

City of Refuge

Summer 2005

A Voice from the Street

Vol. 4- Issue 2

Group Education at Sanctuary by Alan Beattie

Just another Saturday morning drop-in breakfast at Sanctuary. A lot of the usual crowd sitting at the tables, many of them with a bowl of Cheerios and a cup of coffee waiting expectantly for Don's beloved pancakes and sausage. Morning banter fills the room accompanied by occasional grunts from the not-exactly-morning crowd. But there is something different this morning...

Aren't there an awful lot of younger people here this morning? And some are wearing sort of trendy clothes. They don't have that street kid look about them. Who are they? Why are they here? Surely they took a wrong turn somewhere...

When it's time for announcements, it all becomes clear: They're visiting from out-of-town and here to learn about Sanctuary. When the announcement is made and our community is asked to extend a welcome to them, they do so heartily. A round of applause for our guests! Those sitting next to our guests shake themselves free of their morning fog to offer a welcoming grin. Our community here seems ever-ready to welcome visitors and to share "their space" with others. What a treat to see!

One of the less-visible aspects of what we do at Sanctuary we call our Group Education Programs. While education is not primarily why we exist, we still believe firmly that it represents a significant component of what we do. And over the course of the year, we will welcome 20 to 25 such groups whether for an evening, an overnight, a couple of nights or even a full week. And we are grateful for the opportunity to meet and talk with people who are in some way wanting to think differently about the kinds of people who make up our community.

When a group arrives for a Street Orientation, we talk first about Sanctuary – who we are, what we do, who lives in our neighbourhood. We then invite them to imagine themselves in the shoes of someone living on the streets, someone their age and to spend a few hours walking the streets of downtown Toronto thinking about what it might mean to be homeless on these streets. Where would you sleep? Who can you trust? How

would you pass the time? How safe do you feel? When it's all done, we come back together for discussion and reflection, pretty much everyone agrees that this has been an eye-opening experience.

Some other groups will join us for a drop-in – maybe a Thursday evening, maybe a Saturday morning. The key difference for these groups is that they generally assume that they will come for an "inner-city experience" and help out in the kitchen. Instead, however, it is with some glee that we invite them to do nothing like that! Rather, we invite them to sit down at one of the tables, grab a bowl of Cheerios and simply talk away to their hearts' content!

You see, at Sanctuary, our greatest emphasis is on the importance of relationships in each of our lives. While we provide a lot of important things – food, health care, clothing – we don't mostly exist to do any of them. And the reason we don't is that none of those things has the capacity to give life. In fact, not even the bigger things – providing housing or employment skills or drug rehabilitation – provide life in and of themselves. Think about it...

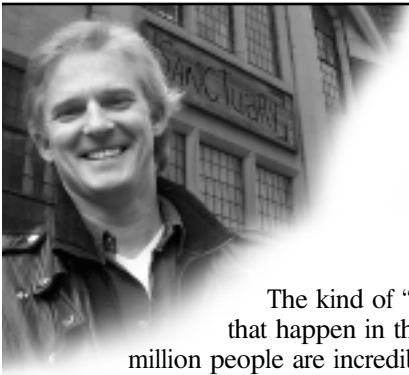
My life is good, not primarily because I have anything of those things – though each of them certainly helps me stay on my feet. My life is rich and relatively stable because of the relationships with which I am privileged to be surrounded. Think of the myriad relationships which you enjoy: immediate family, extended family, neighbours, co-workers, childhood friends, golfing pals, church friends...on and on the list goes. Aren't those the things that make life rich? Chocolate cake is wonderful. And snuggling down under a nice fluffy duvet is a delight. But things don't make life rich. People do.

And so we encourage our guests to engage in relationship and to discover that members of our community are vital and beautiful people whose hearts, just like all of ours, were created for relationship. Relationship with others and, ultimately, relationship with God.

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Open Bible Fellowship group from Windsor, Ontario



A View From Here

by Greg Paul

The kind of “coincidental” connections that happen in this city of three and a half million people are incredible to me. Like about half a million other people, I live within a fifteen minute bicycle ride of Sanctuary, a distance we chose carefully when moving from the suburbs eight years ago. There has only ever been one person I really didn’t want knowing where I live – he’s just crazy enough to follow up on the threats he’s made a couple of times to find out where I live and burn the house down while we sleep – and sure enough, there he was one day as I stepped out the front door, standing about ten feet from our little parking pad, and staring right at me.

“Oh,” he said, looking delighted. “Is that where you live?” I was tempted to tell him an extravagant lie, but couldn’t formulate one quickly enough.

Mostly, though, it delights me when I bump into one of my friends from the downtown core cruising around in my neighbourhood. I was just around the corner from our house a while ago, walking home from a short jaunt to the Danforth, when I saw a woman laughing uproariously and talking to a couple of people sitting in a car parked at the curb. She did something with her shirt I won’t describe in detail, but I thought, “Well, you don’t see that everyday on Pape Avenue.” A second or two later, I recognized her as Rose, a long-time friend who until recently was a mainstay of the working girls on Church Street. (‘Rose’ isn’t her real name, but it’s what I called her in “God in the Alley”, too.)

“Hey!” I said as I walked up behind her. “What are you doing harassing people in my neighbourhood?”

She turned, recognized me, shrieked, and almost strangled me with a hug. She introduced me excitedly to her friends – I think she’s told everybody she knows about her story in the book, and even used it as a way to, as she put it, “disclose” to her son the painful story of her life as a prostitute. Rose explained that her best pal lived in the house behind her, a house that has a back yard abutting mine. What are the chances?

A couple of times during the ensuing weeks, she slipped around the corner to our place for a quick visit while spending time with her friend. Her friend is also a former sex worker, and is facing her own huge battles at the moment. Rose and I talked about how hard it gets when you realize that you simply can’t save anybody else, no matter how much you love them.

She also mentioned a couple of times that she really wanted to move into our neighbourhood – it would be better for her son, Rueben, she’d be close to us, and Steve and Crystal Martin, and her pal, of course; I suspect it was also time to move out of the west end with all its associations to her past. One day, she called me on my cell phone, all excited.

“Guess what? I found a place that’ll be great for me and Rueben, and I can afford it, and it’s in your neighbourhood!”

“That’s great,” I said.

“Well, I don’t actually have it yet, but here’s the really great part: I went for an interview with the landlady, and she lives just around the corner from you and she knows you! But not because she lives near you, because she knows about Sanctuary because she interviewed you and wrote an article about it, so could you call her and give her a reference? I think if you talk to her she’ll let me have it, because this is totally a God thing, I mean, what are the chances? This God stuff is getting pretty weird.”

I don’t have total recall, of course, so I’m not quoting Rose entirely accurately. But she talks like that, going ninety miles an hour down a dead end street. I love being around her. She has about fifty percent more life in her than most people. And she’s had this strange and growing confidence for some years now that God likes her, and talks to her, and wants good things for her.

I did call the landlady, a Christian woman who not only told Rose ‘yes’, but reduced the rent and threw in utilities. I don’t know how much effect my call had (not much, would be my guess; the landlady was already praying that God would bring tenants who really needed the place, and Rose is a force of nature all on her own), but when she called to tell me she had been approved, Rose was giddy with excitement and gratitude. She was also all revved up because she’d had a second interview for a job that would be great, doing counseling for a downtown agency that supports youth in crisis, and Steve Martin had been a reference for her, and she so needed it and would be perfect for it and wouldn’t it just be totally incredible if she ended up getting the apartment she needed and the job she needed in the same week? Whew.

You won’t be surprised to learn that she got the job.

I’ve known Rose for about ten years now. She started in sex work when she was still a young girl, not even a teenager. You can imagine what kind of background led her there at such a young age. I think it was about seven or eight years ago that she started talking about how desperately she wanted out. The hurdles were huge, the disappointments deep and frequent. The culture of prostitution has a ferocious and tenacious grip. Money was scarce and formal education was a whole new trip. Her chances didn’t look good. People who have read her story recall that, during that period, she expressed her vision and faith that she could have a future in which she helped people like herself, and they often ask me, “Hey, did Rose ever realize those dreams?”

The apostle Paul told the Ephesians, “Long, long ago, God decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son...” * Rose wouldn’t express it that way, but she too is learning how tender and tenacious his grip is, a grip that has never loosened through abuse, prostitution, poverty, fear and a catalogue of other horrors.

Yes, Rose is realizing those dreams. What are the chances?

* That’s how Eugene Peterson expresses it in “The Message”.

Faces of Our Community

Jennifer Boyd

Jenn first heard about Sanctuary through her work with our very own Thea in an addictions research group at St. Joseph's Hospital. It wasn't long before she began showing up on Thursday nights and sharing her smiling personality with our community here. Jenn's expertise as a nurse is invaluable in our community and we're very excited for her as she has just been accepted to medical school at U of T! Jenn has been married to Gundars for nearly 3 years now and they share their home with their dog, Tosca.



Here's what Jenn has to say about Sanctuary: "I truly feel at home there. I've met so many amazing people, both community members and staff, it's been amazing. I'm so grateful to have the opportunity to "share God's kind of love". Every week it seems I learn something new and have something new to think about. I really hope to be involved with Sanctuary all through medical school and when I'm a practicing physician!"

Al Mainguy

Al Mainguy has been a jovial part of our Sanctuary community for 2 1/2 years. He first learned of Sanctuary through Don, our Kitchen Manager, who was a neighbour of his at Markeen House which also happens to be home to a number of the men in our community. Originally from Ottawa, Al moved to Toronto in 1991 where he is a part-time actor with experience in TV work, commercials, as an extra in 40-50 movies, and even in our very own Sanctuary productions as a member of the increasingly popular "Screaming Monkeys". Al keeps busy nowadays



primarily as a karaoke host, MC at various events, as a volunteer at many hostels and drop-in centres and playing baseball. He's a tough guy to miss when he's around but is certainly missed when he's not!

North Park Community Church



Whenever we have a staff member start at Sanctuary, one of their challenges is how to connect their commissioning church with the community at Sanctuary. This seems like an even greater challenge when the churches are incredibly different – what does a London church that has more than 2300 attendees each week have in common with our small, impoverished community? Amazingly, we've found that North Park, Thea's commissioning church, has really had a passion for integrating the two communities.

Fusion, the North Park youth group, comes to Sanctuary for 2-3 weeks every year, as well as doing fundraisers and other helpful tasks in their high schools and during their weekly small groups. Thea has had opportunity to share what's going on at Sanctuary on Sunday mornings, and Red Rain has been invited down to play on a Saturday night. North Park churchgoers drive 2 hours each way to be able to come to our Community Concerts, and some have spent weekends or a week with Thea to be able to attend drop-ins and get to know the community. Thea even has to bring an extra suitcase whenever she visits her parents, because people from North Park are always bringing over clothes, medical supplies, and other donations.

Instead of being a difficult task, connecting the two communities of faith has been an experience filled with excitement and much mutual stretching.

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And the most treasured richness which we enjoy around here comes not from serving a great meal or seeing another person housed – but it comes from the slow and laborious work of cultivating friendship with folks who are often stepped over on the sidewalk. Friends who are talked about, in the media, as a "problem". Friends who have experienced rejection on virtually all fronts – in many cases for most, if not all of their lives.

As I reflect on these Group Education programs, I think that it's our way of encouraging people to move closer to the heart of God for our friends. It's not uncommon, when speaking of people who are homeless, to hear expressions of disgust or disdain. Many of us move beyond that to feelings of pity – a feeling of tragedy-at-a-distance. Sometimes, we can feel compassion – some measure of heartache over the sad situation that might move us to action. Then, there is sympathy – a

"feeling with" someone where their pain becomes, in some measure, ours. But when those closest to us suffer (think of close family or friends), the feeling runs even deeper: our heart breaks just as theirs does. Their pain is ours. Their joys are ours too. We begin, I suspect, to feel as God does about the hurts that surround us.

We would be happy to welcome a group of friends or associates of yours to join us as we learn together to feel the heart of God for our community here at Sanctuary. It's sometimes painful. In fact, when we do our job well here, we're certain to feel some pain. But it's also a wonderful invitation to the heart of God and to experience His deep love for all.

For more information about Group Education, see online at www.sanctuaryministries.on.ca/group.html or call Linda at 416-922-0628 x.10.

STREET LEVEL CONFERENCE MARCH 29, TO APRIL, 2006

THE WESTIN HOTEL, DOWNTOWN OTTAWA, ONTARIO

A national conference designed to network, resource, encourage and equip those who work among homeless and street-involved youth and adults. This conference is presented by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada's Roundtable on Poverty and Homelessness.

Sanctuary is a charter member of the Roundtable, and several staff will present at the conference.

Go to WWW.STREETLEVEL.CA

**to register and sign up for updates about the conference;
or call 905-479-5885, ext. 328 for more info.**

[SANCTUARY]

25 Charles Street East, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 1R9
Tel.: 416-922-0628 Fax: 416-922-4961

www.sanctuaryministries.on.ca

email: info@sanctuaryministries.on.ca

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Yes, I want to partner with you.

- ☐ I would like to order _____ copies of "God in the Alley" (Retail price \$ 15.00).
Enclosed please find a cheque for \$ _____.
- ☐ My church/workplace should hear about Sanctuary.
- ☐ I would like to participate in a **volunteer orientation**.
- ☐ I commit to **pray** for the Sanctuary community.
- ☐ I would like to support Sanctuary on a **monthly basis**.
- ☐ I want to **financially support** your ministry:
 - ☐ Where most needed
 - ☐ Staff Name _____
 - ☐ Street Outreach
 - ☐ Meal Programs
 - ☐ Health Care ☐ Arts/Music/Drama
 - ☐ Mustard Tree Employment Program

Name _____

Address _____

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STAFF NEWS

Congratulations to two of our staff who both got engaged since our last newsletter! Lyf Stolte and Jennifer Shank are looking forward to a wedding date in October of this year. Paul Baetz and Kelly Cooper are planning for May of next year.

We're also excited about a few new faces on our staff. Tania Tadros joined us on June 1, fresh from her May 14 wedding to Nabil. Patrick Sullivan will be joining us beginning August 2. Both Tania & Patrick have been around Sanctuary to varying degrees for a number of years and we look forward to having them join us in offering care to our community. If you are interested in learning more about what their work will be or in supporting them either in prayer or financially, please call or e-mail and we'll get you connected.



As well, Stacy Sankar is joining us for the summer months on a nearly-full time basis. Stacy is a student at the University of Toronto who has been hanging around our community as part of our Friday Arts Drop-Ins for this past year. While she is devoting extra time to our friends during the summer, she has a real love for our community and is eager to keep hanging around even in the Fall when she resumes her studies.

MUSTARD TREE HAS A NEW HOME!

On June 30th of this year, we took possession of a new and permanent home for our employment program, Mustard Tree! For the first year-and-a-half of Mustard Tree's life, our wood-working shop was operating in a leased space which is now being developed for condos. We are excited to now be moving into a long-term home at 186 St. Helens near the intersection of Bloor and Lansdowne.

If you are willing to help out with any aspect of the outfitting of this new space or if you are interested in learning more about Mustard Tree, please contact Wayne Rumsby at 416-778-0694 or by e-mail at wayne@sanctuaryministries.on.ca. And see some of the blanket boxes, step stools and more for sale from Mustard Tree at www.mustardtree.ca.

SANCTUARY IN THE MEDIA

Congratulations are due to Greg for having his book, "God in the Alley", nominated for a Quills award: a readers' choice kind of awards program being run by NBC Television and the Quills Literacy Foundation. If you have read Greg's book, you can vote online at www.wnbc.com/quills between August 15 and September 15 and let the world know how you feel!

Also, you might want to tune in 100 Huntley Street during the week of September 19 to 23 to see Greg and a number of other friends of ours talking about a Christian's response to issues of homelessness. The Huntley Street folk have been visiting Sanctuary and a number of other agencies in the city preparing for this and we are glad to have this opportunity to speak to the Church in this way.