

August 10, 2021

The pandemic has made how we “do church” a real challenge for St. John’s. But several St. Johners have stepped up to create new and innovative ways to produce Sunday services. In particular, **David Roth and Bridget Shoe** have worked together over the last several months as part of the team that produces our virtual services.



This is no easy task. Several days before each service, David and Bridget review the order of service created by Rev. Mitra and Claire Wagner. In this preproduction review, the duo is involved in deciding which camera will be in play at what point in the service and how the speakers and prerecorded videos will transition and interact with each other. On Sundays, they spend an hour before the service begins rehearsing with the ushers, Rev Mitra, and any speakers. They often have to make adjustments on the fly when the service commences, taking a deep breath when Zoom throws them a curve and calmly making corrections where needed.



St. John’s is beginning to emerge from the pandemic and services are becoming more complex as we move to a hybrid in person/virtual model, which challenges David, Bridget, and the production team even further.

Through all this, David and Bridget have risen to the occasion with enthusiasm, energy, and good cheer. The results are services that all of us can enjoy. Thank you, David and Bridget!

August 17, 2021

If you haven’t yet met our Spirit Award winner, **Debbie Combs**, you’ll be charmed by her soft-spoken, friendly presence but you’d never guess how important her volunteer contributions are to the operations of St. John’s. She’s our church Historian/Librarian and our library downstairs gleams from her attention. As Historian she continues to organize and weed out redundancies in all the historical documents of the church. No one here knows better than Debbie the history of St. John’s. During Covid, she used her institutional memory and love for the details in bylaws and policy to do a complete review of SJ policies.



In a year-long project to make sure our policies reflect the changes in Board structure and the removal of councils as adopted by the congregation in 2019, she and the Board secretary consulted with other church leaders to improve many other aspects of our policies and by laws. A huge project, it resulted in four distinct policy manuals: Personnel, Safe Congregations, Finance, and General Board policies. (All these can be seen under “our governance” on the website.) Debbie also acts as a SJ liaison with KUUJAN (Kentucky Unitarian Universalist Justice Action Network).

Working with others, she is currently creating a land acknowledgement - a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of the land on which we worship. While we deeply appreciate all those who save our congregation fiscally by doing jobs we would normally pay to have done, Debbie is one of those who does things that would never be considered in our budget, but which nonetheless enrich our experience immeasurably. Thank you, Debbie.

September 28 and October 5, 2021

While we are forever grateful for the many volunteers who make St. John's Sunday service available to all, we think our **online ushers** deserve a special Spirit award for the integral part they play on behalf of our virtual congregation. They welcome you; during the service they monitor, list links, and post details in chat so you won't miss a thing, and after, in online coffee hour, they make sure you get a fair chance to share, almost as if you were in the building. Each week, a team of two are viewing and working the chat at home from their own computer screens, reporting what you see so the producers in the building can adjust as needed.

When the pandemic dropped down, they stepped up! Zoom experience or not, they learned quickly. While on-the-job training is easy and fun, it also includes practices that are often forgotten such as forgiving oneself for mistakes; being patient when the current Gerry-rigged system (soon to be upgraded) breaks down; and especially, allowing oneself the personal satisfaction of helping to provide a unique opportunity for accessibility and inclusion at St. John's. Great practices, indeed.



Thank you (in order) to **Zoe Waldrige, Anne Fleischer**, and the newest volunteer, **Pete Asman, Melissa Rowland, Emily Hodges, Bridget Shoe** and **Brian Snape** (who are now producers), **Monica Pellman**, and **Joetta Prost** (team manager and trainer extraordinaire). There's still room on the dance floor if you want to jump-and-jive or gracefully waltz with the team.

October 19 and 26, 2021

This Spirit Award winner's contributions since 1963 would merit a book if we had the room. Whether you join us online or in the building on Sunday, you've enjoyed **Barbara Hadden's** longtime handiwork in the sanctuary. You can sign up to pay for special flowers in memory of a loved one, to commemorate an occasion, or 'just because' but it's Barbara's passion for beauty that makes our sanctuary bloom.

Barbara has graced our beloved community in many ways over the years. A genuine welcomer, her smiles and hugs always make you feel seen and appreciated. She spent 10 years on staff in Religious Education, seeing RE teachers in everyone as she generated volunteers.

Her sense of fun is marvelously contagious. She hosted tours to France and sang with our choir all the way to Romania. She joined community choirs that collaborated with us. And, with her dearly departed husband, she hosted Planned Parenthood fundraising dinners. Barbara has regularly expanded our personal and world vision. Taking a page from her work on St. John's Nominating Committee, several have nominated her for outstanding service to St. John's.

As our collective gaze rests on the altar flowers, Barbara, we'll thank you in our hearts every Sunday for your many selfless services.



November 2, 2021

While Halloween is widely celebrated by candy-loving kids and alter-ego expressing adults, our St. Johners deserve pride of place for commemorating it most richly.

Last weekend, St. John's celebrated by combining Halloween with our community commitment to Matthew 25: Ministries, an international humanitarian aid and disaster relief organization. In the past, **Jay Gunther** has unfailingly coordinated volunteer brigades to work at their headquarters on Kenwood Road in Blue Ash.



This year, **Nancy Johnson and her husband, Bill Gordon**, again raised money for the organization by coordinating a delightful event with something for all ages to enjoy.

In close collaboration with Rev. Mitra and Marie Inanli, there was a short service indoors, followed by pumpkin decorating for the kids and a costume parade on the grounds, plus a one mile walk and a 5K run through the neighborhood. Nancy and Bill provided pumpkins for the kids to decorate, bought and served the snacks, and organized the walk and run complete with signage and maps. The Matthew 25 virtual run brought in many contributions to their mission, but we think ours was the most fun! The first Halloween Spirit Award goes to all planners and participants who made this holiday uniquely St. John's.

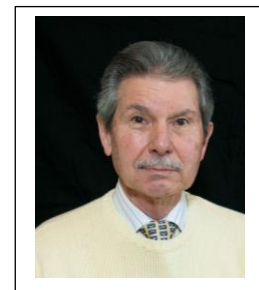


November 23, 2021

A special Spirit Award goes to **Rick Mitts** who recently joined St. John's and stepped right in to take over making name badges. For years, the job was generously done by Rick Prairie. When he could no longer do it, Debbie Combs, knowing their importance to church relationships, agreed to take over temporarily. But Rick has not only taken on the job, he has added an imaginative twist.

Bear in mind that at St. John's, those badges represent our commitment to hospitality and kinship. As a side benefit to those of us with a contrary memory, they quietly remind us of each other's names. They do not, however, remind us to go straight to the name board when we come into the building. Rick's ingenuity has come to our rescue.

A former G.E. employee and later a teacher, Rick's technical adjustment to the multi-piece badge assembly process took its success rate from 50% to 100% in no time. It seems, also, that engineers and artists share the same elements of principles and design, so Rick decided to make the badges an artful expression of something we want people to know about us. For example, he researched far and wide for a Canadian Elm leaf to showcase David Terry's love of trees. His idea is that if the badges are beautiful as well as useful, more of us will remember to wear them.



To get your name badge, sign up on the bulletin board or email him ([charlesmitts@live.com](mailto:charlesmitts@live.com)). He'll design what you want and get your approval before printing. Then, all you have to do is wear it!

Well done, Rick, and thank you.

December 7, 2021

Spirit Award goes to Thanksgiving Dinner Providers

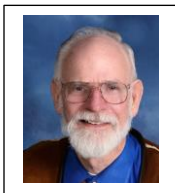


In the St. John's version of stone soup, the 2021 Thanksgiving Potluck was a wonderful meal and a happy (albeit safe) reconvening of epicurean enthusiasts. A tradition started by Linda Doyle in 2012 was continued the next year by potluck proprietors **Rebecca Crone and William Bronson.**

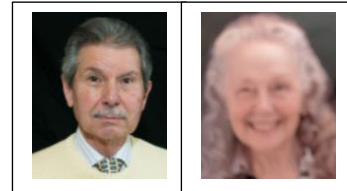
Our regular potluck chefs, **Judy Strong and Paul Bowen,** are vegan/vegetarian masters. All of you (too many to name) who generously donated time, labor, money, and food made this a prime holiday event for the appetite, and we thank you.



This celebration headlined main dishes from Rebecca, William, Judy and Paul, along with hors d'oeuvres from **Patric Leedom.**



Decorations came from **Connie Mitts and Rick Mitts** took the lead in advance table setup, and thorough cleanup. The team may not have started with stones, but what followed from its initial effort was pure delicious delight, offered to anyone who wanted to eat and enjoyed with much convivial conversation.



Afterwards, leftovers were liberally distributed. William declares this his favorite holiday and our mouths are already watering for the St. John's Thanksgiving potluck in 2022.

December 21, 2021

We often think of St. John's as being a welcoming and caring community. Perhaps no one exemplifies the caring aspect as much as **Kathryn McDonough.** For many years Kathryn has been a tireless and energetic member of the Caring Circle, which provides assistance for St. John's members who are ill or have another misfortune. Providing meals and transportation, or simply offering companionship, are all part of Caring Circle's activities. She also serves as a chalice circle facilitator. She leads the only group that meets at church (on Sunday afternoons) to meet the needs of those who might not be able to participate otherwise.



Recently, Kathryn's attention has been focused on grief support. All of us experience grief, but there are few opportunities to talk about it. To address this need, Kathryn, along with Rev Mitra, organized a grief support group that held a series of meetings to discuss topics, such as "Holidays and Grief," "Changing Relationships," and the "Physical Impact of Grief." There is still time to drop in on the last one scheduled for January 1. (11 am-12 at St. John's, no advance registration required.)

Thank you, Kathryn, for all you do for St. John's.

December 28, 2021

This Spirit Award is richly deserved by our volunteer choir directors, **Rob Thacker and Chris Wagner**. Over the years St. John's has been blessed with amazing choirs who perform uplifting music for our services. Their behind-the-scenes effort is dependent on the person we pay to lead them. Blending the voices of volunteers with a range of abilities, personalities, and talent, encouraging, and inspiring them while syncing their rhythm, breath, and diction into a powerful blend of harmonized sound is a big job!

When our newly hired choir director had to step away recently, our music didn't stop because Rob and Chris immediately stepped in.

St. John's services had to organize virtually last year because of Covid but we didn't have to go without our choir then, either. Rob, a choir member himself, organized and led small groups to sing in harmony from their individual boxes on our screens. His experience includes singing with the men's chorus and concert choir at BYU (Brigham Young University) and performing with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir.

Chris has directed the choir when needed in years past. His musical background includes studying and playing flute and experience as a folk musician and wedding band keyboardist/vocalist.

Rob continues to direct rehearsals that are encouraging and positive, making tireless effort seem simple and fun, and performances all the more joyful. Even though we can't yet sing as a congregation, because of these two talented individuals' contributions, we continue to be blessed with choir performances that touch, move, and inspire us throughout the service and the week. We humbly hum our thanks to both Rob and Chris.



January 4, 2022 – A Spirit Team Correction

When a Spirit award nomination consists of just a few words, our team springs into spy mode to uncover background information before publication. As best we can, we condense our findings into a couple of paragraphs for the eNews knowing that our copy can't cover the wealth of contribution that our award winners have made.

Last week's award to Chris Wagner and Rob Thacker is no exception. They have both put in countless hours more at St. John's than we could credit. However, this time we slightly overdid the background bit and in the sweet spirit of humility, Rob wanted us to know.

To ease his mind, we're letting you know. While he performed live with the BYU choir being broadcast around the world and sang for the famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir, he did not sing with them. Also, he organized small groups to sing for us after we came back to church, not while we were only virtual.

Rob's setting his record straight in no way diminishes his award nor how much we appreciate the gifts to St. John's that both he and Chris provide. Rock on, fellows! We love you.