

## Christmas Services at St. Helen's

### Dec. 17, 4pm – Christmas Stories and Songs

A joy-filled concert featuring local band, Celtic Folk, Christmas carols, and storytelling, followed by cookies and refreshments.

### Dec. 20, 7pm – Quiet Christmas

A time of prayers for healing and peace for all who are finding the Christmas season difficult

### Dec. 24 - Christmas Eve Communion Services

*(We will celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent at 8am and 10am)*

**4pm** – a shorter service designed for children and their grown-ups with music led by the Emmaus Praise Band

**7pm** – a longer service ending in the beauty of candlelight with music led by the Emmaus Praise Band

**10pm** - a longer service ending in the beauty of candlelight with music led by the St. Helen's Choir

### Dec. 25, 10am – Christmas Day Communion

### Dec. 31 – First Sunday of Christmas

**8am** – a short Communion service with no music

**10am** – a sung Communion service for all ages

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*Reflections and prayers were written by the Venerable Rhonda Waters who serves as the incumbent of St. Helen's Orleans and archdeacon of East Ontario in the Diocese of Ottawa.*

*Stories from Belong Ottawa were collected and written by the Rev. Deacon Jarrett Carty who serves as the chaplain at Belong Ottawa and is also Professor and Principal of the Liberal Arts College at Concordia University in Montreal.*

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## Belong in the Kingdom of God

### Reflections for the Season of Advent

The season of Advent turns our attention to the promise of God's Kingdom – that place and time where all creation will live in harmony with God and with one another. The birth of Jesus marked the beginning of the Kingdom's coming and so, even as we wait for its completion, we are invited to see it *now* and to live in it *now*. The Advent themes of hope, peace, joy, and love are expressions of the Kingdom that are available to us even in the midst of the struggles and sorrows of the world. And, when we live by these values, we join Jesus in proclaiming the Good News – the Kingdom of God has drawn near and everyone is welcome.

We all belong in the Kingdom of God!



***We know we all belong in the Kingdom of God – let's make sure everyone has a place to belong in Ottawa, too.***

**Belong Ottawa** is a community ministry of the Diocese of Ottawa, providing day programs at three locations: Centre 454, the Well/la Source, and St. Luke's Table. Belong Ottawa's vision of an inclusive community where no one is marginalized and everyone is valued and supported offers us a glimpse of the Kingdom of God. **You are invited to share in this beautiful and sacred work.**

Visit [belongottawa.ca](http://belongottawa.ca) to make a donation or learn about volunteer opportunities. Gifts of gift cards or cold weather gear (new socks/underwear, gently used mitts, gloves, toques, coats, etc) can be delivered to St. Helen's or directly to Belong Ottawa at 154 Somerset Street West, Monday-Friday, 8-1.

*\*all names and details from Belong Ottawa stories have been changed to protect confidentiality*

## Week One – Hope

### Scripture Reading – Isaiah 64:1-4,8-9

O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence - as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil - to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.

Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Do not be exceedingly angry, O Lord, and do not remember iniquity for ever. Now consider, we are all your people.

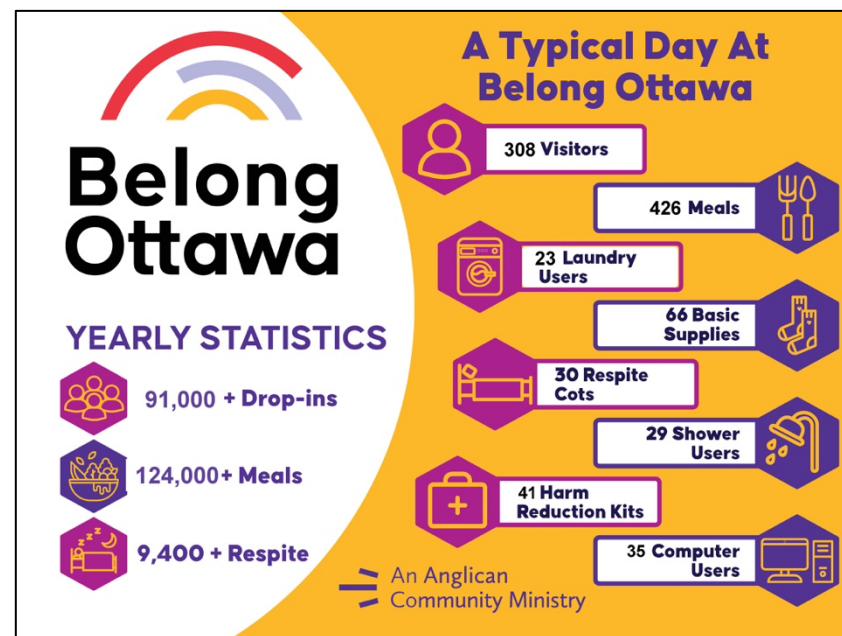
### Reflections

*The world is a difficult place for many people and it is hard to imagine how it can ever be set right. Yet even in the midst of great suffering, there is hope – flashes of kindness and compassion, moments of peace and quiet, glimpses of the world God desires for God's creation.*

*The prophet Isaiah calls on God to “tear open the heavens and come down” to do the mighty works of power that only God can do and to remember that we are the works of God's hands, creations made in love and in need of God's saving acts.*

*The prophet also reminds us that we are the works of God's hands, shaped according to God's own design and in God's own image. We are all God's people. We all belong in the kingdom of God.*

*In this Advent season, don't just wait for Christ to come – call on Christ to come. Look around with the expectation that you will see him, bringing the hope that lights fires of justice and mercy in our own hearts.*



*In addition to these essential services, Belong Ottawa offers social activities, opportunities for creative expression, mental and spiritual wellness supports, and critical links to agencies and organizations from across the city.*

### Belong Ottawa's Mission and Vision Statement

We provide safe spaces  
that connect people and create community.  
We offer programs that address basic needs  
and foster dignity, wellness, and hope for all.

We envision an inclusive community  
where no one is marginalized  
and everyone is valued and supported.

Visit [www.belongottawa.ca](http://www.belongottawa.ca) to donate or volunteer.

## More about Belong Ottawa



**Belong Ottawa was created when three community ministry day programs realized the power and the joy of working together.**

Centre 454, St. Luke's Table, and the Well/la Source each carried out vital work in their neighbourhoods, building relationships of respect and care with people dealing with precarious housing, food insecurity, and/or homelessness. Some of the details differed but the core values and priorities were the same and, as community ministries of the Diocese of Ottawa, the programs already shared a deep knowledge and appreciation for one another.

During COVID-19, the three community ministries realized they could provide deeply needed services more effectively and more creatively by working together and, by 2023, Belong Ottawa was made official. One executive team and one management board now supports three sites, celebrating and drawing on the strengths of each to make the whole even greater.

This is good news indeed because the complexity and urgency of the work done by the staff and volunteers of Belong Ottawa has never been greater. Ottawa is facing a critical shortage in housing and shelter space; growing food insecurity a deathly opioid crisis; and an influx of asylum seekers in need of basic supports.

**Every day, the Belong Ottawa team offer the sacred gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love to a world in desperate need of them. As members of the Diocese of Ottawa, we can be proud of this work. As Christians, we are called to participate in it.**

### Hope at Belong Ottawa

Consider the story of Arianne. Arianne came to Belong one spring seeking to find some hope in her despair. She was living in the shelters. She was a long way from home and loved ones, as she was a citizen of a faraway country, and she longed to return. Over the weeks and months that she spent at Belong, she began to tell her story.

Arianne left her country to claim refugee status in Canada. She was terribly persecuted and left fleeing for her life. Or so she had believed. While in Canada, after many months on the street, Arianne had been hospitalized and diagnosed with a mental disorder. This affliction created the delusions of persecution. She now took medication for her disorder and saw many things more clearly. She was also now supposed to be deported.

But this was also the pandemic, and Arianne's country was one of the most restrictive in the world. She came to Belong, with few possessions and no support, and in a seemingly endless, hopeless limbo of waiting to leave a country that would not keep her to a country that did not want her back.

Hope carried Arianne through the darkness. The next Advent, nearly a year after finally leaving Canada, Arianne wrote a postcard from her home, writing how thankful she was to have found hope amid her despair.

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### Prayer

Holy God, you promise that hope is stronger than despair but we are a fearful and forgetful people. Help us to trust your promise as we prepare for the coming of your Son who welcomes us all into your Kingdom. Amen.

*light a candle*

The day of hope is coming.  
**Come, Lord Jesus, come.**

## Week Two – Peace

### Scripture Reading – Isaiah 40:1-5,10-11

“Comfort, O comfort my people”, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

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### Reflections

*Day after day, week after week, our prayers of peace seem to go unanswered. We know that true and lasting peace, whether in the world or on our streets, in our homes or in our hearts, will only be possible with God. We know, too, that we are called to be peacemakers, even in the face of seemingly impossible odds.*

*Like the prophet, we are called to offer comfort to God's people, bringing the good news of forgiveness and of God's steadfast. This is the source of peace, knowing ourselves to be safe and loved and so set free from fear and worry and grasping.*

*Lay claim to this good news. Let God's peace settle deep inside you. Speak the peace you know so all can hear. We all belong in the Kingdom of God.*

*This Advent, don't just pray for peace – make it. Look for opportunities to bring comfort and calm; look for opportunities to work towards reconciliation and understanding; look for opportunities to ease people's burdens.*

### Love at Belong Ottawa

Mary's Advent anthem tells us that God lifts up the lowly and fills the hungry. But as she sings, she ponders in her heart what it means to carry and raise the Son of God. She will come to know the sorrows of crucifixion; but she will also know the rejoicing of the resurrection. Mary shows us the divine love at work in motherhood. Sometimes that divine love is hard to see in other mothers but it still abides in them.

Consider the story of Helen. Helen lost her son to a drug overdose some time ago. She blames herself for his death. But she also lives with a serious mental illness that causes her to think that her loss of her son is fresh, again and again.

Consider the story of Leah. Leah was living in precarious housing and in and out of shelters. But Leah was also pregnant. One night she was hospitalized and had a miscarriage. The next day she came to Belong to seek help in finding a proper burial for her miscarried child.

Consider the story of Megan. Megan is the single mother of an autistic son, who cannot stay in the local public school because it doesn't have the staff and resources to teach him. He must be taught online, at home. But this means Megan cannot work. She must sacrifice for her son's well-being.

All these mothers share in Mary's love: a self-giving love of the kingdom of God.

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### Prayer

Holy God, you promise that love is stronger than hate but we are a fearful and forgetful people. Help us to trust your promise as we prepare for the coming of your Son who welcomes us all into your Kingdom. Amen.

*light candles*

The day of hope is coming. The day of peace is coming.  
The day of joy is coming. The day of love is coming.  
Come, Lord Jesus, come.

## Week Four – Love

### Scripture Reading – Luke 1:46-55

Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

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### Reflections

*Over the past weeks, we have waited in – and worked for - hope, peace, and joy. Today, we turn to love, just in time to be swept up in the outpouring of God's love in the miracle of Christ's birth. For, in Christ, love is made incarnate, given flesh and sent into the world to live and heal and teach and serve. In Christ, love is revealed to be stronger than heaven; stronger than sin; stronger than the grave. This is the love which makes all things new.*

*The sentimentality of Christmas can make us lose sight of the power of the story of Jesus's conception and birth but Mary's song brings it back into focus. Mary knows that she is carrying the Son of the Most High, God's promised Messiah, and that his birth will change the world.*

*Mary's song is not a Christmas carol; it is an Advent anthem. It is a song for all times and all places where people find themselves cast aside or oppressed. It is a song of defiant hope, of unyielding peace, of persistent joy, and of fierce love. It is a song of faith. It is a song that proclaims we all belong in the Kingdom of God.*

*This Advent (and beyond), don't just feel love. Do love. Be love. And remember that you are loved, now and always, by the God who made you and redeems you and sustains you.*

### Peace at Belong Ottawa

For the people at Belong, there is scarcely ever peace in the shelters, peace in the rooming houses, or peace in the streets. These are places where conflicts erupt with almost a certain constancy. Life for the marginalized is too often one of rupture and brokenness—in families, in friends, and in homes. But true divine peace, even little glimpses of it can still be found.

Consider the story of Susan. Susan's young life was anything but peaceful. As a child, she was physically abused by her father. She married young and had two children. Her husband began to violently abuse her too. After leaving him, she began to struggle with addiction, leading to a time when her children were taken from her and put into foster care. While recovering from her addiction, Susan met another partner. They have now been together and sober for many years. She has restored relationships with her two children and is now a proud grandmother to several grandchildren.

Susan's story is not so much about peace coming to her as it is peace that she has made and continues to make. At Belong, Susan is a community regular: at morning coffee, during games, or special occasions. She is a peacemaker who brings comfort and calm; she looks for opportunities to ease people's burdens—for she knows the life of burdens too well. Therefore some of Belong's most anxious community members sit beside her, taking comfort in her offerings of peace.

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### Prayer

Holy God, you promise that peace is stronger than fear but we are a fearful and forgetful people. Help us to trust your promise as we prepare for the coming of your Son who welcomes us all into your Kingdom. Amen.

*light candles*

The day of hope is coming. The day of peace is coming.  
Come, Lord Jesus, come.

## Week Three – Joy

### Scripture Reading – Isaiah 61:1-3,11

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion - to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

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### Reflections

*The Christmas marketing machine confuses joy with cheer, sparkly but thin. Joy is deeper and richer, able to hold space for the truth of suffering while insisting on the goodness of God's creation and the steadfastness of God's love. Joy is an orientation of the heart that holds firm in all circumstances.*

*Isaiah proclaims the promise of God – that justice and joy go hand in hand. And this is not just a promise for the future, even though we are still waiting for its perfection. The garden has already been planted and, even now, is growing into its full beauty.*

*In the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus identifies himself as the inheritor of Isaiah's anointing and so we, too, are called to share in this ministry. Rejoice! We all belong in the Kingdom of God.*

*This Advent, don't settle for tinselly cheer – orient your heart toward true joy. Seek to see with the eyes of God, alive to the beauty and delight that persists even in the midst of struggle and sorrow.*

### Joy at Belong Ottawa

The people of Belong live in a world characterized by material scarcity and acute need. Joy is also scarce. The broken-hearted seem not to be bound back up, nor does liberty come to the many who are held captive to poverty and addictions. But not all joy is lost. At Belong there is great rejoicing with every homeless person who finally gets a home. No other joy quite compares: it restores souls to wholeness, repairs our ruined cities, and decks the poor with garlands.

Consider the story of Steve. Steve was a proud veteran of the armed forces, but had also a long life struggling with addiction and mental illness. Though a pensioner, he suddenly lost his housing to a capricious landlord. One day he returned home to find all his possessions outside and the locks changed. Soon after he was also diagnosed with a swift, fatal disease. For the first time in his life, he was both homeless and dying.

For the homeless, there is a restorative joy in being appropriately housed. At Belong Steve was able to experience that joy: he was linked with housing for veterans and placed in a new apartment, where he was also provided with palliative care support in his affliction.

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### Prayer

Holy God, you promise that joy is stronger than sorrow but we are a fearful and forgetful people. Help us to trust your promise as we prepare for the coming of your Son who welcomes us all into your Kingdom. Amen.

*light candles*

The day of hope is coming. The day of peace is coming.  
The day of joy is coming.  
Come, Lord Jesus, come.