



The Islington United Church

LINK

 Newsletter

Advent 2003



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ at Islington United Church, Happy New Year! No, I haven't missed a page in my calendar. Advent is the beginning of the Church year. The Season of Advent begins on the Sunday nearest November 30th and ends on Christmas Eve, so I really am wishing you a wonderful and fulfilling New Year.

Around this time of year I notice a change in behaviour in stores and malls. When salespeople hand me my receipt and change, more and more of them say "Happy Holidays." I know this comment is not always motivated by the cashiers' genuine interest in my holiday. They have been told to say this, perhaps through some CEO directive advising employees to switch from "Have a nice day" to "Happy Holidays," in the hope of cementing a lasting bond between the store and the customer. I'm aware of all that, and suspicious of the whole business, and I am often tempted to say, "I'm not on holidays. The Season of

Advent is one of my busiest times of year!"

But then, at least once every year, I meet one salesperson who looks me in the eye and says, "I hope you have a wonderful Christmas," and really means it. And that changes my whole day.

There really is something genuine to this whole idea of "Christmas cheer." As December 25th draws near, people warm up just a bit. If you are out and about on Christmas Eve you notice that people are friendlier than on any other day of the year. Folks warm up when they are mindful of the Christ child's birth, and seem to make a special effort to practise the virtues the angels sing of: **"peace on earth, goodwill towards all."**

But, consider this: why do we notice this at Christmas? Why does this surge in "warm-heartedness" stand out? I think it is because, despite our best intentions, good will toward

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This is Your Invitation to Communion

Holy Communion will be celebrated on November 2 at both the 9:30 A.M. and 11:15 A.M. Services of Worship. We hope you will be able to share these very special services with us. As at other Communion Services, there will be Benevolent Offering envelopes in the pews to allow you to participate in our ministry of outreach to our community.

Name _____

Elder _____

District _____

Telephone _____

The Most Wonderful Time...

Tim Stiff, Junior Choir Director

It's the most wonderful time of the year! It's the most hectic, the busiest, the craziest and the most fulfilling time of the year as well. But 2000 years or so ago, on the eve of the very first Christmas, things weren't that different for two weary travelers and their precious cargo. As any accidental tourist will tell you, it's hard enough to breeze into town and find a hotel room when you don't have a reservation. But for Mary and Joseph on that first Christmas Eve, the challenge seemed daunting.



Our Junior Choir

On December 21st, the Islington United Church Junior Choir will perform "Holiday in Bethlehem." This delightful musical presentation tells the story of how the humble hero and heroine (and their donkey) were met with an assortment of attitudes by the guests of each hotel at which they stopped to find a room. Though it seemed as if they would never find a place to stay,

compassion and understanding won the day when the greatest hero of all arrived, sharing the greatest gift...love.

Please join us on what should be a very special evening.*

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our fellow human beings can easily become a seasonal event rather than a way of life.

When Jesus entered our world, he did not come to brighten our Decembers, but to transform our lives. It can be hard work to practise good will towards one another. But, John the Baptizer's message was that as we prepare for Christ to come into our lives, we can change our ways. The Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry provide the blueprint for loving our neighbour in a busy and complicated neighbourhood. Christ made a point of seeking out the broken and disenfranchised people of his day; he saw the value in each one of them. And in so doing, He helped them recognize the value in themselves.

This Christmas season, let us recognize that, just as faith is a decision, good will towards people is a series of decisions that work themselves out not in temporary holiday cheer, but in the details of everyday life.

As we decorate our church and our homes and prepare to celebrate once again the amazing good news of the Gospel, let us recall what God has done and is doing. It is truly a humbling experience to read back through the Old Testament and see how frail and imperfect all the "heroes" actually are:

Abraham, the coward who cannot believe the promise;
Jacob, the cheat who struggles with everybody;
Joseph, the immature and arrogant teen;
Moses, the impatient murderer who cannot wait for God;
Gideon, the weak Baal-worshipper;
Samson, the womanizer who drank too much;
David, the power-abusing adulterer;

Solomon, the unwise wise man;
Hezekiah, the reforming king who could not quite go far enough.

Then, finally, a very young Jewish girl from a small village in a remote corner of a great empire!

It never ceases to amaze me why God could not have chosen "better" people to do his work in the world. Yet, if God can use them, and reveal himself through them in such marvelous ways, it means that God might be able to use me, inadequate and unwise, and too often lacking in faith that I am. And, it means that I need to be careful that I do not put limits on what God can do with the most unlikely of people, in the most unlikely of situations. I think that's part of the wonder of the Advent Season.

In the words of the Traditional Celtic prayer:

May the Christ who walks on wounded feet walk with you on your road.

May the Christ who serves with wounded hands stretch out your hands to serve.

May the Christ who loves with a wounded heart, open your heart to love.

May you see the face of Christ in everyone you meet, and May everyone you meet see the face of Christ in you.

May God bless you this Advent and always.

*Your friend,
Mark Aitchison*

*P.S. See you in worship.**

Seek and you shall find...

Lisa Page

I was seeking, not sure for what, but when I'm with the broken, the lonely and forgotten, I feel God's warmth and know I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be.

My job as Program Manager with Ground Level Youth Ventures/Ground Level Café gives me the opportunity to work with street-involved youth and youth at risk. Much of what I do is listen. God has granted me such a wonderful gift of being able to truly care and love the youth I work with.

This is where I met Jen who has been an addict, been abused, been an abuser and is now working on putting all of the pieces back together. Every day seemed an uphill struggle, but today is different. Jen and her partner anxiously await the birth of their daughter. Today they are clean of substances, have a decent place to live and they have hope for a new beginning and gratefulness that everything is not lost. God put Jen in my life for a reason...some days it's to practice patience, others it's to practice forgiveness and love.

I was fortunate enough to become part of Scott's world, one filled with pain, depression and loneliness. Many of you will remember Scott as my friend who lives under the Gardner Expressway. I met Scott while doing street outreach with the Light Patrol. Last winter Scott was hospitalized with severe frostbite to his feet. Today, Scott

is living back under the bridge and I fear what this winter will bring for him. Yet, the bridge is his home. He has many friends but most importantly he has God, his constant companion whom he confides in and cries out to. I pray that God will watch over Scott and his friends as our nights grow colder. Keep them safe.

I will also participate in the Light Patrol's 2nd annual dinner to be held this December in the park for all of our friends on the street. Once again, the hospitality team has stepped up to the plate and are donating a great deal of the food as well as doing all of the cooking. This is a magical evening of hospitality, community, faith and love, and to many it's the only family Christmas dinner they will have. If you would like to find out more about this, please email me at lisa.page@sympatico.ca.

As the years pass, I feel God's presence in my life in an enormous way. I have been moved and touched by His works and encouraged to step beyond my comfort zone. God's call and presence continued to grow until I finally asked for direction, clear direction, in my life. I believe that God is calling me to ministry...I'm not quite sure what that looks like yet, but I know that I will, in His time. I now await the completion of my committee and I will begin my discernment through the United Church.

God is calling. I am seeking. Together may we find the best way to serve Him.*



Driving Love Home for Christmas

*Rosemary Drinnan
Christmas Hamper Committee*

For a number of years now, the members of Islington United Church have generously provided Christmas hampers full of toys, clothing, food and love for needy families in our area. Preparation for this project starts early in the year as dedicated knitters make scores of hats and mitts. Things really start to roll in early December when the congregation brings in its snowy packages to White Gift Sunday. Then, for a full week leading up to Christmas, the church is a flurry of sorting and packing of the hampers, which literally overflow with goodies including the makings for a complete traditional turkey dinner. And then, finally and unbelievably, a day or two before Christmas, the hampers are ready to be delivered to the families. A small army of volunteer drivers jumps behind the wheel, not knowing what to expect at the other end, but filled with joy and compassion at being able to share the comforts of Christmas.

A few years ago, before we restricted our deliveries to Etobicoke, Bill Drinnan and Laurie-Beth Davidson did a delivery to an address at Dundas West Subway Station. When Laurie-Beth rang the bell, a hesitant Spanish-speaking lady said she didn't speak English and refused to open the door. Bill resuscitated a few words of his university Spanish and the door opened. Bill and Laurie-Beth delivered the box to a grateful young woman with a very young baby. Her situation was desperate and she was deeply in need of the help that was being presented to her. The gracious young lady offered her visitors tea, and in broken Spanish and English she expressed amazement that strangers would be so generous. Bill and Laurie-Beth went home that evening with warm feelings for a congregation committed to helping others in times of need.

I have been arranging the deliveries of these hampers for at least ten years, and on several occasions have had to

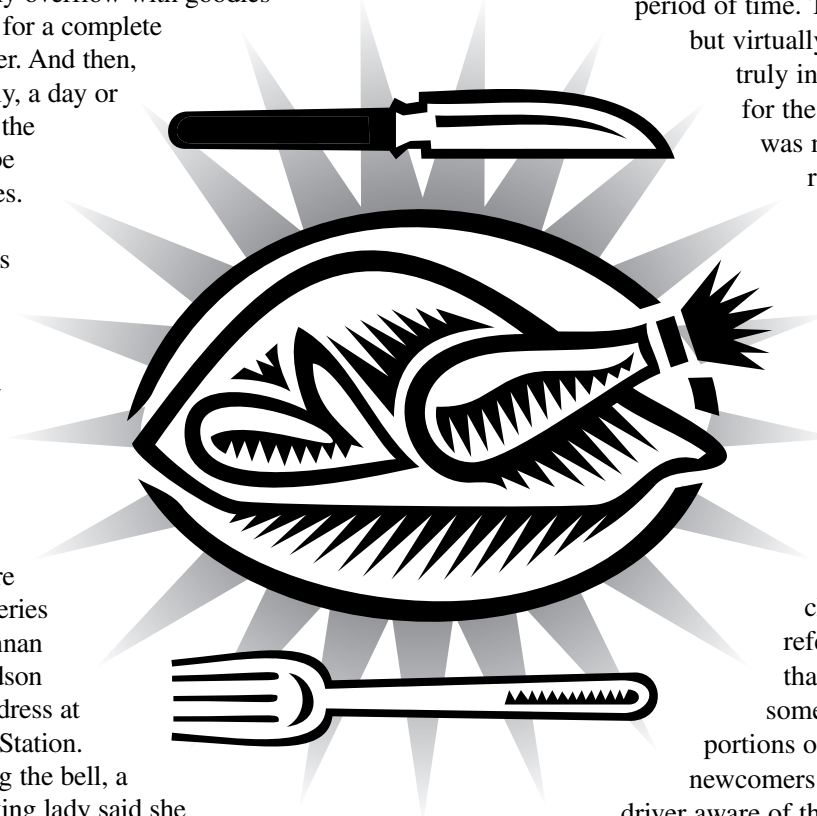
question the addresses given to us. However, here are two examples that show that we can't always judge a book by its cover. One year the address was The Masters condo on the same street on which I live, an address that hardly suggests neediness. As we are given only the recipients' names, sexes and ages, I couldn't find out anything about the recipients except that the children attended the local schools. I chose my driver carefully and asked for a report on the recipient, because unfortunately there are people who take advantage of the generosity intended for those in need. The driver found a family, recently arrived in Canada, who had been loaned the condo for a period of time. The condo was lovely

but virtually empty; the family was truly in need and very grateful for the hamper. This address was not on the next year's request list, so we hope the owner of the condo helped the family get started in Canada, just as we helped create a memorable first Christmas.

Last year a hamper was destined for a house address on a very expensive street in the Kingsway. I checked with the referring person and found that it was owned by someone who rented out portions of the home to needy newcomers to Canada. I made the driver aware of the circumstance and once again the hamper was gratefully received by people who needed it.

The people who put their names in for help at Christmas are sincerely needy. Please contribute as generously as you are able with new White Gifts – no used items or food, please – on White Gift Sunday. Cash donations are also very welcome as they allow us to purchase the food and other items with which we fill our hampers. We are anticipating 100 hampers again this year...for 100 families that really do need your help.

If you can drive for me this year please call me at 416-621-2897 and leave your name and number.*



Hark the Herald Angels – Again

John H. Derksen, Minister of Music

For many people, another Christmas season is just a rerun of the trivial and the sentimental. But for the Christian, each Christmas is a fresh opportunity to think about and celebrate some of the deepest mysteries of our faith. Nowhere are these mysteries so compactly and beautifully presented as in some of our favourite Christmas hymns.

Charles Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism (and therefore a spiritual ancestor) was a phenomenally gifted poet and theologian. One of our greatest Christmas hymns, “Hark the herald angels sing” – or, in Wesley’s original words, “Hark how all the welkin rings” – is packed with Scriptural reference and teaching. You can find the hymn in *Voices United*, at number 48.

From stanza 1, it is clear that the good news of the angels’ song is not just for the shepherds. It is a universal message of reconciliation between God and humankind. This astounding good news is for each of us, regardless

of nationality. Stanza 2 lays out in very beautiful language the doctrine of the incarnation – God taking on flesh for our sake. Wesley uses images from Hebrews 1 and 2 to express this paradoxical mystery. An exuberant call to praise breaks forth in stanza 3, where images from Malachi 4:2, Isaiah 9:6, and Philippians 2:6-8 delineate the character of the incarnate Christ. Each stanza ends with an appeal to listen to the message.

This poem receives surging life from the wonderful tune known as “Mendelssohn.” We couldn’t imagine one without the other. Yet, this music was adapted as a hymn tune only in 1856 (Wesley published his poem in 1739). Felix Mendelssohn originally composed it for incorporation in a commemorative work in 1840. We can thank William Cummings for seeing the possibilities inherent in Mendelssohn’s tune.

This Christmas, let us take up the invitation, offered in the carols we sing, to think deeply about God’s love for each of us. Let us rejoice.*

Loaves & Fishes

The Loaves and Fishes Committee is focused on the stewardship, finance, planning and budgeting of Islington United Church. In my role as chair of this committee, I have learned a great deal. Much of that learning is shared with new members who are considering joining our church, and I’d like to share some of that message with you.

We are all stewards of God’s grace. The concept of stewardship begins with receiving – not giving. Despite how hard we work, how deeply we are committed to providing for those we love, and how dedicated we are to helping people along the way, the fact remains that we own nothing. We have nothing by our own efforts. Our entire lives are gifts from God, and we learn to give to others because God has already given us everything we have.

God does not expect enormous sacrifice. God wants us to have an abundant life that spills over with joy and fullness, through our giving AND receiving. So the purpose of our stewardship – our discipleship – is to

glorify God in all things, to give back the time, the talents and the treasure with which we have been blessed.

Our 2004 financial campaign started on October 26th (please return your Commitment Envelope as soon as possible!) and we have many events planned to help Islington United meet its goals. A sampling:



- IUC stationary, including Christmas cards, note pads, bookmarks based on our stained glass windows
- HymnFest on November 23rd
- Christmas Trees will be on sale in December
- Ben D’Cunha concert

Thank you for your continued and ongoing support of our financial needs. We ask that you continue to prayerfully consider all that you can do to help us meet our goals.

Watch your bulletins for specific information and updates on fundraising activities.*

Talking to Danielle James



Sometimes it seems the world is bashing its head against the brick wall of destructive human nature. Luckily there are people who can communicate a different message – faith in God’s love and assurance in the healing and wholeness that Jesus offers us.

Danielle James is one of those people. Contracted for a one-year period, Islington United’s new Minister for Youth and Congregational Development has a clear vision of how God can make us whole and she is able to articulate it well to other people.

Born in Trinidad and Tobago and raised in Brampton, Danielle spent much of her high school years involved with Youth With A Mission (YWAM), an international, interdenominational movement of Christians working to help make a difference in a needy world. YWAM humanitarian outreach missions in several countries, including trips to Colombia, Mexico and Greece, fed her feelings for social justice. Danielle met many people living out their faith, living humbly and helping others. On May 11, 1994, while on a trip to Guatemala, she dedicated her life to God.

“I love the relationships between people that transcend boundaries of faith, race and nation,” says Danielle, “And I am passionate about healing and spirituality and how religion and science come together.”

Anticipating that her life’s work would combine her passions for medicine and God, Danielle took a biochemistry degree from McMaster University with a minor in religious studies. Then a series of gentle revelations – no lightning bolts – confirmed her belief that the church is the best place to live out her philosophy: Everyone has unique and special gifts that he or she can contribute to this world, so that together we can reflect God more clearly.

Influenced by two professors who were her mentors in terms of social justice and feminism in the church, Danielle opted for Yale where she served as a university chaplain for two years. On September 11, 2001, representatives for all faiths were meeting for the first time of the new year. At 9:30 A.M., the facilitator was called from the room. Upon his return, he led the group in prayer and then told them of the catastrophe. The gathered leaders of the faith communities knew what to do: they spread out over the campus to be with their people.

Danielle’s call is to be with, to lead and to serve God’s people. In her last year of Yale, she felt God calling her to parish ministry. She chose to return to Canada, confident in the potential of the United Church, and aware of her unique contributions as a Canadian of mixed ethnic heritage and diverse experiences.

Danielle is now committed to the United Church of Canada. “It holds great hope for Canadians and the universal Church,” she says, “And there is much the church can do to grow spiritually.”

It is also a welcome home for Danielle’s wholistic sense of Christianity, as she believes the Gospel makes it clear that faith involves very part of us: mind, body and spirit. Her involvement with The Gathering worship service, Christian Yoga and the Healing Ministry reflects this philosophy.

When asked what she hopes to share with the congregation of IUC during her time with us, especially youth who are the foundation of a living, prospering church, Danielle says, “I want to enable others to flourish, to feel and know the transformative presence of God in their lives. God has given me this present to share with others.”*

Leslie Arsenault

It takes a special person to take on the challenge of maintaining a vibrant, successful church school, which is why Islington United is so pleased to have Leslie Arsenault with us for the coming year.

At family gatherings, many people gravitate to the adults, leaving the kids to take care of themselves. Leslie was the adult who was always with the kids, playing with them and keeping an eye on them. She attributes her desire to work with children partially to the fact that her brother was 12 years younger, and from an early age she loved to take care of him.

It was no surprise then that she went to Ryerson for her degree in Early Childhood Education. After graduation, she worked for several years in two daycare centres in the Danforth and Broadview area, including three years as supervisor. She became a full time mom when her son Christopher, now 6, was a year old.

A few years ago when she, her husband David and their son moved into this area, Leslie received a mailbox questionnaire about the Parents & Preschoolers program being considered at IUC. She offered to help Sally Shaw set it up, and thus was introduced to the Islington United extended family.

After the birth of their daughter Hayleigh, now 4, the Arsenaults began attending IUC services and Leslie started teaching Sunday School. Since then, she has taught Grades 7 and up, followed by Grades 4 to 6, and joined the Christian Development Committee. (A perfect example of how, when we welcome someone into the church, we welcome them Big Time!)

Then, Mark Aitchison called. The type of Mark-call that many have received and few can refuse. The end result is that, in the wake of Sally Shaw's departure, Leslie

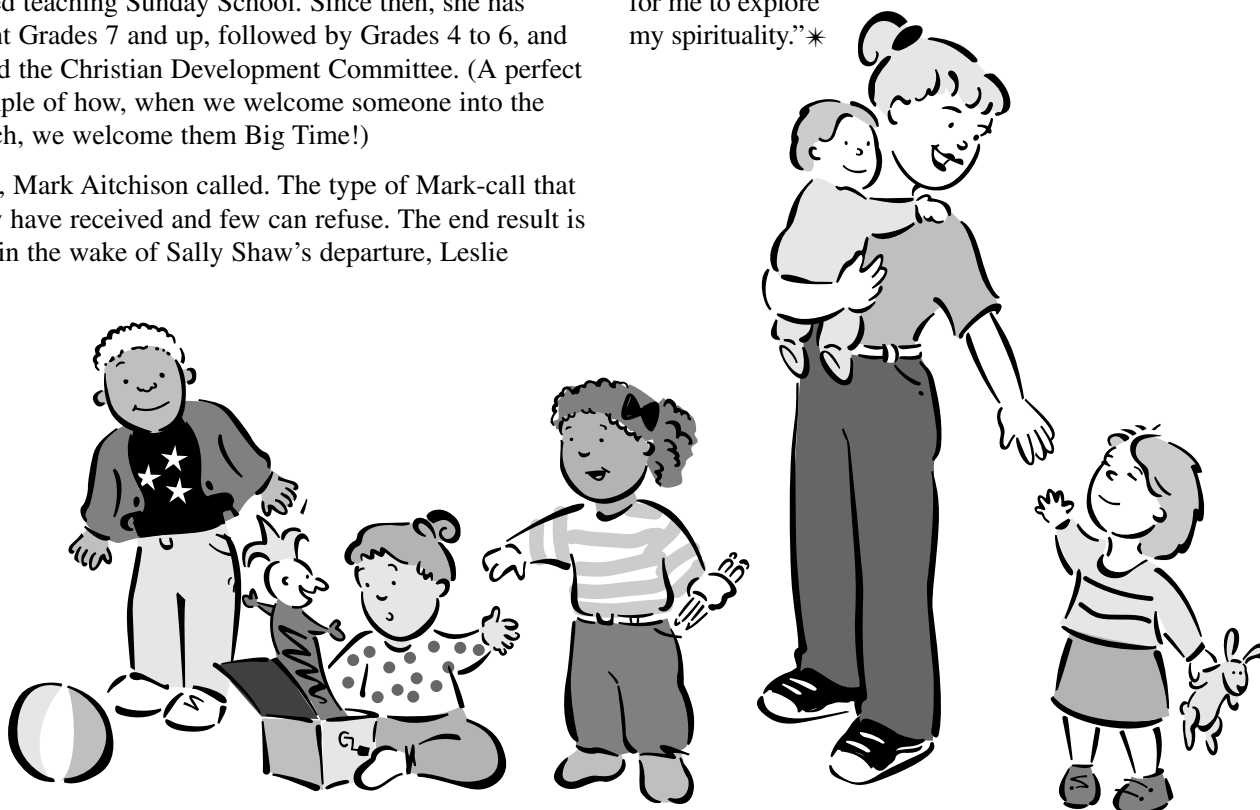
accepted the part-time one-year contract of Church School Coordinator and she is thrilled to be here.

When asked what she hopes to accomplish during her time here, Leslie says her goal is to nurture and carry on the programs that Sally put in place. Her role over the course of the year is that of caretaker of the programs that she believes to be wonderful. Her biggest challenge is finding volunteers to commit to teaching and helping out with Sunday School and she encourages people to consider experiencing the benefits of being involved with the Church youth.

Leslie says, "The kids enjoy Sunday School and the best proof of that is that none of them seems to be here under duress! The children treat each other with respect; they make friends and have fun as they learn bible stories. They grow to understand what church is all about and that Islington is *their* place."

While Sunday School nourishes a sense of a child's ownership in the church, it also meets the goals of parents who want their daughters and sons to receive the seeds of faith and develop a strong moral compass.

Leslie finds the position challenging but not overwhelming. "It's wonderful being with people I know, and meeting new people. I'm very comfortable here. It's home. And it's the perfect place and time for me to explore my spirituality."*



Advent & Christmas Services at Islington United Church

LIGHT UP THE NIGHT

Friday, November 28 – we prepare for Advent



ADVENT I

Sunday, November 30 at 9:30 & 11:15 a.m.*
Sacrament of Holy Communion



ADVENT II

Sunday, December 7th at 9:30 & 11:15 a.m.*

7:30 P.M.**
TAIZÉ WORSHIP



ADVENT III

Sunday, December 14th at 9:30 & 11:15 a.m.*
White Gift Worship Service

3:00 P.M.*

CHRISTMAS IN ISLINGTON

A celebration of the season with music for choirs, brass, organ and bells



BLUE CHRISTMAS WORSHIP

Wednesday, December 17th at 7:30 p.m.**

A reflective worship service for those who find Christmas difficult



ADVENT IV

Sunday, December 21st at 9:30 & 11:15 a.m.*

7:00 p.m.**

THE GATHERING

Contemporary Worship with the Junior Choir musical



CHRISTMAS EVE

5:00 P.M.*

FAMILY SERVICE

Children wishing to participate in the pageant should come in costume or come to the chapel prior to the service to find one.

7:00 P.M. *and* 9:00 P.M.**

LESSONS & CAROLS BY CANDLELIGHT

11:00 P.M.

COMMUNION BY CANDLELIGHT



FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Sunday, December 28th at 9:30 & 11:15 a.m.*
Intergenerational Worship with Baptism

*infant and toddler care
**infant, toddler and child care to age 8

Link is a quarterly news-letter produced & distributed by

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Sunday Services

9:30 A.M. and 11:15 A.M.

