



Thank you to Arezoo Saber for this beautiful painting located at the front of the church. Be sure to walk by to see it in person.

We will continue to livestream Sunday service using Zoom.

Details regarding how to connect to this platform will be emailed each week to those on our contact list. If you are not on our contact list and would like these details, contact James (james@rhuc.org). Following the online service, a recording of the full service will be posted on our Facebook page. Follow this link: [facebook.com/RichmondHillUnitedChurch/](https://www.facebook.com/RichmondHillUnitedChurch/). In addition, the weekly message will be posted on the [RHUC Blog](#).

If you ever find you're encountering issues using Zoom on Sunday you can always visit <https://status.zoom.us/> to check the site status. To access the home based worship resource so you can use to follow along or take time for personal reflection, follow this link: [Order of Service](#)

We understand that this is a strange time, but we will get through it together. We are still one community, committed to care for one another with compassion and love.



Minister's Message: Every year around this time, someone will comment about "Christmas being under attack" as they rant about people saying, "Happy Holidays" not "Merry Christmas", complain about the use of "Xmas" (all the while failing to note that the "X" is the first half of CHI-RHO from the Greek spelling of Christ) or decry that the Starbucks holiday cup isn't festive enough. This year there are added complaints that public health protocols are somehow a conspiratorial assault on peoples right to mark Christmas the way they've always done - with office parties, festive pub nights and other large celebrations. It is ironic that it was these kinds of festivities in the Elizabethan era that put Christmas itself on the naughty list and it was banned in the UK under Cromwell and it wasn't until the Victorian period that it was widely celebrated in the US (founded in part by Cromwell's co-religionists). The complaints about Christmas being ruined are particularly irksome given that other faith groups have observed their religious holidays under similar restrictions, including Hanukkah which wrapped up on Thursday, Diwali which was celebrated in November, and Yule which is coming up on the 21st. But that is lost on "Christians" who continue to be the majority faith in the countries that most complain about the "war on Christmas". This happens each year because they are the majority. Alexis de Tocqueville coined just this type of attitude in the mid 1800s in *Democracy in America* in which he warned of a coming "tyranny of the majority" which would impose its will on others and further marginalize already marginalized groups. I find this trope of the culture wars particularly perplexing given that Jesus' birth went unnoticed (at least by humans) and that he grew up to preach a message of compassion and love. He was part of the "majority" in his homeland but reached out to those who were despised by others, showing us what God's love really looks like. In our context that love is expressed in a "Happy Holidays" or if you know someone's background, in a "Happy Hanukkah", "Happy Yule" or "Happy Kwanzaa". It is also expressed by keeping public health protocols and so finding ways to celebrate Christmas in single households rather than like we usually do. Christmas may be different this year but it is still a celebration of God's love born into the world. If "Jesus is the reason for the season" like so many culture warriors tell us, then what better way to celebrate than by reaching out with compassion and love to everyone, not just the "majority".

worship and music

Discovery Time at home: [Discovery Time](#)

James' video to children:

https://1drv.ms/v/s!AlBjmozEVDR0gaAQokrNchT_xrDqhOw

Sunday, December 20: We celebrate a "Christmas Sunday" as we light our final candle and listen to Malcolm Guite's poem, "O Oriens", the Messianic title, "O Light of the East". In "Unto Us a Child Is Born", James reflects on Luke 2:1-14, the traditional telling of Jesus' birth, and Isaiah 9:2-7, the promise of an end to oppression and the coming of justice to all, pondering how the promise of new life and peace made in both texts is lived out in our own lives when we make room for love to be born. The sense of festivity is heightened as we shift from Advent hymns to Christmas carols and celebrate with not one but three anthems.



Christmas Eve, December 24: This year there will be three opportunities to celebrate Christmas.

5:45 pm - An Outdoor "Open House": "drop-by" the grassy area in front of the Village

Commons (CD Building) for a time of carols, reflective readings and prayer.

7:00 pm - Family Service on Zoom: This online service will focus on a child friendly version of the Christmas story (Luke 1:26-38; Luke 2:1-7; Luke 2:8-14; and Luke 2:15-19) through readings, art and song.

10:00 pm - Candlelight Communion Service on Zoom: The late Christmas Eve service will focus on the Prologue of John (John 1:1-5, 9-14 and 16-18). Those at home are reminded to have a candle ready for the candle-lighting portion of the service as well as to have bread and wine prepared so they may share in communion.

Sunday, December 27: A Christmas Lessons and Carols. For the first Sunday of the Christmas Season, we are preparing a lessons and carols type of service with carol singing paired with reflective readings.

Sunday, January 3: We celebrate Epiphany Sunday as we reflect on Isaiah 60:1-6 and Matthew 2:1-12. We also celebrate communion so please have bread and "wine" prepared ahead of time.

Did you miss this year's online "**Longest Night Service**"? A Christmas Lament - An Online Service of Prayer and Reflection is posted on our Facebook Page and will be available on our YouTube channel as well. In a year when our losses have been compounded by the realities of the ongoing pandemic, this service led by local clergy from the Anglican, Christian Reformed, Lutheran, Presbyterian and United Churches, offers comfort and support for all who find this time of year difficult.

Worship Notes: In a few days it will be the 24th of December, Christmas Eve! For many, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day mark the end of the holidays but according to our liturgical calendar this day marks the beginning of our festivities. We continue to celebrate for twelve days, culminating in the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6. Hence our continued lighting of candles, the ongoing presence of the manger scene, the dais decorated with poinsettias and flanked by an illuminated Christmas tree. This is an important time of year, more than the commemoration of a birth, but a time to ponder the significance of the Incarnation and the many ways that we discover God-with-us.

Are you seeking some quiet in this busy time of year? Are you missing being in the sanctuary, especially as we head towards Christmas? Throughout Advent, we invite those who wish to book a time for some quiet reflection in the sanctuary. Email Deb (office@rhuc.org) and let her know when you would like to come. A member of the ministry team or a volunteer will open the space for you. Disinfectant spray will be available to bring you peace of mind.



Sunday offering: RHUC, like other churches, depends on donations and rentals to pay our bills. We appreciate those who use Pre-Authorized Remittance (PAR). For those not PAR, please consider making sure you get your weekly envelope money in (mailed in or mail slot on Centre. St. door) and we hope as well that you will consider some extra to compensate for the loss in income. You can use e-transfer to office@rhuc.org, Canada Helps, <http://www.rhuc.org/donate.html>, or post-dated cheques to the Church, 10201 Yonge St., Richmond Hill, L4C 3B2.

programs for all

Winter Solstice with Three Rivers Forest Church: With virus transmission numbers still high, it is best for us to celebrate the coming Winter Solstice via Zoom. We will meet online at **7:00 PM on December 21**. Please have ahead of time a candle to light indoors and a birthday candle with matches that you can take outside as part of our ritual. We will take time together to make bird friendly tree decorations. A couple of options for this include making popcorn and cranberry garlands or suet and seed pinecones. Be sure to put together your supplies for these ahead of time along with some food and drink to "share". For log-in details, email james@rhuc.org.

Shalom Seekers: Shalom Seekers is taking a short break over Christmas and New Year's. Our first meeting in 2021 will take place on Zoom on **Monday, January 4th at 10 a.m.** We will continue our study of the book, *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others* by Barbara Brown Taylor. On January 4th we will be focussing on Chapter 8: *Failing Christianity*. An invitation to the Zoom meeting will be e-mailed to you the day before the meeting.

Interested persons are always welcome to try out the group. Please speak to either Peg Hiscoke or Sandra Loughton for more details.



RHUC Book Club: Please join us on **Wednesday, January 27th at 4 p.m.** via Zoom for our meeting to discuss the novel *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins.

American Dirt "is one of the most important books for our times. Already being hailed as a 'Grapes of Wrath' for our times and a new American classic". This gripping novel tells the story of a woman and her young son trying to escape the vicious drug cartels in Mexico as they attempt to flee to safety.

New members are always welcome to join the group. Please speak to Sandra Loughton for more information about the book club.

church news

RHUC Staff: Following the celebrations on Christmas Eve, James will be taking time off until January 2. He will be available in case of emergency.

The church building will be closed between December 24 – January 1.

Want to Get Crafty? As we well know, we had to cancel our annual Craft Dinner this year. But that doesn't mean we can't do crafts. Sandy Dimma had a great beading craft planned for this year and has donated kits (you can make either a wreath or a candy cane) for any of our younger congregants to use. The craft is especially appropriate for anyone who is 10 years old and under, but it would be fun to make these beaded crafts at any age. If you would like a kit, email Deb at office@rhuc.org to arrange a time to pick one up.

Board Minutes: The minutes for 2019 and 2020 are posted on RHUC's website under About Us - Governance. [Governance - Executive - Richmond Hill United Church \(rhuc.org\)](#)

Finance Committee: As we approach the end of the year, let's be reminded that Revenue Canada permits Charitable Receipts for donations received or postmarked by December 31. This year has been difficult for RHUC financially as donations are down in both PAR and envelope offerings, but more importantly in the large loss in rentals during the initial pandemic lockdown. RHUC covers about 39 percent of our budget for salaries, utilities, and building upkeep from rentals. This has been a difficult year for everyone financially but if you do have the ability to give extra prior to the end of the year it is very much appreciated. Thank you for your continuing support of the ministry of Richmond Hill United Church.



Thank You from your Generous Spirit Team: This has been a difficult year for so

many, so words will never adequately express our gratitude for the ongoing support of so many people so that RHUC can continue to be a loving and inclusive community in the heart of the Village of Richmond Hill. Once you have reviewed this year's campaign materials and prayerfully considered what you are able to pledge for the coming year, please send in your form to the office (Richmond Hill United Church, 10,201 Yonge St., Richmond Hill, ON L4C 3B2). If you are not yet on PAR (Pre-Authorized Remittance) and would like to be, please let Deb know and she would be happy to help you set that up.

Going going gone!! Get your supply before they are sold out!! European Blackberry Jam for sale: United Church Women has received a supply from Linda Butler. There are a variety of sizes and range in price from \$2.00 to \$4.00. They can be purchased through the office by appointment only. Please call 905-884-1301 ext. 5 or email Deb in the office at office@rhuc.org and make arrangements with her. We would like to thank everyone for their continued support. June Blanchette

More opportunities to connect online: As we once again spend more time in our homes, it is important that we don't isolate ourselves. With this in mind, we are considering offering a weekly evening gathering on Zoom like we did last Spring. This would be an opportunity to check in with friends as well as a chance to stay up to date with what is happening at the church. We are also exploring other ways to gather, perhaps for games, for prayer, to discuss the sermon. If any of these possibilities interest you, email James (james@rhuc.org).

Outreach

Advent Givings: We have chosen four groups with whom we have a long-standing Outreach relationship for Advent givings this year. All four charities are having an unusually difficult year with extra Covid-19 challenges layered over their long-standing issues. Their websites explain their work and how they are addressing these challenges. It is really inspirational to see how resilient and resourceful they are and they make it very clear how and why to donate. We aren't able to get together as a church community or in our families in the usual ways this Christmas, but we are able to reach out to these wonderful organizations. Here are the websites for getting in touch:

360kids.ca click on 'ways to give' (located in Richmond Hill) or mail to: 360kids 80F Centurian Drive, Suite #200 Markham, ON L3R 8C1

miotc.ca click on 'donate' (Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold) or mail to (This is a mailing address only): Mosaic Interfaith Out of the Cold 9251 Yonge Street Suite 8-104 Richmond Hill, Ontario L4C 9T3

krasmancentre.com click on 'support' or mail to: KRASMAN CENTRE 10121 YONGE STREET RICHMOND HILL, ON, L4C 1T7

<https://honouringindigenouspeoples.com/> click on 'Donate' or mail to: - Attention: Julie Dunaiskis, HIP (Honouring Indigenous Peoples), 100 Simcoe St., Suite 110, Toronto, ON M5H 3G2 Tax receipts provided.

If you would feel more comfortable donating through the church, please drop off or mail your gift to the church with notation to Advent Givings clearly stating **one** of the four charities listed above you would like the donation to go to.

If you would like to put together a **new backpack** with toiletries, new socks, scarves, hats and socks please bring to the church during the month of December up until January 15th, 2021 for the Krasman Centre.

Lyn May, Outreach

December 27 is National Fruitcake Day and to celebrate, all LGBTQ2SIA+ identified folks are invited to a night of fun, games, festivities and connection. Join us online for this very special Holiday edition of Something Completely Different. <https://fb.me/e/3oPJLg4kb>



Minute for Mission: No person should ever be persecuted because of their religion or culture. No one should have to struggle daily to find enough food, a place to sleep, or simply a place to exist, yet that has happened repeatedly to the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. For decades they faced religious and ethnic persecution, which escalated in

2017. They were tortured and killed in Myanmar, and their homes and villages were burned to the ground. Almost a million escaped to the town of Cox's Bazar in nearby Bangladesh to what became, in November 2018, the largest refugee camp in the world. ACT Alliance, a Mission & Service global ecumenical partner, is on the ground at the Cox's Bazar refugee camp distributing humanitarian aid in the form of food, shelter materials, warm clothing, hygiene kits, safe water, and emergency medical help. ACT Alliance also hosted the organization Clowns Without Borders to share the importance of hygiene in a fun way. The Cox's Bazar camp is located in a floodplain; mix that with almost a million people and the result can be a variety of diseases, some of them life-threatening. Thanks to ACT Alliance, many of the Rohingya refugees are able to keep disease at bay by using the skills they were taught and the hygiene kits they received. Through our gifts for Mission & Service, lives are truly saved every day in Cox's Bazar camp.



Gifts with Vision: Give meaningful gifts this Christmas that make a difference to the lives of others in the world! Gifts with Vision is a giving catalogue which gives you a glimpse of the breadth of the United Church's Mission and Service ministries and programs. We will be celebrating Christmas 2020 in ways that keep us and others safe so shopping for gifts online is a good idea, and you don't have to go through tracking your purchase and hoping that it arrives and is suitable! There are gift ideas suitable for every interest, budget and person. To order, be inspired and learn more visit: giftswithvision.ca

Donna Smith, 905-884-6307

In his [Christmas message](#) this year, **Moderator Richard Bott** reminds us that "The story of Jesus' birth is not completely a beautiful one. The birth of Jesus was not easy. But in the midst of all these difficulties, the beautiful, amazing, and immense love of God was made tangible in a tiny little baby. Remind yourself—and the world—of the message the angels proclaimed: Do not be afraid! Good news! Great joy!"

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