



David's Dialogue

Dear members and friends of St. Matthew's

So, Peter said to them, "I begin to see how true it is that God shows no partiality [...]. This is the message God has sent to the people of Israel, the Good News of peace proclaimed through Jesus Christ, who is saviour of all. Acts: 10:34

It has been more than two years now since St. Matthew's became an Affirming Ministry. What is Affirming Ministry? An Affirming Ministry is a church or other faith community, like a camp or an outreach organization, that is explicitly and publicly welcoming of people of different gender identities and sexual orientations. We don't just say it. We do it. Our flags in the sanctuary and in the entrance have been noticed and have made an important difference to many who have entered the church. And the work continues. Every year, we have collaborated with Richmond Hill United in this work, including marching in the York Region Pride Parade.

The Bible is full of stories of change. When Peter and other early Christians realized that non-Jews could be meant to receive the Gospel they were shocked. Our scripture says, "**The Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter were surprised that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the gentiles also[.]**" They finally understand, that anyone regardless of faith or ethnic background could receive the Holy Spirit and recognize Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, the risen saviour.

This is what Peter says in response: "**I *begin* to see... *any* person of *any* nationality who fears God and does what is right *is acceptable to God*.**" For the earliest followers of Jesus, this meant change but not capitulation of their most deeply held beliefs, as some feared. It meant changing their interpretation of Scripture but not abandoning it. It meant changing their sense of identity as Jews but not discarding it. It meant changing their religious priorities and practices but keeping their commitment to Jewish things like regular worship, prayer, generosity and care for others. Suddenly they saw their community of faith differently.

Peter is just "beginning" to understand the fullness of the gospel. So are we. If

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

we want to continue to grow in our understanding and faith we will have to open our ears and listen. Prayer is most often thought of as a conversation with God, where we speak and then listen. If we are good at prayer, we may find it is mostly about listening.

Perhaps someone or something is asking to be understood, forgiven. Perhaps God is speaking to us, asking us to change a little, to make more room for others. Perhaps we are afraid and God is telling us everything will be okay. Perhaps the voice we hear is asking us to put our trust in our loving Creator in a way we have resisted up until now. Lets open our ears and listen!

Those people who really started to change the thinking of the United Church in the 1980s, saying that people of different sexual orientations belonged in church just as they are, pointed to this story as an example of the kind of change that was needed. The church often gets stuck in an old ways of thinking. It is my prayer that, like Peter, we will have the courage to open our hearts to the new directions of the Spirit, to really think about the kinds of changes she may be asking us to make.

Peace Like a River,

Rev. David Kim-Cragg ᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱᐱ *wahkohtowin*;
Minister at St. Matthew's United Church (he/him)



Jan 15, 2026. God must have decided that we needed to be wrapped in a blanket. He sent down a blanket of snow which allowed us to slow down for the day, have a tea and read or watch a show. Still others chose to face the storm and drive to work. I hope their return trip is safe. The photo is in colour; but, we were given shades of black and white to enjoy today!

Photo by Doreen Coyne.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

- Saturday, Feb. 7 from 10am to 3pm. Memory Living Invites you to join in their SOUP-FEST event. Yes, there will be soup to try, refreshments, music from a live group playing in the sanctuary, and several not for profit vendors—including ourselves—who will be on hand to discuss their charity.
- Rooks to Cooks will be teaching another group of young people to cook during March break (March 16 to 20 in our Hall and Kitchen.) You may have noticed they are offering a few “PA” day cooking classes. The first was on Jan. 16, 2026.
- Feb. 8 & March 22. The Truth and Reconciliation Circle will convene on Feb 8 and March 22 immediately following the worship service. In March, Sarah Loretta Schuster will be our special guest.
- Feb. 15, the CE&O group is offering a Soup & Bun Luncheon for \$10 per person.
- Feb. 18, 6 to 8pm. Starting Feb. 18th, Rev. David will hold a Lenten Reflections study on the Women of the Bible every Wednesday during Lent. This is a seven week session ending on April 1st.
- Feb. 22. The Annual Congregation Meeting will be held after the service.
- Feb. 28: VOLUNTEERS NEEDED. Each year Blue Door’s Out of the Cold program (OoTC) organizes a walkathon in Richmond Hill called “Coldest Night of the Year”. This initiative is in support of our neighbours experiencing homelessness and is OoTC’s primary fundraising activity. At the end of the walk the participants are provided a light warm snack which, in the past, has been donated by local businesses. This year it was suggested that the local faith communities might be willing to support OoTC by providing this snack. There will be approximately 400 people and will take place at Lauremont School at 500 Elgin Mills Road East. Richmond Hill UC will look after organizing this event but needs volunteers to assist with preparation and serving on walk day. If you are able to help out at this event, please let Valery know at the church office.
- The St. Matthew’s Annual Report will be emailed in a few weeks.

Missed a service—Here are links to recent services:

- ♦ Dec. 24. [Video replay](#). This is a new link for our Christmas Eve service.
- ♦ Jan. 04. [Video replay](#). The sermon talked about Rev. David Bible studies in Saskatoon in which they focused on Bible stories about women.
- ♦ Jan. 11. [Video replay](#). The service talked about the word meaning change and then other changes that our church and others have made.
- ♦ Jan. 18. No replay for today as there was a problem with the recording.
- ♦ Jan. 25. This service was cancelled due to the snow storm. We’ll hold that service on Feb. 1st. No updates were made to the bulletin. Hopefully February’s snowfalls will be lighter.

A Visit From Our Recently Arrived Family

Nelab & Shugufah Qarizada are the sponsors of our Afganee refugee family, the Aminy family) who landed in Canada a few months ago. Nelab and Shugufah emailed to see if it was alright for them and the Aminy family to visit our church. The answer was a resounding “Yes!”. They visited us on Dec. 21st.

Our congregation enjoyed meeting the family. We are so grateful that they made the time to come and see us. The sponsored family members included the two parents, one young adult and one child over the age of majority. They all landed safely in Toronto on October 22, 2025. What a blessing that they have made it to Canada and are settling in well. So wonderful they are able to be with other family members again. They expressed their heartfelt gratitude for our assistance and support in sponsoring them. It is so good to hear that the things we do as a congregation can have such a positive impact.

We also wanted to tell them of our gratitude for the beautiful gift, a rug, they gave to us. A photo of the rug is shown on the right.

The rug was featured during our Christmas Eve service and helped to make our celebration of Christmas very meaningful this year. Its beautiful deep red colour is perfect for the season of Christmas and warmed out hearts. It was left on display in our sanctuary for a few weeks for others to see. The Aminy's older son had a birthday on December 23rd. It must have meant a lot to share this with more of his family members here this year.

We should hold the family in our hearts and prayers, with special prayers that they might be reunited as soon as possible with their oldest sons who are still in Afghanistan.

They gave thanks for our efforts to help refugee families and wished us all the best for 2026. And we wish them a wonderful, peaceful 2026 year.

BTW: Our Treasurer, Rick Knight, manages the monthly allowance that is provided to the recent arrivals over the next two years. We thank Rick for his time and efforts providing this service.



Photo by Doreen Coyne