

City of Refuge

Fall 2005

A Voice from the Street

Vol. 4- Issue 3

A Place for Me, Too by Greg Paul

Rolling up to Sanctuary on my bicycle a while ago, I was met by Robert and a small clutch of others who were having a smoke out front, taking a break from the weekly Friday morning kitchen scrub-down.

"Hey, I have something for you," he said, waving a plastic bag in my direction. "You're gonna love it."

He pulled a shirt from the bag – a black, Hawaiian style shirt, brightly emblazoned with floating skulls, flowers, and rock-'n'-roll slogans. Very garish.

"Gerry said you wouldn't wear it," Robert said, pleased as punch as he held it up. "But I told him he's crazy – you're a rock'n'roller. Soon as I saw it, I knew you had to have it."

Robert has me figured out. I think it's a truly funky shirt, and I wore it proudly at Red Rain's very next gig, our October 15th community concert.

Robert knew I'd like that shirt because he knows me – not as a professional serving him, but as a friend, a member of his community. And just the sight of the shirt made him think of me the way many of us think of someone close when we see that item that would be "just perfect for him/her". Can you imagine how blessed I feel by Robert's sensitivity, thoughtfulness and generosity – by having him embrace me this way?

Experiences like this encourage me in the hope that we are truly, if slowly, becoming the kind of healthy, welcoming community we dream of being.

For the past few years, that word "community" has been a big buzz word in the social service sector. Most social service organizations would describe their work, quite accurately, as serving "the community" in some fashion. Often the community being served is defined carefully in terms of a geographical "catchment area", and a specific group characterized by age, ethnicity, health impairment (physical or mental), gender, sexual ori-

entation, or a combination of these or other qualifiers. These organizations, and most often, the dedicated professionals within them, see themselves primarily as providers of important services to these communities.

We're grateful for these valuable organizations, and for the critical work they do. In fact, we couldn't function as we do without them. But our own take on "community" is a little different. We see ourselves – Sanctuary – primarily as an incredibly diverse group of people who are trying to find ways to live our lives together, rather than as one group serving another. And rather than addressing as specialists a specific issue or people group, we are deliberately trying to grow a comprehensive, holistic community that ranges from connecting with people in back alleys to encouraging artistic expression, healthy homes, and dignified work among other things.

At a recent breakfast meeting with some friends from the local business community, I was asked, "How many of your staff get 'face time' with your people?" There are fourteen staff here at Sanctuary now, so the answer was – fourteen.

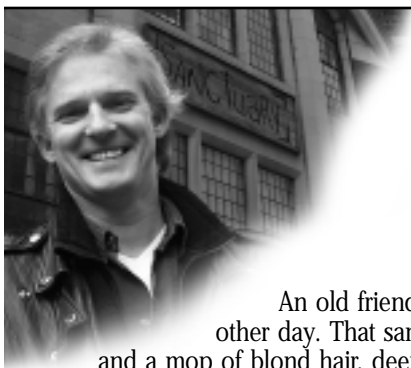
All of our staff members – community workers, program coordinators, nurses, artists, office and kitchen managers, managing and executive directors – are involved in "front line" work, connecting regularly and directly with those members of our community who struggle with homelessness, addiction, mental illness, poverty and a host of other challenges. Not even our most administratively inclined staffers (I'm not one of them) punch the clock and stay holed up in their offices. That's because we're members of the community too.

The preparation of meals, including menu selection, preparation, serving and cleanup, involves dozens of people who first came through the doors because they needed a meal themselves. (Donny, our kitchen manager, is one of them.) Street outreach teams, and street orientations for visitors, often include



Various community members helping in the kitchen.

...continued on page 4



A View From Here

by Greg Paul

An old friend stopped in for a visit the other day. That same old toothy, boyish grin and a mop of blond hair, deep-set eyes like blue lasers.

Before I actually got to know him, I used to see him on the street selling papers – he never could bring himself to walk up to strangers and just ask for money. Ball cap yanked low, hair spilling out beneath its frayed rim (the hair was longer then), raw red fingers offering the paper and a flash of white teeth to passersby. Always fast-talking friendly, but with that indefinable edge that tells you there's desperation not far below.

I don't recall whether it was on the street or at drop-in meals that we first began to connect. It must be at least ten years ago. But I retain specific images of him crashed on a couch here at Sanctuary, red-rimmed eyes swimming in pale, puffed lids, the whole of him drained of energy as surely as if someone had stuck a spigot in him and left it open. Or bent over, chest on his knees, trying to squeeze ruined feet into soaking sneakers, fumbling at the laces with numb, swollen fingers, their tips burnt and split open from constant exposure to the elements and crack cocaine. Out on Bloor Street in an early December rain, the drops like tiny bullets, his shoulders hunched high to offer some protection to bright ears, papers wrapped in plastic offered to passersby along with the frozen grin and the increasingly mechanical patter.

Like many of my friends, he slept in a lot of different places – the stairwell of a parking garage, beneath the large canopy surrounding the Reference Library, in the open air of small parks when the weather was decent. But for a couple of years, home was a doorway in an alley behind a pizza shop on Yonge Street. He was proud of the fact that the owners knew he was there, would sometimes pass him a slice or two at closing time, and let him stash his gear because he kept the doorway and alley clean.

There came a time when he started to say the same things I've heard from hundreds of others: I'm beat, I can't do this anymore, this life is killing me. And, finally, I need help.

I'd heard him hold forth at length about the intractability of bureaucrats and social workers, the meanness and slim potential of some of his fellow street people, the pettiness of the police, and how all those factors conspired to keep him where he was. But I'd never heard him blame anyone but himself for his addictions, or for his ending up homeless. Still haven't. And I still don't know what dark personal demons dragged him to the streets in the first place.

We helped him find a spot in a transition house. They told him he needed a rehab plan if he wanted to stay. We put one together, and Keren Elumir and I became his support team – regular rehab programs, he figured, were not for him. He showed up to “confess” one day: he'd spotted a piece of crack on the sidewalk, right outside the transition house, and he had picked it up. Then he had become convinced that it was a set up, the cops were watching him – so he swallowed it, and came directly to Sanctuary, still literally shaking, to tell me how close he'd come.

He started to dream again of another kind of life. Walking around the neighbourhood together, he would point out windows he had installed when he had been working as a glazier, and talk about what it would take to get back to work. He started to come to the Sunday worship at Sanctuary, although he'd never been a church guy, because he'd come to realize he needed a kind of help that was beyond what any of us could offer. After a while, and despite my insistence that it would do nothing to cleanse or cure him, he decided he wanted to be baptized, symbolizing a new direction for his life, and a new allegiance to a Power outside himself.

He stumbled a few times, righting himself with that same old grin and a caustic word for the dopes who spent their time navigating around the “zero tolerance” drug and alcohol stance of the transition house. He got his own place, and promptly fell headlong, ended up crashing in the doorway behind the pizza joint once more. He kept away from Sanctuary for a time.

When he did come around again, those brilliant eyes had gone the colour of bruises. He was going to go home, he said. His mom would let him live with her, in a small town at the base of the Bruce Peninsula, and he was pretty sure he could find work. Despite his obvious affection for his mother, and his respect for her generous husband, I remember thinking it couldn't be easy for a guy closing in on forty to crawl home like that with his tail between his legs, especially to a place small enough that everyone in town would know exactly what he'd been up to these past ten years. I warned him about the futility of the “geographical cure”, and watched while he aborted the plan a couple of times.

But he did finally get there. Over the past few years, I've only seen him when he needed to be back in the city on one kind of business or other. The first time it was welfare-related, and I was terrified for him, sure that he'd get sucked back into the dark world he had struggled so long to get free of. The next time, he was in the area to pick up his swing-stage license, and to tell me about the job he had installing windows and aluminum siding. Complaining a bit about the boss, naturally. Admitting he still drank too much on occasion, and kicked himself around for days afterward. Last summer he arrived to show me the pickup truck he had just bought, and just lately he came to get me to sign his passport photos, and proudly display a company cheque – his own company! The eyes are clear, and very bright again.

His story reminds me of a few important things that are easy to forget when the daily grind keeps your nose too close to the ground. Although there are principles that apply universally – nobody does anything that really matters on their own; God makes the most sense to people who are truly desperate – every person's journey is unique. So while principles may apply, the rules often don't. God, and His greatest creation, the human spirit, are both too big to be bound by the limits of my imagination, too flexible to submit to the rigidity of my expectations.

And miracles do still happen. Sometimes they take ten years to unfold. Some just keep on unfolding.

“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old life is gone, a new life begins!”

(2 Cor. 6:17, 18 NIV/The Message)

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...Continued from page 1

community members who were formerly homeless. The sorting of donations of food and clothing, most of our building maintenance, and some of our recent Mustard Tree renovations, are all getting done by members of the community. In fact, this newsletter was folded, stuffed and addressed by people who come regularly to the drop-ins – people who know they are important members of the Sanctuary community, and that *City of Refuge* is an important means of communicating with the people who help support it.

Most of us here, staff included, came in the first place because we either needed some material help (food, clothing, health care) or we thought we had something to offer (service, witness, skills). We stay because we have discovered that, while these things are all true, the deeper truth is that this is where we belong. In community, the “needy” discover that they have much to give; the “strong” discover there is much they need to receive.

The same friend who asked about “face time” also remarked on the nature of community. Although these aren’t exactly the words he used, he pointed out that being in community together means that we value mutuality, intimacy, and accountability. Mutuality means that each individual is valued, and has gifts to offer as well as to receive. Intimacy means that our personal relationships deepen over time. And accountability means that, since the actions of the individual affect others, we are willing to submit ourselves to some measure of scrutiny, and the encouragement or reproof that may follow. While that might sound constraining in a culture that so values individual liberty, we’re discovering that it’s actually very freeing, both releasing and holding us as we “grow up” into the people we were meant to be – reaching toward, as the apostle Paul describes it, “the stature of the fullness of Christ”.¹

We sometimes say that we want to be a community centred on Jesus Christ, one that lives out the incredible good news that grace is for the undeserving, and mercy for the guilty. A place where the rich discover their poverty, the poor discover their wealth, and each of us sees reflected in the other the image of the One who made us all. A place, in other words, for me.

¹. Ephesians 4:13

STREET LEVEL CONFERENCE MARCH 29, TO APRIL, 2006

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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
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about the conference;

or call 905-479-5885, ext. 328 for more info.



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WANNA BUY A HOUSE?

Sanctuary's first and only house, **Lucas House**, has just celebrated its first anniversary. **Yahoo!** Four friends from within our community have been living together as a “surrogate family” for a year in a home provided for them by Sanctuary and, in particular, some very financially-supportive friends of Sanctuary. And having done this once has just whet our appetite now for doing it again!

Believe it or not, twelve people each contributing \$1,500 only once per year could make a “home within a community” a reality for some of our friends. We would love to talk with you more about working to this goal.

If you are interested in learning more about how you – either on your own or in partnership with some associates from church or work or wherever – could help Sanctuary provide a home for some more of our friends,

Please contact **Alan** at 416-922-0628 ext.11
or alanb@sanctuaryministries.on.ca.

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A Night at Grace's



**NEXT SANCTUARY
COMMUNITY
CONCERT:**

**FEB 4, 2006
8:00-11:00p.m.**

Bring a Friend!!

Faces of Our Community



Dana Ruttkay

For nearly 5 years now, Dana has been a member of the Sanctuary community, connecting with our friends in a variety of settings and ways. By his own admission, Dana came to Sanctuary initially just to “do the good Christian volunteer thing” – a once-a-week, ease my guilty conscience, help the homeless experience. But from

his very first Thursday night drop-in, he felt challenged and re-directed to a more meaningful level of involvement and engagement with our community.

Most recently, he has been actively involved with his partner, LouAnne Morton, in Outreach on Friday nights, as a regular attendee at our Sunday worship services and as a friend and mentor to a number of our community members. In general, he just seems to be around as often as he can – exactly how we love for our community to work. In between visits to Sanctuary, Dana is a Senior Product Manager with the TSX where he has worked for the last 10 years and is also a part-time student at Tyndale Seminary where he is working on a Masters of Theological Studies.

Rosa Lampkin

Rosa Lampkin has been gracing the Sanctuary community with her cheerful presence and bright smile for 6 or 7 years now. She is the proud mom of 3 kids and grandma to her grandson, Kevin. Beyond just those kids though, she is a street-mom to another dozen or so kids whom she and her fiancé, Dave, have taken under their wing. Together, she and Dave have been helping out regular-



ly in the kitchen for more than a year and are always willing to pitch in and lend a helping hand. Rosa is a Toronto native and, as every good Toronto resident should, even worked at the Canadian National Exhibition for a stretch of time. Along with caring for her kids and grandson and helping out around Sanctuary, Rosa enjoys doing arts and crafts, making jewelry, skating and baking – rumour has it that she makes a mean chocolate chip cookie!

Operation Good Thing

Now in its tenth year, Operation Good Thing (OGT) exists to promote the awareness and practical involvement of caring people in significant street issues. This is done by soliciting practical, meaningful and greatly-needed items and then working with eight agencies in the downtown core – including Sanctuary – to distribute these items to homeless youth and adults.



An Operation Good Thing bag may contain anything from toothpaste and a toothbrush to socks and underwear...to a sleeping bag that may just be key to helping someone survive the winter. Over the years, OGT has made it possible for our staff to give out hundreds of sleeping bags, toques, gloves and much more to many grateful friends who spend the cold winter nights sleeping outside and trying desperately to stay warm.

If you, your church or your workplace is interested in learning more about Operation Good Thing and how you can participate in this program, see the Toronto Youth Unlimited website at www.youthunlimitedgta.com and look under Programs.

PROGRAM UPDATES

Mustard Tree Update – In our last newsletter, we announced with delight that Mustard Tree had a new home. Now, after a few months of hard work fixing it up to meet our needs, we are ready to move in! We are still, however, looking for volunteers to help with some painting and other odd jobs. We can always use an extra set of willing hands, skilled or unskilled, in the shop itself. If you're interested in seeing the shop and learning more about what we are doing to offer dignified work to some of our friends, feel free to drop by for a visit to 186 St. Helens Avenue near Bloor & Lansdowne. Or contact Wayne at 416-778-0694 or wayne@sanctuaryministries.on.ca.



Women's Drop-In – The newest initiative we have started has been a drop-in on Tuesday mornings exclusively for women. The driving force behind this has been Nancy Sarlo, a member of Forestbrook Community Church who, for more than a year, has been devoting a couple of days a week to building relationships here at Sanctuary. Here's how Nancy expresses her heart for the Women's Drop-In:

“As I sat in drop-ins and coffee shops over the past year and listened to the stories some of the women were willing to share I was impressed by the need to somehow create a safe, peaceful environment in which woman-to-woman relationships could be nurtured. I've always loved cooking and have been involved in community cooking projects in the past. The story sharing and conversation which spontaneously occurs during meal preparation seemed a natural place to start. With the support of Karen Paul, the dream of a weekly women's drop-in with a community kitchen component became a reality on Sept. 21, 2005.

“On Tuesday, as the smells from the stove waft through Sanctuary's large but homey kitchen the women are slowly sharing their stories from their week and past. They plan the menu for the next week and at times contribute recipes they remember from past family meals.

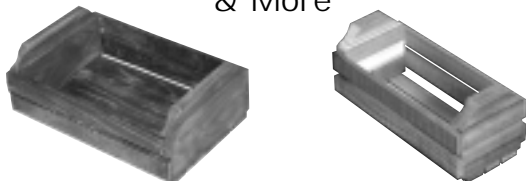
“For many of the women who have attended regularly they say it's a place to meet other women, share ideas, discuss problems and learn new recipes. For others it's a place to grab a quick shower and share a cup of coffee before starting their day.

“As the cold weather approaches we look forward to the warmth of sharing this cozy atmosphere into the new year.”

Nancy Sarlo

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FINANCIAL UPDATE

The last few months of every year, for better or worse, are always the ones that can make or break our year financially. This year is no exception. Looking back however, we are reminded of how consistently and faithfully God has provided for us through all 13 years of our existence – no matter the size of our need, He has provided through friends and supporters like yourselves. And we look forward to seeing that happen again!

As always though, we are looking for new friends who might become partners with us in this work. Some partner with us by sharing their time, others through their prayers and some through financial gifts. If you know someone who might be interested in contributing in any of these ways, please share this newsletter with them and encourage them to get in touch with us so that we can connect about how they might become involved.

ITEMS NEEDED

The winter months are, for obvious reasons, some of the most difficult months of the year for our friends who live on the streets. Even those who spend nights in one of the city's many homeless shelters or in an Out of the Cold program, spending a cold winter day outside can be a real trial. For this reason, we commit a good chunk of our year's budget to purchasing sleeping bags, gloves, blankets and more for our friends.

One of the greatest ways that your church or workplace can help us out is by either contributing financially to the purchase of items like these or by purchasing them yourself and sending them to us. This can be done directly through Sanctuary or through Operation Good Thing (see Page 5).

Along with these special needs for the winter months, we are always in need of some basic items like socks and underwear as well as personal hygiene items like deodorant, toothpaste, soap, shampoo and more. If you have any inquiries at all about what we need, please contact Linda at 416-922-0628 x.10 or lindar@sanctuaryministries.on.ca.

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[SANCTUARY]

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