

Hello, friends in Christ.

As we approach the celebration of Christmas, we've been reflecting together on the Advent themes of [Hope](#), [Peace](#), [Joy](#), and [Love](#)—this year through the eyes of newcomers to Canada and to our diocese. I am grateful to them for sharing their stories which have reminded us that the heart of Christmas is welcome: God coming to dwell among us, and God drawing us closer to one another.

I remember well what it was like to be a newcomer in Canada. When my family and I arrived from South Africa, we were unable to go back for five years. Those first seasons were marked by the joy of discovery, but also the quiet ache of distance—especially at Christmas. We learned early what it means to be “from away,” and to lean on the kindness of others.

During that first year, as Christmas approached in Ottawa, I began attending St. Thomas Anglican Church. One Sunday, a woman I had never met, turned around in her pew and welcomed me. She later told me that she had never done anything like that before. Something simply nudged her. That simple act of hospitality opened a door of belonging and began a friendship that has lasted forty years.

I often think of that welcome alongside the story of Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem. They too were newcomers of a kind—away from home, uncertain where they would stay. And yet someone made room for them. Someone opened a door so that the Christ child could be born.

That is the invitation before us this Christmas: to open the inn of our hearts to those who are new, those who are returning, and those who are searching.

Our churches will be filled this Christmas Eve—with students returning from school, families visiting loved ones, and people who may not have crossed a church threshold in years. Some will be newcomers to Algoma. Others will be newcomers to faith. Still others will be long-time members carrying their own hopes and burdens.

And here is something I've learned:

It takes courage to step into a new place,
and it takes courage to make space in your heart for someone you do not yet know.

A parishioner once shared with me a moment of regret: her congregation had remained seated in their pews when a new family visited—while it was the *newcomer* who walked around greeting everyone. Later she said, “We should have been the ones to get up and welcome them.” That humility—that recognition—touches something very true. Let us be people of courage who have no regrets in offering hospitality this Christmas.

So this year, I want to speak to two groups of people.

To the newcomer—whether newly arrived in Canada, new to Algoma, or simply curious about the hope that Christmas promises:

Be brave. You are welcome here. There is room for you in God's house, and in God's heart, and in every church in the Diocese of Algoma and beyond.

And to the long-time parishioner—the one who knows the comfort of a familiar pew:
*Be brave as well. Turn around. Look for the person you have not yet greeted. Let God
nudge you toward someone who may need exactly the welcome you are able to offer.*

People need hope. They need pathways toward joy. They need places of peace, so that they may come to know the Love of Christ. These are the gifts of Advent, and these are the gifts the people of Algoma have to share, in abundance.

God-willing we will be able to give these gifts to one another this Christmas in simple, courageous acts of hospitality.

May the Christ child, born among strangers yet welcomed with love, fill your homes and hearts with hope, peace, joy, and love this holy season.

A blessed Christmas to you all.