

A Message from Your Rector's Warden

If you're reading this, it is likely that you are a part of the parish of St. Paul's Anglican Church, Thunder Bay. At the very least, you have a connection with this wonderful place of worship and community. Have you taken time lately to contemplate what St. Paul's means to you? To think about what this parish brings to your life, or the lives of those you love? Lately I've been filled with a lot of gratitude for the blessing of St. Paul's in my life and the lives of my family members.

When Destinee and I came to St. Paul's nine years ago we were in search of a church that would baptize our newborn daughter Madalyn. In no time, St. Paul's became an integral part of our lives. God brought us into a church and church family that provides us with support in so many ways. Because of St. Paul's we've been blessed to learn what it means to strive to live as disciples of Jesus, and to witness and become part of a people that actively make the world a better place by extending their hands and hearts into the community.

At Christmastime, people often reflect on the year past: the highs and the lows of another year gone by. As a father of young children, these reflections tend to revolve around my kids – the challenges they have faced, their accomplishments, their defeats and how they have grown so much in just one year. Most of these milestones, and our lives altogether are impacted by being part of St. Paul's.

Highlights of our time as members of this parish include baptisms, when our parish family pledged their support in guiding our children to God-centered lives. As part of this family, we have been comforted and uplifted in prayer during times of need, and we have broken bread and shared fellowship more times than I can count.

This year, our daughter Violet, 7, particularly enjoyed the God's Girls retreat. She was pampered and doted on and received a bible with a fuzzy, purple cover. She mentions that day regularly; a day of escape provided by the amazing Sunday School/youth team. A sample of the love, encouragement and guidance that is helping to grow the confidence and faith of the many children active in the Sunday School program.

A day that stands out for me from 2019 is the St. Paul's Remembrance Day Service. For me, this service is more impactful year after year, from honouring our veterans and troops, listening to the life story of a wartime parishioner soldier researched by Rick Molloy, and reading the biographies of parishioner veterans masterfully displayed by Marion Walsh. An added component this year, during the Children's Talk, Eric and Marion Leat shared first-hand stories of the terror and hardship of growing up in England during World War II. What an incredible gift to use these memories to foster in our parish children an appreciation for the sacrifices made for the freedom they enjoy.

Aside from the highs and lows, St. Paul's provides a much-needed steadiness for a young, active family. At the risk of sounding cliché, I can say that St. Paul's is our children's' second home. I

am grateful for this God-filled environment that provides my children with the opportunity to grow in Christ and feel safe to ask questions and take chances. In a time of fast pace and constant distraction, the stability of a parish with faith-filled worship services and wonderful people ranks high among the blessings in my life.

What else does St. Paul's mean to me? It means being part of a church that reaches out into the community and the world to spread love and feed peoples' souls. The new Blessing Box located on our front steps is an example. When the idea was brought forward to host a Blessing Box on the church property and stock it with food, hygiene products and other essentials, the St. Paul's Advisory Board backed the initiative without hesitation. An energetic team is ensuring the box is stocked twice daily and anyone may take or leave an item, no questions asked. There are many churches that strive for many different goals, but it is the action that sets St. Paul's apart. I am proud to be a small part of this movement that is making a difference in the lives of others. A movement that makes and distributes blankets to the homeless and fundraises for the marginalized; a community in which the members share and teach their talents and culture; a pocket of God's family that steps up to help re-build a bridge washed away by a flood halfway across the world so that another pocket of God's family can safely access their place of worship. My soul is fed by being able to serve with St. Paul's and know that the effort put forth makes a difference in the world.

In a nutshell, St. Paul's means a lot to me. I could not imagine a better place to worship, a better place to teach my children what it means to be disciples, or a better place to serve. I encourage you to contemplate all that St. Paul's means to you.

Christmas Blessings,

Chris Heikkinen

Rector's Warden St. Paul's Anglican Church