

# Lynn Valley Herald

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## SANDRA'S SERMON

The following sermon was given at LVUC in late September, 2008. Mollie asked Sandra Severs, who works at 'First' and who is the current Chair of Vancouver Burrard Presbytery to bring us an update of the work of First United Church Mission. Mollie received so many appreciative comments about Sandra's sermon that she sought and received permission to print it in our newsletter. It has been slightly edited for length.

### A Sermon given by the Rev. Sandra Severs of First United Mission at LVUC on Sunday Sept. 28,2008

Based on Exodus 17:1-7 a story about the Israelites and the anger and frustration they direct at both Moses and God as the community copes with the challenges of wandering in the wilderness. And of God's gracious response.

I want to begin this morning by thanking you for this invitation to preach and to share with you in worship some of the story of First United Church Mission. As most of you will know, I am the latest addition to the staff at First . This past January I was called by the Oversight Board to be the Minister of Hospitality and Programmes. It's a newly created position.

Together with Ric Matthews, the Minister of the Mission and Community Life, Tony Weall, our Manager of Administration and the grand energizer bunny of all of clergy, Bob Burrows, Minister of Fund Development, I am part of the Ministry Leadership Team which works together with the rest of the staff at First to build on the work of the past and to chart a new course for the future of First United Church Mission. Ever since I was a student in Toronto over twenty years ago, I have dreamed of working at First.

This is an exciting and challenging time to be in ministry at First. After 123 years of continual existence we no longer have a traditional worshipping congregation among us. When the congregation of First closed over a year ago, a series of focus groups were held with secular and faith organizations and with people who visit our building. Those who gathered were asked a difficult question. "Should First United Church Mission become a social agency and continue its work in that capacity?" The answer that was heard loud and clear from the Downtown Eastside community was "No." "No. You should not become a social agency."

In addition to the "no" , the Mission also heard a resounding "Yes!" "Yes, you must remain a church. You must remain a Christian presence, a sign of hope, on the corner of Hastings and Gore. You must continue to be the place where those who are most marginalized in this society find a welcome." But the question that

none of the community groups and social agencies in the DTES answered was the question: "What does it mean to be a church when you don't have a congregation?"

I don't know about you but the only model of church I know is the congregational model. I grew up in a congregation in southern Ontario. I was trained and ordained to work with

### IN THIS ISSUE

SANDRA'S SERMON.....	1
LIBRARY CORNER.....	4
MUSIC NOTES.....	4
FIRST GIFTS.....	4
FINANCIAL UPDATE.....	5
LVUC A.K.A. ELIZABETH.....	6
ANYTHING BUT BORED.....	8
HARVEST OF THE SPIRIT.....	9
COMING EVENTS.....	9

congregations and until recently that is the only kind of ministry I have done. When I say the word "church", I automatically think of congregational life.

And I'm old enough to remember when the church in the form of a congregation was an important part of the fabric of Canadian society. Many of us who are still a part of congregations have that memory. I heard John Pentland, minister of Hillhurst United Church, Calgary, and member of the Board of Governors at VST preach at the covenanting service for Janet Gear last Thursday. John asked us all the question. "Do you know what it says on the back of the 5 dollar bill?" And taking one out of his jacket pocket he showed us the picture of children engaged in winter sports and read these words of Roch Carrier: "The winters of my childhood were long, long seasons. We lived in three places - the school, the church and the skating rink - but our life was on the skating rink." It is a long time since we occupied 2nd place in the hearts of Canadians.

No matter how affluent the place you live and worship, congregations of the kind most of us are familiar with, are struggling to survive. Struggling to find volunteers, to meet their budget, to keep the rain out and the roof on the building. Very few congregations in the United Church of Canada are flourishing and I think that probably holds true for churches in most denominations.

We are a bit like the Israelites we heard about in our Exodus reading - stuck in the desert without any water and complaining to Moses, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" Modern day church people might ask: "Why did you let us put our energy and passion into the raising of churches like Lynn Valley United only to leave us worrying about our budget?" "Why did you allow us to invest our care and compassion into the people of the Downtown Eastside only to see the congregation at First close, and the problems of the community continue?" And the question we dare not ask: "Is God with us or not?"

If I was making a movie of this section of Exodus, I would stretch out this middle part of the story for a very long time. A very long time. This time in which the Israelites are thirsty and this time in which Moses feels beleaguered. I would stretch it out a very long time because most of us when we deal with conflict or difficult times know that solutions generally do not come quickly. We know that when we pray to God that our prayers are not answered immediately. We know that we have to wait for things to work themselves out, for new ideas to be born, for new leaders to gain maturity. We wait and we wait and we ask the question that the people asked "Is God with us, or not?"

I think that we are in this time period at this moment. A time in which we are feeling our way from something that worked well in the past to something we don't yet know what will be. Perhaps it's a paradigm shift - an opportunity for those of us who are followers of Jesus to imagine ourselves in community in new ways. Of course that process is scary. Sometimes it feels more like we're dying than changing.

That's what we've been doing at First United in this year and a half since the congregation closed. We have been reimagining the place of First United in the Downtown Eastside. We have started to answer the question that emerged out of the focus group conversations: "What does it mean to be a church when one doesn't have a congregation?"

Rereading the stories of Jesus, we have strengthened our focus on a practice of radical hospitality, reminding ourselves that Jesus sat at table with those whom no one else would sit with. With the help of churches from across the Lower Mainland and from ecumenical and interfaith groups like the Seventh Day adventists, the Goans and a Jewish-Muslim peace group, we are inviting those who have food to share with those who don't - not by creating food lineups but by inviting people into conversation over food just like you would if you had guests in your house for dinner.

On Wednesday nights we invite members of the Downtown Eastside community and members of the wider church community - like yourselves - to join together in a shared meal and a time of celebration in which we give thanks for the gift of life - as challenging as it sometime is - and when we give thanks for a community that welcomes us as we are.

We are working at expanding the involvement of staff, volunteers and Downtown Eastside residents in developing our ability to be a caring community. We recognize that people who come to First are not clients of

the Mission but members of the community that make up First United . We recognize that members of our community are individuals who have challenges. They are struggling with poverty. Many of them are mentally ill and self-medicate with illicit drugs. A significant portion of them are brain injured as the result of accident, and cannot live adequately on the meager amount of social assistance the government provides. They are, however, people who have gifts, talents and wisdom to share. Together we are trying to be a caring community -one that looks not only at the need in our own building but also into Chinatown and Strathcona.

Not so long ago, I heard the sound of ambulances out on the street. Glancing out the windows of my office, I saw an ambulance pull up in front of one of the little Chinese stores on Gore. Being a curious person, I went downstairs a little while later to check out what was happening and when I did, I learned that an elderly Chinese woman had fallen on the sidewalk.

Frank, who is our head of security and aboriginal, had seen her fall and crossing the street, he called the ambulance and then went into one of the stores trying to find someone to translate for the ambulance workers. No one would come out of the store with him. Sometimes the neighbourhood is a frightening place and people don't want to get involved.

When he couldn't get any help he went back into the Mission and found Scott, a homeless, Causasian man who has an active crack addiction, who had grown up in Richmond and amazingly enough spoke Cantonese! From the destitution of the folk at First United came this gift of language and an elderly woman was comforted as she waited for the ambulance to take her to hospital.

Among those for whom First is a sanctuary and a place of welcoming there are musicians and artists. There are people with carpentry and cooking skills. Together with the help of churches like this one, they care for each other to the best of their ability. They are not the nameless drug addicts, mentally ill and homeless that Trevor Lautens likes to rant about in the North Shore News. Their names are Carol, Randy, Tyrone, Fernando, Jason, DJ and James. They are people with mums and dads who worry about them. Some of them have children. Many of them have inadequate housing. All of them have dreams. They desperately desire participation in a community in which they can find and give, love and acceptance even on the days when their illnesses and addictions get the upper hand. They desperately desire participation in a community that can hold hope before them, a community of haves and have-nots in which everyone, rich and poor, addicted and clean, mentally well and mentally ill, sheltered and unsheltered, can challenge each other to become more like the persons God wants us to be. And while they are not formally constituted as a congregation, they are, in my mind, the church of Jesus of Nazareth and God is among them.

We had an incident recently that shook us all. A man and a woman started a fight in the church. What began with name-calling quickly escalated into a beating, followed by a stabbing. Within minutes we had the fire department, the police and the paramedics in our building. The man who had been stabbed was quickly loaded into an ambulance. In the Hastings Street entrance a young woman whose face was a bloody mess was being attended to by the paramedics and comforted by gentle Carol, a woman who sleeps every day in the last pew of the sanctuary.

I stood next to a tiny aboriginal woman whom I had never seen before and we talked about what had gone on. I must have looked really shaken because she glanced up into my face, paused for just a second and then she wrapped her arms around me and gave me the most wonderful and unexpected of hugs. It was a moment in which I could respond to the question of the Israelites in a difficult time and say without a hesitation of doubt, "Yes, God is with us."

God is with us. Perhaps there is no other affirmation to make in this time in which we live. We at First do not yet know what we will become for the people of the Downtown Eastside. We who are part of congregations do not yet know what we will become for 21st century Canadian society. We dwell in a time of uncertainty. We can, however, claim the witness of the Israelites who have gone before us and say with confidence, "Yes, God is with us." And that will be enough. That will be more than enough. AMEN AND AMEN.

*Sandra Severs* - Chair of Vancouver Burrard Presbytery

## MUSIC NOTES

The choir has already started rehearsing our Christmas music, "Canticle of Joy," a cantata by Joseph Martin with narration by Pamela Martin. In his introduction, the composer wrote: 'Let the music of Christmas reawaken the promise of God's presence and love in our lives and remind each of us that our faith is a song worth singing – a Canticle of Joy that is made all the more glorious when it is shared.' We will be singing this cantata on Sunday, November 21.

Joseph Martin is one of my favourite composers. His music is very accessible, yet also challenging enough that makes it satisfying musically for both the choristers and accompanist. In "Canticle of Joy" you will be hearing some of your favourite carols in varied choral arrangements set against the rich accompaniment. In fact, in this piece, both the piano and the choir share the limelight. During our rehearsals, it's been demonstrated that the accompaniment ensures that Lori doesn't fall asleep at the piano – because she loves it so much she can't wait to get going with it.

Although we are not singing the cantata in its entirety, all the narrations, musical interludes, and lighting of candles (10 in all, each having its own symbolic meaning) will be presented. And to ensure you all have a part in this cantata, we will be inserting some carols (in their original versions which you are all familiar with) in appropriate places in the music and you will all be invited to join in singing them.

Other than sitting in the pews to enjoy this music, you could also consider joining us in the choir pews. We would love to have you as an open choir member for this Christmas season. And we promise we will treat you nicely. No harassment from the bass section. Guaranteed.

*Mary Yan - Music Director*

## LIBRARY CORNER

The Library has moved!! Thanks to a tremendous effort on the part of Ken, John B and Bud, the books were moved to the crèche. I will be busy for a few weeks tidying up the shelves, but after that I am going shopping!! Look for some new books on the Library cart in the narthex. Please let me know if you have any suggestions for books. See you at the new location soon.

*Helen Preston - Church Librarian*

## First Gifts... help us make room at the Inn

Advent is a special season as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' birth. It is also a special time for the work and ministry at First United which provides an "Inn" for the people of downtown eastside Vancouver where they may sleep in safety, eat a hot meal, find legal information and access the many resources we provide.

The need for the Mission's programs and services is growing

In the winter months last year, 700-1000 people a day came through the front doors of First. Despite financial challenges, we've worked hard to keep the doors and heart of the Mission open so we may carry out this important ministry.

### First Gifts Donations

Special First Gifts donor cards and envelopes are arriving at your Church and will be available in December. The cards invite you to make a one-time donation or join our ongoing monthly donation program. Your participation in First Gifts will go a long way to helping us make room at the Inn this winter and in the future.

We deeply hope that First Gifts will be much more than a fundraising program for First. *May it be a life giving expression of a mission and a ministry which we share in as members and friends of the United Church in the Lower Mainland.*

United Church congregations make a difference!

We are deeply grateful for the blessing of support First United receives from our family of United Churches. Together, we are able to make a difference in the lives of the people who come to First to sleep in safety, to eat a hot meal, to talk with an advocate, and to access the many resources we provide. The mission's programs and services would not be available without the generous support and active participation of people in our congregations. *Thank you.*

<http://www.firstunited.ca/>

## FINANCIAL UPDATE

Our current financial situation contains some very positive results. Following the "Hard Hat Appeal" by Ken McKeen in September for donations towards our Property Improvement Projects, a total of \$8,343 has been raised and donated as at the time of writing. The Soup & Bun Lunch in September raised \$701.50 and the Chicken Sale in October an additional \$550.66. Personal donations are \$7,081! Very many thanks to all who have contributed so generously to help improve the appearance and usefulness of our building.

The recent relocation of the Library will allow the Korean Methodist Congregation to use that space as an office/meeting room. The crèche has now become the new Library and Rainbow Corner has requested, and received approval for, the use of that space during the week (Library access at any time is still available). These changes will generate an additional \$600 per month that will also go towards financing our facility upgrades.

The Fall Fair was again a great success - and not just because of the weather. Recent additional receipts (and expenses!) bring the total raised to almost \$8,500 - not quite a record, but still an excellent result! Again, thanks to the hard work of so many, many people, we can report another very successful fund raiser. This is becoming a real community event and is positively anticipated by many of our neighbours.

The one not-so-positive item in our financial picture is that our regular weekly and monthly offerings have not kept pace with last year or our current-year budget. We are about \$500 behind last year's October 31st total. Our budget calls for \$1,720 to be donated each week, but so far we are averaging about \$1,601 per week. If this deficit remains for the full fiscal year, we will fall short of our offerings target by almost \$6,200 or 6.5%.

On the Expense side of the ledger, we have benefited from Christine Davis's maternity leave in that we were not required to pay her for September or October. Also, both Office and Property costs are below budget. However, the cooler weather is upon us and heating costs will soon soar.

In summary, our October 31, 2008 results are as follows:

### Revenue:

Donations	\$ 27,612	93.0%	of Year-To-Date Budget
Rental Income	\$ 16,672	100.2%	
Fund Raising	\$ 8,490	110.7%	
Interest & Other Income	\$ 129	54.9%	
TOTAL REVENUE	\$ 52,903	97.6%	

### Expenses:

Staff Compensation	\$ 34,567	93.5%
Office & Property	\$ 11,842	89.2%
Program & Other Expenses	\$ 4,315	115.1%
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 50,724	93.9%

YEAR-TO-DATE SURPLUS      \$ 2,175

In summary, our financial report is mostly good news at this point in time, but with some notes of caution of which we should all be aware.

For those interested in such things, the audited financial reports as at June 30th, 2008 are available for viewing on the notice board opposite the general office.

*Roger Eastwood - Treasurer*

## LVUC a.k.a. Elizabeth

The following is a sermon that Mollie preached on Sunday Nov. 2nd It is based on the work that we did as a congregation on Saturday October 4, 2008 when we addressed the issue of LVUC's unique Identity in terms of how it will impact our future. Mollie will preach on Elizabeth again during Advent since that is Elizabeth's 'season;' a unique time of preparation when we look forward to the arrival of God's unexpected gifts. Elizabeth is known as the Mother of John the Baptizer and a cousin of Mary, Mother of Jesus.

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Friends, this morning I want to talk with you about Elizabeth. She is a character that has been created by this congregation as we work together on becoming ever clearer about who Lynn Valley United Church is, and who it is not.

A few weeks ago you created Elizabeth, at our most recent congregational gathering. I asked you to imagine - if we were to describe this congregation as an individual - who this church might be. After we read together from 1st Corinthians 12 and talked about what it means to be the Body of Christ in the world.

Paul writes: "YOU are body of Christ." Not someone else - you! "

During our Identity gathering I asked you a range of questions to help you get at this business of discerning your unique Identity.

The first was "When you consider Lynn Valley United as a person - is this cong. a man or a woman?"

While some of you struggled with this question for awhile, gradually you started to have some fun with the exercise, and eventually you told me, "Lynn Valley is a woman. " I then asked you "How old is this person?" And you said, "She's in her early sixties."

I then asked you a string of other questions: "What does she do for a living? How does she look? What's her health like? What does she do for vacation? What does she eat for breakfast? To what radio stations does she listen? What are her favourite TV programmes?" And, "What changes has she been dealing with lately?"

And when it came time for you to come up with a name for her you agreed on Elizabeth. As the table group said which first picked her name, "Elizabeth does not stand at the centre of the stage. That place is reserved for Mary, the mother of Jesus. But Elizabeth is not far away from centre stage and she has an important role to play in the story."

So, this is what I learned from you: Elizabeth of Lynn Valley -the body of Christ in this place-, is in her early 60's. She is semi- retired, having worked for many years in the helping professions.

Currently, Elizabeth is at a crossroads and she knows that whatever comes in the future it will be significantly different from her past. But Elizabeth has wisdom. She has learned from her own life experience that when you come to a crossroad, it's worth taking the time to find your way with God.

Elizabeth knows that her life could go in one of several directions. Because she is in good health and has quite a bit of energy she is aware that while she is interested in and open to many new possibilities, she also has to watch how much she takes on.

Because it's important that she find the right balance, between taking good care of herself on the one hand and reaching out, on the other, in order to make a difference in God's world.

While Elizabeth is well rooted in the community she is also freer than at any other stage of her life. Her children are adults, with kids of their own, and while she sees them often none of them are dependent on her now.

Compared to earlier generations of women Elizabeth is relatively well off though she will never have a life of luxury. She is financially independent in the sense that she owns her home but she is also grateful for the rental income provided by her long standing tenant who lives in the basement suite. (Anyone think 'Rainbow Corner Daycare'?)

Quite often Elizabeth thinks about her future, with or without her house and garden. She knows that someday it will get to be too much and so she wonders about downsizing. She wonders, "How big a place am I going to need at the next stage of my life?" and "How will I know when I have reached that stage?"

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Sometimes when she thinks about the future Elizabeth admits that at times she finds change, challenging. She's felt sad when she looks around and sees her community changing. But she's also willing to look in the new stores that are opening, even though she's not sure how often she will actually shop in some of them.

But Elizabeth enjoys the fact that there are three gourmet coffee shops now within a block of where she lives because sometimes she likes to meet her friends there and treat herself to a really good cup of coffee.

When Elizabeth first got established in Lynn Valley she was busy with her own home and family. Now she notices a lot of parents with young children around in her part of North Vancouver. She would love sometimes to reach out to those younger people and get to know them. Indeed she would be very pleased to share with them whatever wisdom and knowledge she has gained over the years - particularly about living a life of faith in today's world.

At the same time she wonders how much she has in common with these young parents and their offspring.

As Lynn Valley United Church 'Elizabeth' knows that if she is have a vital future, she will have to open her doors and welcome new people in. But more than that, she wants to be of service to the newer people in her community. She would do anything she can to introduce them to the rich life that one can find in the Church, while also challenging them to nurture their faith be learning about, celebrating, seeking and sharing God's love in the world.

Even though Elizabeth does not have all the answers to the challenges she faces as the Body of Christ she trusts that if she stays in close touch with God; and if she both asks for God's help and then listens for God's new directions, the future -while different from the past- will be promising.

Earlier, we heard the story of our spiritual forbears as they ready themselves to enter the strange new land which God promised to them through their ancestors Abraham and Sarah.

Right at this very time, they are also having to get used to Joshua, their new leader. Together, the Hebrew people with Joshua, are being called by God to cross a formidable boundary, the river Jordan.

This massive, flooding river is what will separate them from what has become familiar to them -the ways of the desert-and the unknown;-the future that God has in mind for them .

As Joshua stands at the waters' edge looking across to where they need to go, he knows that the only way he can lead his people forward is by putting all of his faith in God. The river is huge, strong and swift and dangerous. But taking God at God's word, Joshua orders the priests to pick up and carry the Covenant Box out and into the river.

Trusting in God the priests step out into the river Jordan. And as they do it seems as if God enters the waters ahead of them. And soon, miraculously the impossible is happening. The flooding waters gather in a heap until all the people cross over on dry land.

Throughout the Bible we are reminded-as individuals and as a community of faith- that we will find our utmost security not when we cling tightly to what we already know or have experienced but when we let ourselves go in order to sink into God.

When God's people let go and let God, they manage to give God a lot more room than was there before whether it is in their minds or their hearts, or whether it's out there in the life of the world.

And with all that extra room in which to bring new life to the world God strengthens and empowers us that we might do exactly what needs to be done.

Elizabeth wonders about her future sometimes. But then she has also learned that sometimes the way to the future is to also look back from time to time. Because whenever she looks back she remembers the times when she could do nothing else but place all her faith in God. It's then that she has discovered that God is more than trustworthy, more than present in her life, and more than ready to graciously show her the way forward, one step at a time.

Friends, Elizabeth, this is the gospel of Christ. Thanks be to God.

*Mollie Williams - Interim Minister*

## ANYTHING BUT BORED

Well the Fall has started off with a great deal of activity. People have said that they have noticed changes and I would agree that there is a new vitality and energy that has been missing for quite a while. It is good to be taking ideas and putting them into action.

The Short Term Measures Committee has been working diligently taking the wishes that the congregation made and turning them into reality by spearheading projects and showing us how to make our dreams happen.

The Library has most recently been moved into the old Crèche location which has made it possible to rent out the old library space to our Korean congregation for their much needed use as a permanent office and the new Library space will also be rented by our Daycare. These two negotiations have resulted in a revenue stream that will provide long term funding for our projects. Space is our most marketable asset at the present time and we are fortunate to have been able to utilize it to our advantage at this time.

Our Long Term Planning Committee has been hard at work looking at what might be possible if we were to look at redeveloping our property. This is one of the topics that was brought up by the congregation at the March workshop session. The committee will be ready to present to the congregation an initial understanding of their findings sometime in February.

These types of plans take years and years to bring into fruition so we, as a congregation, need to understand the processes involved in order to be able make the proper choices when we are called to do so.

Recently we had the last couple of pews removed from the south side of the sanctuary in order to provide a multi-purpose space at the rear of the sanctuary. We had the opportunity to try out making our sandwiches upstairs for the first time in order to keep the Sandwich Making project with the Coffee Time. Although there was concern about how it might work, there is optimism and a belief that it can be made to work.

The She Shares group has taken on the responsibility of spearheading the coordination of the celebrations for our 100th and 50th Anniversary Celebrations. The first project will be the sale of special mugs adorned with a lovely design hand drawn by Lori Chang-Foidl. These will be ready for early December. In January, we will start collecting recipes for an Anniversary Cookbook. The last one was published for the 75th/25th Anniversary so we are due for some new meals. The plan at this time is to host a Celebration Weekend to be held the last weekend in May 2009. This is the same weekend as Lynn Valley Days and we are hoping that opening up our doors on that day might just provide the gesture needed to invite new families to peek inside. We are proposing to have an event on Saturday morning, an evening musical celebration and a special service on Sunday morning followed by

a luncheon. Everyone will be asked to send out invitations to past members in order to truly celebrate this memorable year.

We have also taken the next step in the process towards hiring our new minister as the members of our Joint Needs Assessment Committee were confirmed. The members of the committee are: Helen Bloom, Jennifer Eastwood, Emma Gibbons, Jason Haight, Neil Jorgenson, Shirley McKeen and Rick Turner. The Board is very pleased with this committee and feels that it truly represents the varied demographics as well as the wonderful spirit and integrity of our congregation.

As a Board we are called to listen to the wishes of the congregation as a whole and try to provide leadership and stewardship. As our congregation goes through these times of change and challenge, it is sometimes difficult as people who may not see all the facets of a particular decision feel left out or unheard. We try to communicate as much as we can with the congregation either one-on-one or as a whole. If anyone has an issue that they do not understand, we ask you to please contact a member of the Board directly and we will try to open up the lines of communication so everyone can feel as encouraged by the changes we are experiencing as those who are participating most actively in implementing them.

This is our church, doing the work of our God, in our community. We are all in it together.

*Myrna Pearce  
Chair of the Board*

## HARVEST OF THE SPIRIT

Let those love now who never loved before,  
Whilst those who always loved, love even more,  
Let all who feel rejected, seek and find  
New hope, new warmth, and healing peace of  
mind.  
Let those who think their faith has ebbed away  
Stretch out their hands, to grasp a brighter day;  
Let those who are imprisoned, far and wide,  
Find freedom, where all men walk side by side.  
Let those who have abundant blessings, give  
To those in dark despair, the will to live,  
Let all those who love, now sow and reap and  
share  
The harvest of the Spirit - everywhere.

*Iris Hesselden*

## COMING EVENTS

Date	Event
Sun November 30	I st Sunday in Advent
Sun December 7	II nd Sunday in Advent
Wed December 10	Board Meeting
Sun December 14	III rd Sunday in Advent
Sun December 21	IV th Sunday in Advent
Wed December 24	Christmas Eve Service
Sun January 11	Helping Hands
Sun January 18	Newsletter Deadline
Wed January 21	Board Meeting
Sun January 25	Helping Hands

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