



# Young and Old, Neighbour and Newcomer: Connecting through Pentecost Banners

by Betsy Hogan

All generations were involved in the celebration of Pentecost at St. Matthew's United Church this year. St. Matthew's is a diverse congregation in downtown Halifax, Nova Scotia. It gathers people from a wide area, many of whom see one another on Sundays only. In addition to its regular worshipping congregation, the church includes tourists, many visitors, and some who are transient or homeless. In large measure, therefore, this service was intended to enable not only worship, but also some sense of connection to one another as a community of God's people—a connection that would be felt by all ages. To achieve this, worship leaders had come up with the idea that everyone in the congregation would be invited to share in making 12 banners.

*The young will see visions with  
the wisdom of age  
And the old will dream the dreams of youth*

## Banners

Before the service began, 12 pieces of red fabric (2x4 feet) were taped across the tops of pews at intervals in the sanctuary. Each had two baggies with it—the first contained straight pins and letters, and the second a series of shapes cut out of yellow, orange, and red fabric. The shapes were of different sizes and included flame shapes, leaf shapes, some stripes, and some triangles.

The bulletin that was handed out at the beginning of the service explained:

Today is Pentecost Sunday:

the church's celebration of God's gift of the Holy Spirit.

In our sanctuary this morning there are the materials needed to create 12 banners, representing six visions and dreams for the world which inspire our life and our mission as a community of faith:

PEACE	WHOLENESS	JUSTICE
JOY	LOVE	HOPE

During the Reflection Time this morning, you are invited to join with those around you in creating the banner nearest to you.

Decide as a group how you are going to use the materials provided and secure the pieces of your banner with pins (so it can be hung upright).

Each banner will have the letters to form one of the above words.

As a group, prepare a few words about how and why the word represented by your banner is part of our vision and dream as God's People (use the back of this sheet), and identify someone in your group who will be comfortable reading your statement to the congregation.



At the end of the Reflection Time, the banners will be brought to the front of the sanctuary in turn, and the statements of each group read ~

our collective expression of the vision and dreams with which we are inspired by God's Spirit.

## The Service

The service began with a Call to Worship that incorporated a reading from Acts 2:1-2 and the hymn "Wind, Who Makes All Winds that Blow." (VU 196) This was followed by a dramatic reading of the Pentecost story from Acts 2:1-21 (read by a narrator and readers taking the parts of Peter and James, with a chorus supplied by the choir). The Pentecost story was framed by "Joy" performed by the handbell choir and the congregation singing "Spirit of Life" (VU 381) and "Shine Jesus Shine." The reflection followed.

## Reflection: See Visions, Dream Dreams

The children were asked to come forward and the minister shared: "I brought a balloon this morning. Isn't that great? I thought we could have a good time playing with it. No? Boring? Ya, you're right, I should definitely blow it up. It's a bit like us, this balloon. It really isn't as interesting as it could be until breath fills it. And we're not really as interesting as we could be until the Spirit, the breath of God, fills us. So I'll blow it up. (*Don't tie it!*) What will happen if I let go of the balloon? (*Let it go!*) Chaos! Pentecost Day was a day when the spirit filled the disciples and everything became pretty interesting and chaotic and surprising. People started speaking many languages, meeting people they hadn't known and being able to communicate with them. And amazing things happened. They began sharing together God's vision for the world and all God's people.

And that's what we're going to do this morning. For some of us, it's going to be a bit different from usual. We're going to move around like the balloon did—we're going to meet one another and talk to one another about the gifts of God's vision and our dreams for God's world, and it won't be neat and

tidy—Thanks be to God, Amen!—and it might be a little chaotic, but there is such a thing as gentle chaos with purpose, and that's what God's spirit is like. And together we're going to create what I think will be a beautiful expression of our vision and our dreams for God's world. (*Blow up the balloon again and let it go again.*)

If you have read the insert in the bulletin, then you know what we're going to be doing next. First, I'd like all you kids to go back to where you were sitting, and then I invite everyone to move to the piece of red fabric nearest you, or find one that is not too crowded, and let the Spirit inspire your creativity and vision and dreams. And whenever your group's banner and your collective statement are complete, just step up to the front as a group and we'll hang your banner and listen to your words."

The organist, choir, and handbell choir also moved into the congregation and were encouraged to join different groups.

## Sharing the Banners

At the front of the sanctuary, 12 chairs had been lined up with their backs facing the congregation. (The chairs had cloth backs.) As each group came forward to present their banner, their banner was pinned and hung from the back of a chair. Then the statement of the group was read aloud by one of the group's members.

The banner making took less than 15 minutes. The banners were glorious, and the words spoken by representatives of each group (many of whom were quite new to the congregation) were wonderful.

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