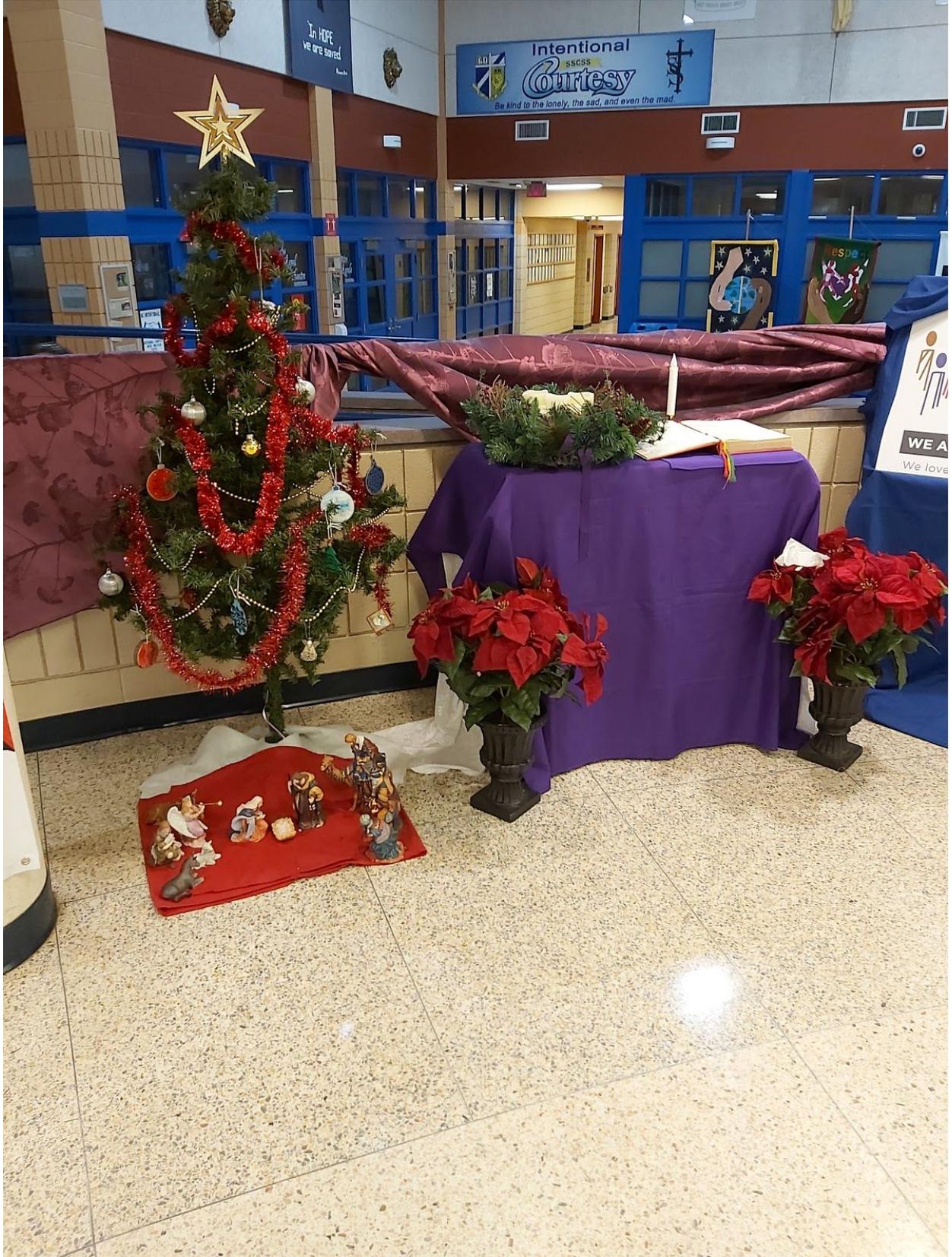
ADVENT CHRISTMAS REFLECTION

At St Stephen in Bowmanville it has been a strange year, but still very rewarding and good for our students and staff. Everyone, while cautious, is happy to be back in the classroom with their friends and colleagues. As we prepare for the arrival of our Lord this Christmas we have prepared with prayer, helping those in need and joyous activities. We wish everyone a very Merry and Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Here is a picture of our chapel:



Here is a picture of Advent/Christmas display:



- *Deacon Shawn Panio is the Chaplain of St Stephen Catholic Secondary School in Bowmanville*

Thanks to Jolene, Don, Andrew, Joanne, Azniv, Gillian, Dean, Vincenzo, Margaret, Susan, Mary and Deacon Shawn for their contributions.

The next one will be issued in Easter 2021.

Please consider submitting any news, prayers, stories, reflections, or insights by March 26, 2021 for the next Newsletter. Send it to Lorenzo at cscovp@gmail.com . Include a photo or image.



Wishing you and your loved ones a blessed and merry Christmas, and a happy New Year! Hope, peace, joy, and love to you! Enjoy the break!