

### Greetings from the Bethlehem Aboriginal Fellowship Board

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. For those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned." Isaiah 9:2

For over fifty years I, as a single woman, celebrated Christmas with my parents at their home. The first Christmas morning after they died was weird for me, very weird. There were no presents, no family, no traditions, and no scrambled eggs with raisin toast. I joined my siblings in the afternoon to celebrate, but the morning was lonely and I felt quite lost as to what Christmas would look like for me now.

In this issue of our newsletter we have asked people from our church to talk about what makes Christmas difficult for them. We also asked them to tell us how Jesus makes a difference in their Christmas. Some of their responses to what is difficult are pretty stark, some predictable. But what brings joy are their answers to how Jesus makes a difference to their Christmas.

Bethlehem Aboriginal Fellowship continues to be a church where people in our community experience Christ through a women's Bible study, a men's support group, our foodbank, good sermons from guest preachers, worship through song, communion and prayer; through fellowship, through our muffin outreach and through a variety of youth programs. We are working hard at rising up our people to be leaders. Our new vision statement is to connect with our North End Community through experiencing and sharing the love of Jesus to overflowing so this neighborhood is transformed. Perhaps one day more and more people will be drawn to live in this community because of the love of Jesus experienced here!

We've had some wonderful Sunday services lately. We blessed a nervous young man who was stepping out for his first evangelistic outreach by sharing his story. A painful wound in a foot was healed. We gathered around one of our men who is involved in a difficult ministry and prayed for him together. We also gathered in prayer around a wife who had a fearful situation at home. Some generous people have donated food that we are able to give to people after the service and people are getting to know each other over coffee at the end of the service.

After a year or two I figured out what I wanted my Christmas to look like. I began to have my own traditions, eat my favourite breakfast food and decided how I wanted to celebrate Jesus' arrival. I love Christmas morning now. I can't imagine my life without Jesus at Christmas. And as you will read, many of our little congregation can't either. Indeed, Jesus is the Light in the land which many think of as the shadow of darkness. His light has dawned on our church and community and we are very thankful.

Have a wonderful Christmas celebrating His arrival.  
Beth Wilton



*Farewell.....* We'd like to say a huge thank you and farewell to Lois Mawby who was our office administrator for a number of years as well as Sigita Lukaviciute who was our bookkeeper. Both of these women were gifts to us during a difficult time and they were amazing!

### Prayer Corner

- ❖ Please pray for wisdom, grace and joy for our children's program leaders – Penny and her daughter Mackenzie. They are such a blessing to us and love our children dearly.
- ❖ Pray for wisdom for the Board as they endeavour to grow the leadership of the church.
- ❖ Pray that our women who attend our women's Bible study would continue to grow in their relationship with the Lord and each other.
- ❖ We need two people to substitute in the children's ministry once a month from 2:15-4:30. We have children's ministry leaders who are there 3 weeks out of the four. These are paid positions.
- ❖ Pray for the Lord to continue His amazing financial provision for BAF. We are so grateful to Him and to those He prompts to send provision so we are able to continue the outreach to the community around Bethlehem.

## *Christmas – difficulties and joys*

We asked people in our congregation what was difficult for them at Christmas and how did Jesus make a difference to them at Christmas time. Here are some responses:

S: Something always seems to happen to my health around Christmas. Jesus is everything! I see him intervene for me over and over again even when I don't trust him sometimes. He's always there.

A: It's hard to buy everybody Christmas presents. Just knowing that He is in my heart is more than anything – more than presents.

C: It's hard having the money for Christmas gifts. When I help out at different parties and groups, Jesus supplies through the meals and gifts at these parties.

L: Christmas is a financial stress. We remember that Christmas is about Jesus – putting him back at the centre and making him the focus.

A: It's going to be the first year without the whole family together. He brings in new family – our church family to help us feel like a family.

J: I see the trap of consumerism and materialism that sucks the life out of people. Jesus offers hope of living a life free from needing things and wanting stuff. I feel like I can find this freedom by celebrating the love of Christ that he brings to earth.

A: It's difficult this year because the family is not together. My husband has gone and we are not able to see a grandchild. I bake Jesus a birthday cake and when I bring it out we celebrate Jesus. His Presence becomes very strong and we are all in awe of Him. We wish Jesus a Happy Birthday and talk about good things.

D: This Christmas the children's father won't be in their lives and my oldest son is especially missing his dad. There won't be the same amount of presents for the children, but I am attempting to share with them how Christmas is about Jesus. I feel Jesus is filling up my life with His love and my children and I are praying together. I know Jesus will give us an amazing gift of His love this Christmas because that's what it's all about. He is the greatest gift.

From one of the youth - M: Christmas is a hard time for me. Five years ago around Christmas is where my mental illnesses first hit me hard. It was the first time in my life I ever wanted to die so bad I tried to do it. To this day Christmas is always a reminder that my mental illnesses haven't gone away. It's also a time when all my supports are gone to be with their families. When Christmas became about God and not Santa for me it has helped me a lot through the holiday. It became a time where I was more reminded of God's presence. On Christmas I try to stay in contact with my Christian friends, but it's challenging every year. God is all there is for me around Christmas as I can't see my family and my friends are gone.

From another youth - J: Christmas is hard sometimes for me and my family. I'm not always around them. There isn't always a dinner and sometimes I don't get any presents. If I never had Jesus around I wouldn't know the true meaning behind Christmas. I would be spoiled and upset when I didn't get the present I asked for. I was like that until I learned it's the thought that counts. This year my family can't afford a Christmas dinner, so I was invited by my lovely friend Bethany to join her family dinner. The "thought that counts" is that my Christmas present is being loved and invited into another home to celebrate Jesus's birthday and have a wonderful day.

## Meet our New Board Member



Alan Edward is our newest Board member and is from the Cowichan Nation of Vancouver Island on the West Coast of British Columbia.

As a young boy we moved from Vancouver Island to the mainland where my parents and grandparents were commercial fishermen. It was a blessing to have moved as it saved us the grief of the Indian Residential school. My younger years were good growing up in the culture and traditions of the Indian religion. In time my father became angry and later violent due to alcohol use. From about age 14 to 21 I drank out of fear of my dad. I started attending AA and realized I needed to start practising the steps – especially the one about the “higher power”. A friend gave me a card that talked about “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’ (John 14:6) Reading this opened up my heart and spirit and I realized this was the spiritual fulfillment I had been looking for. I gave my life to Christ. Later I married Donna and we attended a native bible school and transferred to Briercrest Bible College. I was sober for 17 years.

I started working as a Federal Corrections officer but had a lot of unresolved emotions and anger because of my father. I didn't cope well and started to drink again. It came to a point where I no longer had control of my drinking and Donna and I separated. We had four sons. When I became suicidal, Donna helped me enroll in the BC Teen Challenge (TC) program. It has now been over 10 years since I stopped drinking. Teen Challenge is a good program and I ended up working for them for several years. Last year I accepted a position with TC in Winnipeg facilitating Bible studies in the prisons. Just before I left BC I googled native churches in Winnipeg and came across BAF. I started attending here because BAF is similar to the church I attend in Vancouver and I come from a Baptist background.

## Make a Donation

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[www.bethlehem.ca](http://www.bethlehem.ca)