

Spotlight on St. Christopher's Anglican Church



McGregor Bay,

Summer 2014

Dear friends in Sudbury/Manitoulin,

I'd like to tell you about one of the hidden gems of a parish in our deanery. It's one of our summer congregations, St. Christopher's Community Church. This beautiful and well cared for church, that is open for just a few months of the year, overlooks some of northern Ontario's most magnificent waterway - McGregor Bay, and some of its stunning scenery - the La Cloche mountains. There is no road to St. Christopher's - it is accessible only by boat.



St. Christopher's Anglican Church and the 'dock' parking for boats

St. Christopher's Community is a twenty minutes boat ride from the marinas at Birch Island off Highway 6. You can hire a boat to take you to McGregor Bay if you want to visit it on your own, but it costs about \$60 one way, so best to make friends with one of the parishioners and hitch a ride with them!

The church is open from June through August each summer, and the Bishop of Algoma appoints a student intern to serve in the congregation.

St. Christopher's sees itself as a teaching parish and the wardens smile as they recount that the first order of business when an intern comes on board is to make sure they know how to drive a motor boat.

Many of the students are in their second or third year of Divinity school and this is a wonderful opportunity for ministry in a vibrant congregation. In the past some of these students have included the Ven. Harry Huskins, the Rev. Canon Bain Peever, the Rev. Paul Walmsley, the Rev. Joan Locke, the Rev. Peter Simmons, and the Rev. Lyn Fisher. Writer Tom Harpur served there in 1970.

For the last two years, Charlene Scriver a postulant for ordination has served this congregation. Sunday services are usually the Service of the Word, with the occasional Eucharist celebration provided by visiting clergy. Bishop Andrews never misses an opportunity to visit St. Christopher's each year.

How did St. Christopher's begin? It's an interesting story that began when a pioneering family, Jenkins by name, established a private burial ground at the site of the present church. This happened in the early years of the 20th century. In 1949 private burial sites were deemed illegal under the laws of the land, and so in order to avert the relocation of the graves, planning started to establish a church in the Bay, thus allowing the burial ground to be consecrated as a church cemetery.

In the process of solving a practical problem, the mission of St. Christopher's was established. On July 4th, 1951, Bishop Wright entered the Bay and consecrated the cemetery and also held the first service where the church would be built. In the 50th Anniversary flyer it is mentioned that 79 people were at hand on that day 'suggesting that the occasion was deemed more than a practical solution to a private problem.'

While some of us in the deanery face a great exodus from our parishes during the summer months, St. Christopher's is a hive of activity. Sunday attendance is upwards of 100 people and oftentimes the church is so full that you will see people sitting on the church steps. The service can also be heard in the parish hall just down the hill, which makes it easier for those with mobility issues.

There is a beautiful sense of ecumenism at St. Christopher's as the 'people of God' who attend represent an incredible number of religious denominations and communions. It is a model for us to emulate.

Many of the congregants own cottages in the area and live in 'The Bay' for four or five months of each year. Some people now in their 60s and 70s have been coming to McGregor Bay since they were children themselves. This is a place that stole their hearts and that has now become home away from home. You will often find generations of families at church on a Sunday morning, and during the week they participate in some of the activities that are offered. The Parish Hall is also the community centre for The Bay, and the monthly calendar seldom has a blank square on it. These activities include Bible Studies, activities for young people - "Snake and Lattes" games days, bridge, yoga and kayaking, sailing, 'Desert with a Dash of History'. And there is always food - glorious food!

Many of the parishioners are active in their 'home' congregations in the United States and Canada and bring with them their deep faith in God, as well as the wealth of knowledge and expertise in so many aspects of parish life that they share freely with each other and those they serve. Many of them continue to support St. Christopher's throughout the winter months.



St. Christopher's Parish Hall with a wrap around deck overlooking McGregor Bay.

The interior of the church looks very much like a log cabin with its pine pews and altar. It truly reflects the rustic beauty of Northern Ontario. Behind the altar is a window in the shape of a cross that fills the sanctuary with light. Often you will find a simple arrangement of wild flowers on the windowsills of the church. These are picked alongside the many boardwalks leading to the church.



The interior of St. Christopher's and the boardwalks leading to the church and the log cabin rectory.

I have had the pleasure of visiting St. Christopher's twice since becoming the Archdeacon for Sudbury/Manitoulin. In 2013 I attended one of their monthly board meetings and then enjoyed a lovely afternoon with Charlene and parishioners Dick and Alice Lockrem.

This year I visited again, with Colin. We brought classical music to "The Bay" as he and his accompanist Philip, provided an afternoon of wonderful music. We were transported in style down to St. Christopher's by boat and were received in the usual gracious way that the folks there welcome all their guests. There was a chance for us to visit with the friends I made last year, and to meet and make new friends.



I give thanks for the faithful ministry of the leaders and parishioners at St. Christopher's. They all share a deep love for God and God's church and I pray that those who come after will continue the work that has begun in this place.

If you ever have the opportunity to catch a ride out to St. Christopher's - don't miss the boat!

May God bless all of those who call St. Christopher's their parish family.

Archdeacon Anne.