

## Christmas 2025 Newsletter

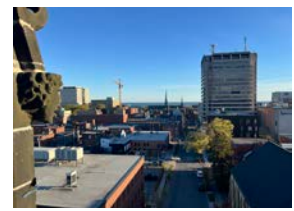
BY TERENCE AND  
JASMINE CHANDRA



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# PENNIES AND SPARROWS



## An Unusual Greeting Card

If you're in the habit of mailing out Christmas cards, there's a good chance that, this year, your card featured an image of Christ's nativity: perhaps a tranquil, watercolored painting of Joseph with his staff, Mary in her royal blue and the Baby Jesus himself— the centrepiece of the ensemble— snug in his swaddling cloths. But, for the Christmas of 2026, may I suggest the use of a different Biblical character?

On the front of your greeting card there ought to be a painting of a man dressed in camel's hide— the hairy, ill-fitting mantle hanging loosely from his tall, skinny frame. It ought to be one of those portraits where it seems as if the subject's eyes are staring directly at the viewer, probing their souls with a fierceness and intensity that borders on the psychotic. And, to make the image even more unsettling, he should be pointing straight ahead

(Uncle Sam style) with his long, bony index finger, as if accusing the greeting card recipient of having committed some abominable crime. Then, when your friend or family member eventually opens the card, they should find the following words printed in bold type across the middle of the page:

**"You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:7).**

To be sure, a card that featured such a striking portrayal of John the Baptist wouldn't result in many Christmas party invitations coming your way. However, it would certainly be in keeping with the traditional spirit of Advent— the 4 week season of the church calendar leading up to Christmas Day. Historically, Advent has been observed as a penitential season not unlike Lent— a time when Christians fasted, prayed and contemplated their sins before God. Hence the centrality of a figure like John the Baptist.



You see, John the Baptist is known as the precursor of Christ, the one whose mission it was to ready the world for the coming of the long-promised Messiah. He is, in the words of the scriptures, "a voice crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight'" (Matthew 3:3). And, the way John the Baptist calls us to prepare for Jesus' coming is simple but, at the same time, difficult and demanding. Bluntly put, John the Baptist calls us to repent— to reject all of the sinful attitudes and behaviours that prevent us from receiving Christ's love and to show that we've repented by thinking and acting in the opposite way.

Don't get me wrong: I don't wish for anyone to have a miserable Advent season. By all means, enjoy your eggnog and gingerbread cookies, have fun at those holiday parties and watch that old, claymation movie where Rudolf runs off with the elf. But, in the midst of all the celebrating, carve out some time each day for prayer, contemplation and self-examination. Take up your Bible and read the passages pertaining to John the Baptist. Then ask yourself, "If I went out to meet John in the wilderness, what might he say to me? What sins would he want me to turn from?" To be sure, this is a rather unsettling exercise. But, it is through turning from things like hatred, greed and jealousy that we truly make room in our lives for the love of God— a love that the Lord longs to pour into our hearts until we are full and overflowing. I, for one, cannot imagine receiving a greater gift this Advent and Christmas season.

## Foodie Friday



Foodie Friday meets every Friday at 11am to cook and serve up healthy and hearty meals. This program is run by the very gifted Miriam Westin. She sources the ingredients as locally as possible through her Lifedirt small enterprise.

There is a great sense of community in the group as each person is given a role in making the meal happen. There is always room for more to join!

# An Afternoon at the Stone Café

I write this on a Thursday afternoon at my office desk, gazing through the glass partition that allows me a view into the main worship space of our church. Our drop in program (a ministry we call The Stone Café) is currently running. There are 5 or so tables spread out all throughout the space— tables around which our friends from the neighbourhood are enjoying conversations, working away on crossword puzzles or simply nursing a cup of coffee. Some live in small apartments and rooming houses and some are homeless. Some struggle with mental illness and addiction and some do not. They've come here to get out of the cold, get an afternoon snack or simply connect with other human beings.

But they're not the only guests present. Ensconced in the other glassed-in offices that surround our worship space are a variety of professionals representing a variety of organizations, both public and private. Staff from Fresh Start Services have set up a desk in our nursery space and are presently helping a guest secure housing. A man from Service Canada is working from the room next door (our Sunday school classroom) helping another guest obtain access to various government services and benefits. Nurses from Horizon Health have set up shop at the foot of the chancel steps and are just in the process of administering a flu vaccine to one of our regulars. Finally, a hairdresser is working with a female guest just two feet away from the marble baptismal font by the lectern, doing everything she can to help this lady look her sharpest. To add a slight element of disorder to the mix, a schizophrenic man roams openly about the space, occasionally offering a sharp rebuke to some internal antagonist only he can see. (But don't worry— he's never been known to be violent).

Although the Stone Café isn't always humming with the same level of activity as it is this afternoon, we're definitely getting into what I call our busy season— the cold midwinter months from December to March when the sheer number of guests require our staff and volunteers to remain continually on their feet. In fact, there's no reason for us to believe that this winter is going to be any easier than last— especially given the slow but steady increase in our city's homeless population. According to some recently released statistics, the number of chronically homeless in our city sits somewhere around, as of the month of October, 250— up from 238 in September and 218 in August. Given this unfortunate fact, our presence— along with the presence of other churches and community development organizations at work in the heart of our city— is vital.

It's with this in mind that we extend our deepest gratitude to you, our supporters. Your financial contributions allow ministries like the Stone Café to continue operating— ensuring a place of sanctuary and refuge to some of the most hurting people in our city. Pray for the safety of our guests, volunteers and staff. Pray that next Christmas, the homelessness crisis improves and we find ourselves at least a little less busy than before.



Jennifer Hallihan is the Community Navigator for the Waterloo Village Neighbourhood Association. Because of her, our drop in guests can meet with representatives of the various community development organizations mentioned in this article.

250

The Number of Chronically Homeless People in Saint John as of October 2025



Stone Café



Some of our other regular programs include:

Youth Connection: weekly youth gathering that is held every Friday from 6-8pm and that begins with a meal.

Seniors Present: A monthly seniors program that has entertainment and seniors sharing their expertise. This group also has a bi-monthly craft and chat group.

If you would like to know more about any of our programs or about Pennies and Sparrows in general, please reach out.



## Contact Us!

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*Wishing you  
a wonderful  
Advent and  
Christmas  
season!*



Photograph taken by Russ Hanso

We largely rely on donations to make our work possible. Donated funds go towards salaries or program expenses. Tax receiptable donations can be made to the Anglican Diocese of Fredericton with a note that funds are to go to Pennies and Sparrows. This can be done in several ways:

Online through Canada Helps (using the drop down tab on the page to select Pennies and Sparrows)  
<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/dn/13778>.

By cheque sent to the Diocese of Fredericton with Pennies and Sparrows in the memo line - 168 Church Street Fredericton, NB E3B 4C9. Or by cheque sent to Stone Church again with Pennies and Sparrows in the memo line - 87 Carleton Street Saint John NB E2L 2Z2.

By etransfer to Stone Church with a note that the funds are to go to Pennies and Sparrows -  
[stjstone@nb.aibn.com](mailto:stjstone@nb.aibn.com).