

Issue 46
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Communicator



BC & Yukon Provincial
Council of The
Catholic Women's
League of Canada

The Spirit of Christmas



Welcome from the Editor

I found this plate at a garage sale and to me, it represents the true spirit of Christmas. We now celebrate the birth of Christ, but it is his life, death, and resurrection that we, as Catholics, commemorate throughout the year in everything we do. The prayer with our national theme, *Catholic and Living It!* asks us to be joyful and responsive to our Christian calling and to live our faith, witnessing to life, peace, and social justice daily. Our provincial theme, *Embracing Christ in Everyone* asks us to be an inclusive and engaged community of Catholic women, inspired by faith. As women of The Catholic Women's League let us live the true spirit of Christmas.

"Peace on Earth will come to stay, when we live Christmas every day."

Helen Steiner Rice



I would like to thank all the contributors to this issue. It has been my pleasure to coordinate their stories for your reading pleasure.

*Christa Grillmair,
BC & Yukon Provincial Council,
Chairperson of Communications*

Wishing you and your family a blessed Christmas!

Zacchaeus and Our “Mini” Christmases

*Fr. David John, Spiritual Advisor
BC & Yukon Provincial Council*

Every time we invite Christ into our world, our homes, and our lives we have a moment of rejoicing that leads to generosity and love.

When Jesus was passing through Jericho, he saw Zacchaeus up a tree. He called to him and said that he wanted to come to Zacchaeus' home that very day. At these words Zacchaeus rejoiced. Jesus then said, "Today *salvation* has come to this house."

This is an odd little episode from the life of Jesus as told to us in chapter nineteen of Luke's gospel, but I think it has an importance beyond what we might imagine.

In Luke's gospel the word 'salvation' – Greek σωτηρία – is only used here and in the first chapter of the gospel, where it is used specifically in reference to the coming of Christ into the world as told to us in the infancy narrative.

As we know Christ came into the world, born as a baby in Bethlehem, and we celebrate this at Christmas with joy, rejoicing, and the sharing of love. But by using the word 'salvation' in reference to Christ's visit to the home of Zacchaeus, what Luke is implying is that what happened in Jericho, in Zacchaeus' house, was a 'mini-Christmas'! It was another arrival of Christ, but in this case in a local and particular way. Just as the first Christmas in Bethlehem was an experience of joy and rejoicing, so too here in Jericho Zacchaeus 'rejoiced' that Christ was coming to him. And just as the first Christmas included the act of generous giving by the 'Magi', similarly here there is an act of loving generosity by Zacchaeus.

At Christmas this movement of Christ into our world and into our lives is seen so clearly; such a dynamic statement by God of God's desire to come to us and be with us, and it is right and proper that we celebrate this with all of our hearts and minds. Yet we should be attentive to all the other times that Christ comes to us and renews that first coming to us, that first Christmas.

So, this Christmas I thank Jesus for coming into our world and for coming into my life, and I joyfully celebrate the 'big' Christmas; but I also rejoice at all the very many 'mini' Christmases that I experience throughout the year, indeed, throughout each day.

The Prayer of Mary:

"My soul glorifies 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 Almighty has done great things for me and holy is his name."

Luke 1:46-49



The Spirit of Christmas

*Sharon Geiger,
President, BC & Yukon Provincial Council*

In the past as the Religious Education coordinator in my parish, the Faith Formation for children put on a play called the Advent Angels. The play consisted of younger children to teens. Parents provided music as well as costumes. The play was presented at a senior's home as well as our parish. The collaboration of the different ages certainly shows me the Spirit of Christmas. Teamwork was very necessary to form this play. It was a very heartfelt time to see everyone work together to bring this Advent play to fruition. The final production was very meaningful - and to hear and see the residents in the senior's home reactions put a smile on my face. The seniors can be lonely and to see the children perform for them was joyous. After the performance there were refreshments, and the children did talk to the residents.



When the play was performed at the parish the play was a huge success there as well, again with refreshments served. There is nothing like having children entertain and to be with young and old alike.

This was Embracing Christ in Everyone and being Catholic and Living it!

This was the Spirit of Christmas for me and when I look at pictures from then it fills my heart.



The Spirit of Christmas



*Catherine L'Heureux,
BC & Yukon Provincial Council President Elect*

I believe the real spirit of Christmas is about embracing children because Jesus Christ came to us as a little child on Christmas day. The dictionary definition of spirit contains words like courage, liveliness, prevailing feeling, nonphysical part of a person concerned with profound thoughts.

This spirit welcomes the new baby, whatever the circumstances. It also welcomes the child that needs to be adopted. There are currently 1000 children in BC over the age of 6 that need to find forever homes. It takes courage, faith, and liveliness to adopt.

This spirit should also embrace immigrant and refugee children. 100 million people worldwide have been displaced; half of them are children (EWTN news, September 28, 2022). Helping them integrate into the society of their new country, like teaching them English, smiling at them and making sure their needs are met, is a great spirit.

Sick children need embracing as well. Knitting stuffies, buying BC Children's Hospital lotto tickets, and visiting them in the hospitals are just some of the ways to buy into the Spirit of Christmas. Mentally and physically challenged children are also in need of our love.

The news recently reported that British Columbia has the lowest birth rate in all of Canada. This low birth rate is unnatural, unhealthy, and very harmful for our province. We currently have a serious labor shortage, and this will only continue unless our birth rate increases.

The spirit of Christmas should also embrace the unborn child and its rights. We should support pregnancy centers, sign pro-life petitions, write letters to our politicians, spiritually adopt an unborn child in the womb, and encourage our young women to carry their children to term. Walking with, listening to, and supporting a pregnant mother, can make all the difference in a young mother's life and the life of her unborn child.

For all of us who have grandchildren, teaching them materialism and consumerism is a real no-no. Keep it simple! There are many alternatives such as supporting Chalice, taking them to an event or giving teen girls a membership to the Catholic Women's League are all excellent Christmas ideas. Taking them to a soup kitchen and working alongside them is also a great idea. Also, it is important to just be with them; baking, teaching them to sew or knit or any other skill you possess.

Having children baptized is perhaps the greatest Christmas spirit of all because it makes our little ones, children of God. Jesus said, "Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:3.



Merry Christmas!



The Wonder of Christmas Gift Bags

*Gisela Montague,
Past President, BC & Yukon Provincial Council*

For many years, prior to, during and post COVID, the Prison Ministry team at St. Mary's Parish in Chilliwack has been preparing Christmas gift bags for the residents of a local correction centre. These bags contain items that will enhance the lives of the inmates over the Christmas period. The Chaplain from this institute directs us what might be appreciated by them. These bags are filled with socks, puzzle books, a pad and pencil, a calendar a toothbrush and toothpaste plus a sweet treat for the holiday season. We let our parish family know, via a bulletin insert, for the need for various all occasion cards, calendars, and monetary donations to purchase the other items. The blessings from our parish family are generous! In some years the children from our school participated by preparing homemade Christmas cards, expressing their love and the love of Jesus to the inmates.



Currently, our team visits once a month and we celebrate in the liturgy of the word using the Sunday readings.



Singing and sharing is a lovely part of our fellowship during our visit. When leaving the grounds, we feel we have been blessed as we receive more than we have given. God has blessed us in meeting our brothers in Christ during this time of their lives. We learn from each other as we continue our spiritual journey.

*Gisela Montague and Shirley Rollheiser,
St. Mary's Parish Prison Ministry*

Anticipating the Spirit of Christmas Throughout the Year

*Suzanne Eng, BC & Yukon Provincial Council
Chairperson of Christian Family Life*

This photo is one of the ways that I keep Christmas in mind all year round. I have 5 “Christmas Cactus” plants of varying sizes. In early June every year, I take the pots outside for the summer fresh air. Invariably, they bloom madly in late June and early July.

Then in late September, I bring them back in again. And this is how the plants show they are happy to be back inside. A little bit of Christmas in July and October.

Over the past ten years or so, my adult children and I have made the agreement that for Christmas our gifts to each other have to be homemade or bought from local artisans. Giving something homemade entails starting early in the year with whatever project you might have in mind. Last year, I had



knit a gift for my first grandchild, and then continued with knitting fluffy scarves for each of my adult children and their spouses. As I worked, I thought of them, and prayed for them.

This year, I’m working on knitting toques for each of the adults. For my granddaughter, I found the perfect set of mittens—hand knit—in a gift shop in Baddeck, Nova Scotia.

As my crafting skills are fairly basic, I also “cheat” a bit. Throughout the year, I enjoy going to farmers’ markets, craft sales and artisan’s shops looking for just the right thing for family and friends. Whenever I travel, I take the opportunity to find the perfect souvenir for someone. I like to think that I’m supporting the communities that I visit, rather than some giant corporation somewhere.

I find that I have got into the habit of thinking about Christmas and the spirit of giving all year long with these two practices—hand making something for each of my family members and finding just the right “locally” made gift from an artisan.

Christmas Treasures

Linda Faust, Secretary, BC & Yukon Provincial Council

As I was reminiscing about Christmas' past, I pulled out the Christmas photo album. There, the pages filled with the lives of my family, friends, and traditions over the years. As young children, Christmas morning was anticipated with excitement, waking early, opening the stockings, going Mass, breakfast and finally the opening of presents. Going out and cutting down the Christmas tree was a fun family event. In the early years, the tree was always covered in lots of tinsel, so much so that if one walked too close to the tree, you were guaranteed several pieces of tinsel would be stuck to you.



I remember one year the shortbread cookies mom had made, had holes and a piece of string through them and they were hung on the tree like ornaments. Day by day, the cookies were eaten and as children, we claimed we hadn't eaten any. As each of us grew and left home, Christmas was a treasured family event to gather together. I smiled as I realized I have photos of a lot of those Christmas trees. There were trees that were as wide as they were tall, others were so tall they stretched out across the ceiling until the tallest person would give the tree a trim. Branches bending from the weight of ornaments placed on them and some trees with the branches taller than the angel on the top. It seems it was a simpler time, but as adults we know the work that goes into making Christmas a family treasured event.

Merry Christmas from my house to yours.

Some Ways to Get Into the Spirit of Christmas

*Sheila Doherty, BC & Yukon Provincial Council
Chairperson of Education & Health*



CELEBRATING ADVENT

Take time during this Advent season to really prepare for the birth of our Saviour. Set up your Advent wreath, light the candles and pray in front of it each day. Read some daily devotionals/listen to spiritual webcasts or music devoted to Advent, do some journaling/meditating with the daily readings, attend days of reflection/adoration.

DECORATE YOUR HOUSE

The first thing I like to put out to prepare for Christmas is my Nativity scenes. I have several displayed around the house, on the windows and they are a reminder every time I look at one that we are preparing for Jesus' birth.

GIVING TO OTHERS/GET INVOLVED IN CHARITY

As I get older, there are fewer 'things' that I need or want. For many years, I have asked my daycare families that if they 'need/want' to give me a gift at Christmas, would they consider giving to a charity in my name? Many have embraced this, and it warms my heart. My children have even made donations in my name and had an email sent to me on Christmas Day. During Advent and the Christmas season, it is a great opportunity to give to those in need. Whether it is through cash donations, food, supplies, gifts, meals, clothing etc. or volunteering your time/talent/transportation, your generosity will be greatly appreciated and help others to celebrate the true 'Spirit of Christmas'.

LISTENING TO CHRISTMAS MUSIC

There is so much beautiful Christmas music available to us in so many forms. Play your favourites, while singing along and paying close attention to the words and all the while, thanking and worshiping God for these traditional carols.

BAKING FESTIVE TREATS

I always loved doing my Christmas baking, but it became more meaningful 3 years ago when my sister moved to Kamloops, and we have done our baking together. We use many of the recipes that are family favourites, and some are still written in our mother's handwriting! We play our favourite Christmas CD's and enjoy our time together reminiscing and creating new memories. Some of our favs, shortbread (our Grandmother's recipe), meat pie, peanut butter balls and we're still trying to master my husband's favourite, fudge! Much of our baking is given away to friends, single men, our priest. A great way to get into the 'Christmas Spirit'.

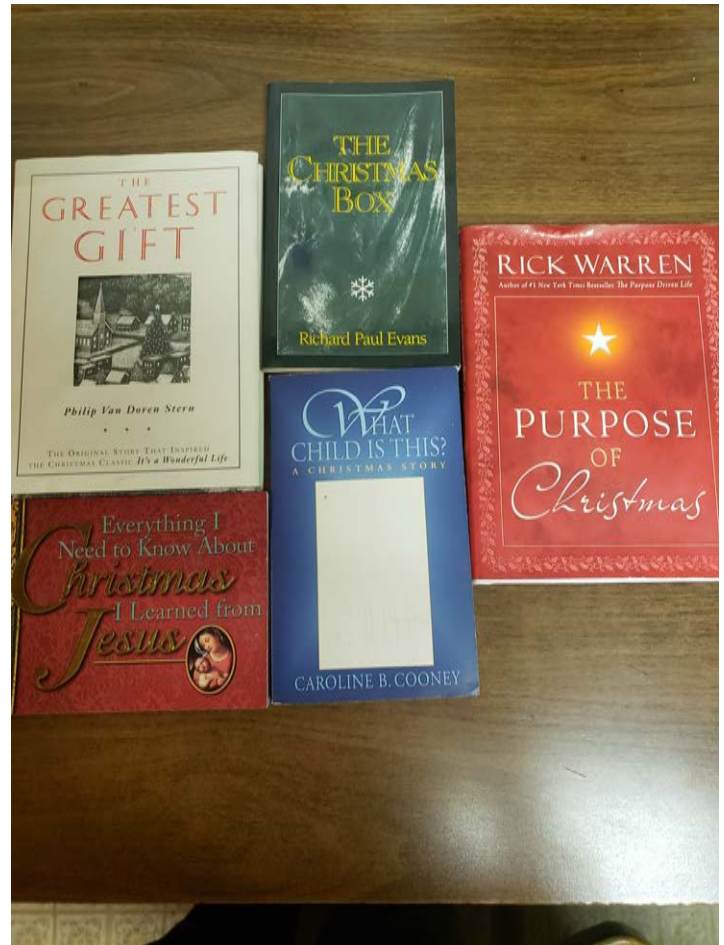
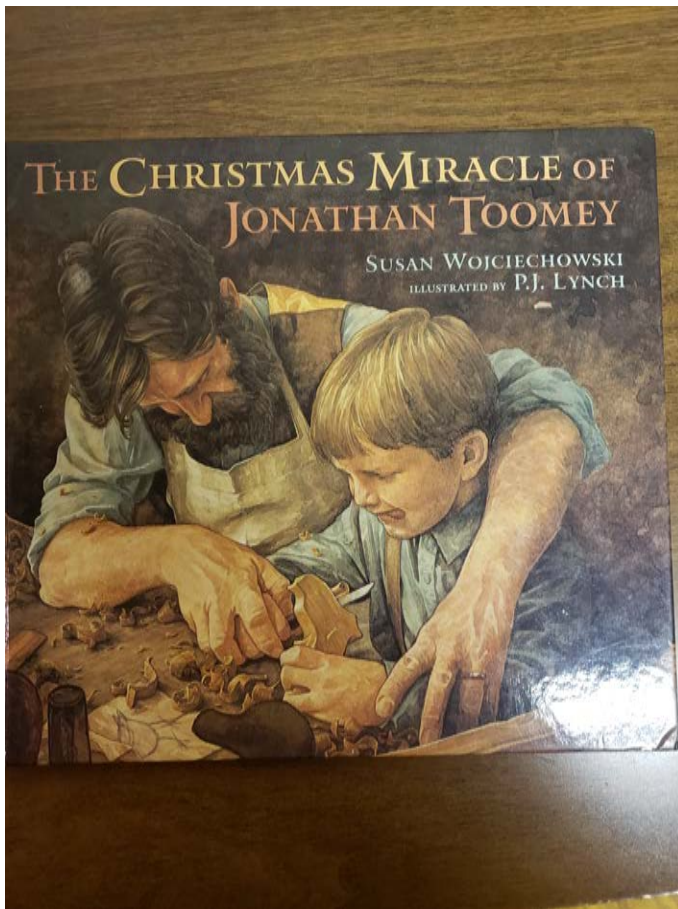
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CHRISTMAS CARDS

A thing of the past??? I still enjoy sending and receiving cards. Perhaps consider sending some this year to those who are alone, who may have lost a loved one this year or to inmates at your local prison while remembering/praying for them often throughout the Christmas season. You never know when the card you sent will make a huge difference in someone's life.

READ CHRISTMAS BOOKS

I have been blessed to receive some beautiful books that I bring out every year and read them enjoying their Christmas messages. There are some great Christmas books for children, and I've included a photo of my favourite, *The Christmas Miracle of Jonathon Toomey*.



May you all experience the true 'Spirit of Christmas'

The Spirit of Love

Victoria Oppertshauser, Nelson Diocesan President



How marvelous it would be if we kept the spirit of Christmas within us throughout the year! A few years ago, I asked my best friend since we were 12 what she liked most about the season. She thought about my question then said she liked everything about the season then added slowly that she somehow felt it was Christmas all year long. With curiosity, I asked her why. She paused again, longer this time, then quietly and with a faint smile of discovery, said her husband made her feel loved every day, that he was like Santa that way. With fondness, she added that it was not the gifts he gave her for no reason at all but the love that she felt went with them. They were well thought-out practical gifts she was not aware she needed. Sometimes it was simply a flower he picked from their garden while he was cutting the grass. She shared this with me as if realizing this about him only then, that very moment.

He and many others around us are living out their Christian beliefs by sharing their blessings. They have the gift to see Christ in everyone and so connect with people lovingly not only at Christmastime but all-year long. If only we could be like Rocha and Pete - share our blessings with love or receive them with gratitude!

Kindnesses received multiplies as we give the same to our families, friends or sometimes even strangers. The gift we give can be the gift of ourselves- a helping hand, a kind word, an authentic smile, and many more. For me this is the true meaning of Christmas. Our Saviour, born in a manger, gave us the supreme gift of all- his own life so we would be saved!

Perhaps, if we held on tightly to that thought, we would have the spirit of Christmas all year-long. I wish everyone reading this a joy-filled Christmas and peace in 2023.

The Gift of Life

*Gerry Heywood, Victoria Diocesan Council,
Chairperson of Spiritual Development*

I'm just back from the 2022 CWL National Convention in Kelowna, B.C. and can't wait to tell you about it. The meetings, dinners and hanging out with friends from all across the country will long stay with me. Kelowna, itself, is a great town with lots to do. However, be prepared for only healthy meals and exercise! I never saw a "fast food joint" during my stay in the city core!

I could go on and on about the great times, friends, presentations, and boat trips until the proverbial cows come home. But, for me, the convention turned out to be an encounter with Christ in a truly unique way—while I was eating my bran flakes!

Our hotel served breakfast every morning and on my last day I "happened" to sit next to a CWL sister from Manitoba. After a brief chat, she said she was still tired after her surgery. Of course, I asked what kind of surgery she had. She replied, "Kidney transplant." "Wow!", I said and then asked, "How's it going? You must be taking anti-rejection drugs." "No, I gave a kidney to my granddaughter." Her granddaughter had come down with a virus that destroyed both her kidney's and she ended up on dialysis for quite some time. It was taking a heavy toll on her.

My grandmother friend decided to find out if she could give her granddaughter a kidney. It turned out she was a match. Don't think this was a simple process. There were around forty tests done and one failure would mean no kidney or life for the granddaughter. My CWL friend feared a test failure, feared for her weakening granddaughter, and feared the surgery, itself.

In the end, the surgery went well for both patients and both grandmother and granddaughter are doing well!

I am so grateful to eat my bran flakes where I did. To me, this is a clear case of Christ's saving grace acting through a CWL Sister to heal another.



I'd like to keep this entry fairly brief, so I have chosen just two quotes from the New Testament to think about. These are: "I abide in you and you in me" (John 15:03) and "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God knows God. . . God is love." (1 John 4:7-8)

So, for me, this breakfast didn't turn out to be about bran flakes and very weak coffee but an unexpected encounter with Christ on my own journey to Emmaus.

The History of 'APRONS'

Laurel Phyll, Victoria Diocesan President

The principal use of Grandma's apron was to protect the dress underneath because she only had a few. It was also because it was easier to wash aprons than dresses and aprons used less material. But along with that, it served as a potholder for removing hot pans from the oven. It was wonderful for drying children's tears, and on occasion was even used for cleaning out dirty ears. From the chicken coop, the apron was used for carrying eggs, fussy chicks, and sometimes half-hatched eggs to be finished in the warming oven. When



company came, those aprons were ideal for hiding places for shy kids. When the weather was cold, Grandma wrapped it around her arms. Those big old aprons wiped many a perspiring brow bent over the hot wood stove. Chips and kindling wood were brought into the kitchen in that apron. From the garden, it carried all sorts of vegetables. After the peas had been shelled, it carried out the pods. In the fall, the apron was used to bring in apples that had fallen from the trees. When unexpected company drove up the road, it was surprising how much furniture that old apron could dust in a matter of seconds. It will be a long time before someone invents something that will replace that 'old-time apron' that served so many purposes.



My Grandma wore these aprons. We could go crazy now trying to figure out how many germs were on that apron. I don't think I ever caught anything from an apron – but love. I have one of my Grandma's aprons and I proudly don it when I want to remember or feel close to her. She also had a special one for Christmas with poinsettias on it.

Miracles are What He is Famous For

*Gladys Jung,
Vancouver Diocesan Chairperson of Communications*

When I first became the CWL Parish President in 2016, I decided to change things up a bit for the CWL Christmas dinner. The Christmas dinner were traditionally celebrated in the evening with the Chinese food. This time it would be lunch, catered turkey buffet with all the trimmings and instead of carol singing after the meal, we had a team of CWL ladies perform a comedy show like a Saturday Night live style.

The day before the party, everything was coming together nicely, except the weather and the comedy show. There was heavy snowstorm on that week, and the snow had no sign of stopping. Then it began to snow again.

Also, my phone began to ring. I knew it was someone calling to cancel because the weather forecast was predicting at least another foot of snow. To my surprise, for every cancellation that night, someone else called to ask for extra tickets. By morning, the lane behind the church, which needed to be cleared for the caterer's van, was two feet deep in snow and the rehearsal for the show was a disaster. I began to fear we had bitten off more than we could chew.



By the grace of God, the lane got shoveled out and the caterer arrived with his staff. The decorating team transformed our bare, chilly hall into a warm, welcoming, and elegant space. All tickets were sold, and every seat was filled. Food was delicious and everyone were enjoying it very much. Now if only God could transform a group of nervous women with bad memories into a bunch of budding comedians. As the curtain opened, His peace descended and suddenly everyone remembered her lines and began to deliver them with confidence to the delight of our audience.

All I believe is do my best, trust in Him and God will indeed make a way.

The Spirit of Christmas

Angelina Stiglich

BC & Yukon Provincial Council, Chairperson of Resolutions & Legislation

"Maybe Christmas" he (the Grinch) thought "doesn't come from a store, maybe Christmas perhaps means a little bit more." Dr. Seuss



These words from a classic Christmas children's story ring even truer today in our culture of consumerism. I am not immune to the call of the shiny temptation to measure Christmas by dwelling on what gifts are best for those we love; we are bombarded with advertising from October until December 25th. Social media uses algorithms to measure our interests and continues to provide helpful suggestions for that "perfect gift." But what is the perfect gift? Is it that shiny bauble your friend or family member was admiring or is it offering that person something far more valuable. These are gifts that cannot be measured by a monetary value, nor ones you can purchase online. The gift of time, the gift of caring, the gift of listening, the gift of

prayer. In these days or rush, rush, just spending some quality time with each other can be more precious than the most expensive store-bought trinket. This is especially true for older family members and for the very youngest. The old adage "children should be seen and not heard" has taken on a new meaning with our youngsters getting lost in their electronic devices. Time slips away from all of us.

So, why don't we all pause this Christmas season to ponder the true meaning of Christmas, as we remember the birth of our Lord and emulate his example in our everyday interactions with family and friends. Enjoy time instead of trinkets. Pray for those who need extra help this season and instead of showering each other with more things, let's help those who really need the help. To paraphrase a message from Dicken's A Christmas Carol, the spirit of the season is not only alive on December 25th, but also alive the other 364 days a year. So let us be examples of this truth by "Embracing Christ in Everyone" and by truly being "Catholic and Living it!"

I wish you all the abundant joys and blessings of the Advent and Christmas seasons and I hope you spend quality time with those you love.

"God bless us, everyone." Tiny Tim

Prayers for Advent Candle Lighting

First Week

All-powerful God, increase our strength of will for doing good that Christ may find an eager welcome at his coming and call us to his side in the kingdom of heaven, where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God, forever and ever. ~AMEN.

Second Week

God of power and mercy open our hearts in welcome. Remove the things that hinder us from receiving Christ with joy so that we may share his wisdom and become one with him when he comes in glory, for he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. ~AMEN.

Third Week

Lord God, may we, your people, who look forward to the birthday of Christ experience the joy of salvation and celebrate that feast with love and thanksgiving. We ask this through Christ our Lord. ~AMEN.

Fourth Week

Father, all-powerful God, your eternal Word took flesh on our earth when the Virgin Mary placed her life at the service of your plan. Lift our minds in watchful hope to hear the voice which announces his glory and open our minds to receive the Spirit who prepares us for his coming. We ask this through Christ our Lord. ~AMEN.

Prayers taken from [A Prayer Book of Catholic Devotions](#)



This newsletter is published twice a year and we welcome submissions from parish council, diocesan council, provincial council members and spiritual advisors.

Articles may be submitted to: comm@bcyukoncwl.com and will be published on the BC & Yukon provincial website www.bcyukoncwl.com.

This publication is not intended to replace communiques or reports, but to share events, stories, and milestones with our members throughout British Columbia and the Yukon Territory.

Our next issue's theme will be He is Risen! Let us Rejoice. The deadline to submit articles for the Easter Issue Number 47 is March 4, 2023. Looking forward to hearing from you!