

News From The Pews

June 2026



St James United Church

400 Burnhamthorpe Rd. M9B 2A8

416 622 4113

Anniversary Sunday May 3

It was a wonderful, inspiring service, and the musical production: SONGS OF COURAGE AND FAITH was absolutely noteworthy and outstanding. What a superb performance worthy of a Mirvish show at the Royal Alex. It truly was marvellous and sensational. The choir, the duets, the soloists, the instrumentals and the readings were brilliant. Hey! The lunchtime snacks were also great.
by Ben Skipowsky



Photos by Carol Jones showing flautist Laura Forgrave, Patrick Ty on Saxophone, and Albert Conforzi on trumpet. Albert was also part of the choir, and Emcee for the afternoon! Guest musicians included Chris Cawthray on drums, and Jay Yoo on guitar, with special guest Jeff Madden. The incomparable Adrian Marchuk put together this incredible presentation of music and poetry, and led the choir from the piano.



Spring Concert: Songs of Courage and Faith

St. James Choir with Jeff Madden

Editorial by Mhairi Godley

As you know, St. James is at a cross roads. In the coming year, we will need to fill a number of positions in order to enable the work of St. James U. C. to continue into a healthy future.

Firstly, we need a **Search Team**, who will be responsible for choosing our new full time minister, with help and guidance from the Shining Waters liaison. They will be using information gathered by the Transition Team. Ideally, this team will consist of 5-7 members representing the diversity of our Community of faith: Possibilities include a newer member, someone who has



spent several decades here, a parent of a Sunday School child, someone non-white, a non-heterosexual... This will be a one year commitment, with more work at the beginning, (August, September) and a busy period around February when you will be focussing on matching up applicants to our priorities. You will be ably trained and guided by our Liaison from Shining Waters. **This team must be ratified by the whole congregation as they will be working on our behalf to recommend the Minister most suited to our needs at this time.** An exciting opportunity!

Before we have a new Minister, it is important that we have a full team of volunteers to support them. There is no time like the present to begin rebuilding our committees and teams. The following groups, which meet monthly, need your active help: Worship and Music, Property and Finance, and Christian Education. Real decisions affecting our church are made at these committee meetings. Someone to head up an Eco and Social Justice team would also be wonderful.

Other areas of need include input into Outreach donations (collected each time we have communion) and Mission and Service, and Membership Care people who like to chat with others. **These positions involve very little time in meetings**, and any work is at whatever time is most convenient to you. (Please speak to "Varry", or email mhairi.godley@yahoo.com)

We also need a **deputy-chair of our Unified Board** who will attend monthly Unified Board meetings and learn what leadership requires, and who will eventually be able to take over the vital role of Chair of the Board. **Empty nesters and newly retired people especially:** please give prayerful, serious consideration to becoming a volunteer for St. James now you have a little more time!!

The Potent Scripture Verse



An elderly woman had just returned to her home from an evening worship service and was startled to find an intruder in her house! Catching the man in the act of burglarizing her home, she yelled, "STOP! Acts 2:38!" ("Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.")

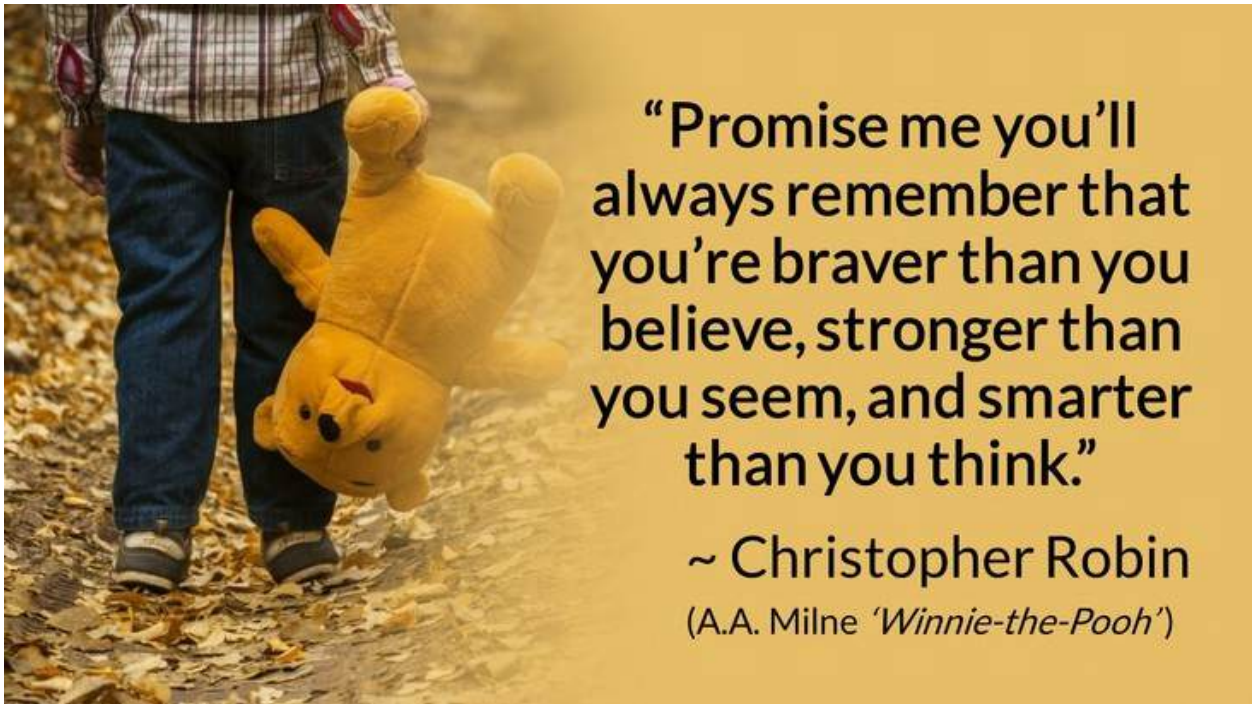
When the burglar heard this, he stopped dead in his tracks, blanched and raised two shaking hands. The woman quickly called the police and told them exactly what happened. They arrived minutes later with sirens blaring. Several officers strode in and took the unresisting man into custody.

As he was placing the handcuffs on the burglar, one of the officers asked, "Why did you just stand there? All the lady did was mention a scripture verse."

"Scripture? What scripture??" replied the confused burglar. "She said she had an axe and two 38s!"

Happy News

Many congratulations to new grandparents Nancy and Aldo Violo, on the birth of their granddaughter Isabelle. Proud parents are Dylan and Rachel Violo.



**“Promise me you’ll
always remember that
you’re braver than you
believe, stronger than
you seem, and smarter
than you think.”**

~ Christopher Robin
(A.A. Milne *‘Winnie-the-Pooh’*)

June Highlights

Sundays: Worship at 10:30 p.m.

7th - Pentecost 2. Short Congregational Meeting after church.

14th - Pentecost 3. Congregational Picnic, fun and games for all ages. BBQ

21st - Pentecost 4.

28th - Pentecost 5.

Mondays:

1 p.m. and 2 p.m. - Reiki

Sign up in binder in Well-Being waiting room or call Matty at 416 622 4113

Tuesdays:

7 p.m. - Reiki

9th and 23rd - Euchre at 1:30 p.m.

Wednesdays:

11:00 a.m. - Yoga

Thursdays:

7:30 p.m. - Choir Practice. New singers are always welcome

Fridays: (Family Games nights will resume in September.)

Saturdays:

10:00 a.m. - Yoga

Upcoming October Municipal Election

The long time Councillor for Etobicoke Ward 2 is Doug Holiday.

In the upcoming Municipal election Jennifer Alexander will be running in opposition. To find out more about her, see <https://jenalexander.ca/>

Which one best reflects YOUR values?



Many congratulations

and very best wishes to two lovely young ladies whom we have had the joy of seeing grow up at St. James. Both are beautiful people, inside and out, and very, very talented.

We wish them every blessing for the next stage of their life journeys, and pray that both will come back to visit us often.

Rhea Ty will be going to the University of Guelph next year for Biomedical Science; she's really excited for it!

Laura Forgrave will be studying Integrated Science at McMaster in Hamilton, and she is also extremely excited!

Love and prayers for success to you both from your 'second family' at St. James.

With the warmer weather here, be sure to check out the beautiful new deck that has been installed in the courtyard! It is a great place to sit and enjoy the outdoors!

Thanks to the Garden Club for their dedication - the flowers are a source of joy for many! This month, the Sunday School students are also



working on planting some annuals in the courtyard garden, as they learn about the “Parable of the Talents”. We are using our God-given gifts in different ways to make St. James a great place to be!

Submitted by Karen Forgrave.



Transition Team Report

Is St. James Joyful or Joyless?

Submitted by Jennifer Ling

During the May 17, 2026 sermon, Rev. Richard raised a question that deeply resonated with many members of the congregation. His comments sparked thoughtful reflection and emotional responses about joy, community, and the current life of St. James. Recognizing the importance of open and honest dialogue, the Transition Team and Ministry & Personnel Committee (M&P) invited members of the congregation to gather after worship on May 24 to share their thoughts and concerns in a respectful and supportive environment.

For those unfamiliar with M&P, the committee functions much like a human resources department within the church, supporting both staff and congregational relationships.

More than 35 people attended the discussion — a clear indication that this conversation mattered deeply to the St. James community.

At the heart of the discussion was a concern expressed by some congregants who interpreted Rev. Richard’s sermon as suggesting that St. James does not celebrate joy as a congregation. For some, those words were difficult to hear and prompted feelings of hurt and frustration. The gathering provided an opportunity to clarify intentions, listen to one another, and better understand the emotions behind those reactions.

Rev. Richard began by explaining that his intention had never been to suggest that St. James lacks joy altogether. Rather, he hoped to encourage the congregation to reflect on how joy is expressed and experienced within the life of the church. He acknowledged that, in shortening the sermon, some important context was lost.

Since his arrival, St. James has navigated several major transitions, including hiring a new Music Director and addressing significant financial challenges. These ongoing pressures were part of the context behind his remarks. His hope, he explained, was to encourage the congregation to think creatively and intentionally about how to cultivate and celebrate joy together, especially during difficult seasons.

Nancy Violo, speaking as a member of both the Transition Team and M&P, encouraged everyone present to use the gathering as a safe space for honest conversation. She reflected personally on how difficult it can be to experience joy while carrying significant responsibilities and commitments within the church. Marie Truelove echoed similar sentiments, acknowledging the emotional weight of moving from project to project with little time to pause and simply feel joyful. Their honesty was eye-opening for many in attendance.

Rod Lord reflected on how the energy within the church community has shifted since the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, he said, there was a strong sense of collective energy and connection that now feels diminished. Many in the room agreed with his observation.

Brenda Beaton shared that she re-watched the sermon online to better understand her own reaction. Upon hearing it again, she concluded that Rev. Richard's comments were not intended to offend but rather to challenge the congregation to reflect on joy and participation. She emphasized that joy cannot flourish when too few people carry too much responsibility, leading to exhaustion and burnout.



AI generated image

Marie Truelove emphasized that joy cannot flourish when too few people carry too much responsibility, leading to exhaustion and burnout but she noted that one of the most joyful moments recently experienced at St. James was during the Annual General Meeting, particularly because the church's finances had stabilized after years of uncertainty. She credited Rev. Richard's leadership for helping guide the congregation through that process. Marie reflected that, if we see Rev. Richard as a teacher, then part of his role is to challenge us to think differently, even when those conversations feel uncomfortable.

Eleanor Shapero reminded the group to be mindful about how concerns are expressed online, noting that comments can sometimes unintentionally create a negative impression of the church community.

Rev. Richard reflected on his six years of experience as an Intentional Interim Minister, explaining that building trust and relationships within a congregation takes time — often several years. He acknowledged that the strong reactions to his sermon revealed underlying concerns already present within the congregation. He suggested that this moment, while uncomfortable, could also become an opportunity for growth and deeper understanding if approached with openness and grace.

Emily Corthay spoke warmly about the joy she experiences at St. James. She highlighted the dedication of volunteers involved in ministries such as Finance, Music, and Sunday School, noting how meaningful their contributions are to the life of the church. She shared that the music ministry, including the soloists, often brings her tears of joy. Emily also reminded the group that joy is not something people feel every moment of every day, and that reflection and honesty are also important parts of congregational life.

Mhairi Godley expressed appreciation for Rev. Richard's role in helping stabilize the church's finances. However, she admitted that she interpreted the sermon as suggesting that the congregation was incapable of experiencing joy, which troubled her deeply. She also expressed concern after hearing Nancy and Marie describe the burdens they have been carrying. Their comments highlighted the need for broader support and shared responsibility within the congregation. Mhairi asked an important question: how can the congregation help lighten the load for those giving so much of themselves?

Nancy reminded everyone that support is available and encouraged congregants to reach out when they feel unheard or overwhelmed. Clearer communication, she said, is essential if the congregation hopes to move forward together in a healthy and positive way.

Rev. Richard reiterated that his sermons are intended to encourage reflection rather than personal criticism. He noted that many congregations believe they are welcoming communities, yet surveys often reveal gaps between intention and lived experience. Part of his role, he explained, is to help congregations identify difficult truths and areas for growth. Change can be uncomfortable, but avoiding difficult conversations prevents growth from happening.

Brian Isard commended Rev. Richard for his leadership in addressing the church's long-standing financial challenges. In particular, he highlighted Rev. Richard's work in coordinating the rental agreement with the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), which now provides approximately \$25,000 in annual income for St. James. Brian noted that several other churches declined rental opportunities with PCEA before St. James chose to welcome them. He also acknowledged the successful renegotiation of the Lady Bug Nursery lease, which helped bring rental income closer to market value.

James Ankarah reminded everyone that joy begins in the heart. The very fact that people continue to serve and contribute to the church reflects the joy and commitment they carry within themselves.

As the discussion concluded, Gord Burrell reflected on how meaningful it was to gather openly and honestly as a congregation. He noted that this kind of conversation may not have been possible two years ago and expressed gratitude for the willingness of people to engage respectfully, even amid disagreement. Ministers, he said, are meant to challenge congregations, and growth often emerges from those challenges.

While there was recognition that St. James continues to face challenges — including the need to attract more families and volunteers — there was also hopefulness in the room. Many expressed that continuing to gather, communicate, and support one another as a community is itself a sign of strength and renewal.

The Transition Team extends sincere thanks to everyone who attended, shared their perspectives, and contributed thoughtfully to the discussion. Special thanks are also extended to Nancy Violo for chairing the meeting.

If you have questions, comments, or further reflections, please feel free to contact the Transition Team at: sjutransitionteam@gmail.com

With gratitude from your Transition Team,
Gord Burrell, Jennifer Ling, Ariadne Reid, Nancy Violo



Good, old-fashioned fun!

Rain or Shine!

(If rain, the fun and food will be inside)

The Sermon Notes 🙏😊🙏

A new priest at his first mass was so nervous he could hardly speak. After mass he asked the monsignor for help. The monsignor replied, "When I am worried about getting nervous on the pulpit, I put a glass of vodka next to the water glass. If I start to get nervous I take a sip."

So the next Sunday he took the monsignor's advice. At the beginning of the sermon, he got nervous and took a drink of vodka. He proceeded to talk up a storm. Upon return to his office after mass he found the following note on his door:

"Sip the Vodka, don't gulp.

There are 10 commandments, not 12.

There are 12 disciples, not 10.

Jesus was consecrated, not constipated.

Jacob wagered his donkey, he did not 'bet his ass.'

David slew Goliath, he did not 'kick the crap' out of him.

We do NOT refer to the cross as the 'Big T'!

When Jesus broke the bread at the Last Supper he said, "Take this and eat it, for it is my body", he did not say, 'Eat me.'

The recommended grace before a meal is not: "Rub-A-dub-dub, thanks for the grub, yay God."

Next Sunday there will be a taffy-pulling contest at St. Peter's, not a peter-pulling contest at St. Taffy's.

And lastly, don't EVER refer to Jesus and the 12 disciples as "J.C. and the boys!"

Submitted by Ben Skopiwsky

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