

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS FROM THE BISHOP

Dear friends in Algoma,

This will be our family's first Christmas in our new home in Sault Ste. Marie – the stately and beautiful Bishophurst. Somehow, the few boxes of decorations that we brought with us from Sudbury don't quite fill or 'fit' the space.

For one thing they aren't themed or colour coordinated, but are more of an eclectic collection reflecting our growing family over many years. You know exactly what I mean as you have the same kinds of treasures in your homes.....handmade decorations lovingly created by the hands of a kindergartner, others purchased on a holiday that scream '*sunny Mexico*' rather than '*snowy Canada*', and photo frame ornaments of loved ones long gone who still have a place of honour on the tree. Last evening as I unwrapped the figures for the Creche, Mary holding the baby Jesus in her arms, Joseph standing proudly by and shepherds and kings looking on in wonder it felt as if I was welcoming old friends into our home again.

Our family cherishes these worn out decorations because they are reminders of where we've come from as a family and how we've changed and grown over time. They're also reminders of Christmases past – the joy-filled ones when all was well, and the difficult ones when we barely made it through the season.

On Christmas Eve we will be listening to the familiar words of the birth of Jesus told to us through the words of the gospel writers. Luke's text is so familiar that we can almost recite it by heart, at least many of the verses. 'In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered....' (Luke 2.1) Repetition seems pointless, yet we all know that musicians spend hours and hours working on one piece of music, sometimes on one or two notes, until it is perfect and ready to be performed.

What if our hearing of the birth of Christ year after year becomes that same kind of formation for us in our Christian journey? We may come to church on Christmas Eve feeling fully prepared for the festive season, or not at all, but year after year as we listen to them we are shaped by them and 'molded by their promise of God's wondrous indwelling with God's creation.' (Kristin Lergen) In Christ, God has come to us and loves us just the way we are. God will never leave us. Over and over in the Gospel narratives we hear these words and their frequent repetition moves them from our heads into our hearts where they form us in our faith. Let us never become weary from hearing the story of Christ's birth, but trust them to bring something new to birth in us.



As you gather with your family members, friends, and church communities this Christmas season, following the traditions that you hold dear, know that you will all be very much in my thoughts and prayers. The first year of my episcopacy is almost over and even though it has been a year with a steep learning curve, it has been a real joy to get to know some of the beautiful people who fill Algoma's pews week after week. Thank you for your support, prayers and encouragement.

For those of you who are able to join us on New Year's Day, Colin and I would love to see you at the levee at Bishophurst from 2pm-4pm. This year the hosts are St. Peter's in Sault Ste. Marie.

Wishing you Christmas love and joy,

+Anne



Creche at Bishophurst

*May the joy of the angels, The eagerness of the shepherds,
The perseverance of the wise men, The obedience of Joseph and Mary,
And the peace of the Christ child
Be yours this Christmas
And throughout the New Year*