



# CAPITAL CITY MISSION NEWSLETTER

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## LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER

In a recent article on the homeless in Ottawa, the Citizen told of StreetOutreach, a government-subsidised program operating in Ottawa to address the needs of the men and women who live on our streets.

As readers and as concerned Christians, it warms our hearts to know that “something” is being done and that the government is making a contribution to alleviate the suffering of folks like those cited in the story. Yet we ask ourselves, is it enough to keep ourselves informed and to give thanks for those specifically called to minister to the poor and for whatever government assistance is available to assist them? Ought we, too, to be more personally involved?

For many of us, the last question is a difficult one to answer, even, perhaps, one that we would rather not ask. This is not because we do not want to help so much as because we aren’t sure how to help people whose lives are so far removed from our own. We know that Jesus has told us that everyone is our neighbour and has called us to love one another. Yet, as Christians living in an affluent society, and one in which the idea that a governmental “safety net” should make it possible for anyone who really wants to, to “make it”, we often struggle with stereotypes. It is easy to fall prey to thinking of those people who seem to loiter about the streets doing nothing productive with their time as lazy or dishonest or any number of other descriptions. We ask ourselves legitimate questions:

How do I know when a “need” is real?

How do I truly help someone who may use money simply to feed an addiction?

Perhaps the hardest: how do I get past my own anger or distaste or fear or stereotypical thinking in order to open my heart as Jesus called me to do?

I acknowledge that I am uncomfortable with the sight of the homeless on the streets, that I often resent being approached for spare change, that I am suspicious of motives. I resent the guilt I feel when I do not give and the malaise I experience when I do, all the while wondering if I have hindered rather than helped. How do I get past this discomfort in order to respond, as I ought?

It seems so much easier, less stressful, to respond financially to the needs of the poor in other places who have been displaced and dispossessed by war or famine or natural disasters. And, after all, we’ve all heard stories of people from “difficult backgrounds” who have taken themselves to twelve-step recovery programs to deal with their personal fallout from addictions or abuse. If one can do it, why not all?

The only way that we can answer this last question is to learn what the life-stories are, to come to some understanding of the events that have led people to life on the streets. Only with understanding can we develop compassion, a love that springs from our identification with those who suffer our brothers and sisters in Christ. In this issue and ones to follow, Timothy Meisenheimer, CCM Director, will share with us the story of some of our guests at the Mission. To respect our friends’ privacy, all names have been changed.

## Freddie

Freddie and his wife Debbie have been together 20 years, separated only in the periods when one or the other is in either the hospital or jail. Right now, because of special needs brought about by Debbie's mental illness, they live in separate locations. Eight years ago, the Children's Aid Society took over guidance of the couple's three children. Freddie and Debbie never see them, nor do they expect ever again to have their family with them.

At the moment, Freddie lives in a nine-by-twelve-foot room. He shares a washroom and kitchen with eight other folks, most of whom are addicts and have comparable life stories. After paying his rent, Freddie has \$112.00 for the month. His only possession is his bike.

Freddie's dad is still alive and not too far away but memories of violence and aggressive anger make Freddie nervous of working on the relationship.

Typically, Freddie's day begins with breakfast at Shepherds of Good Hope or The Mission. Afterwards, he goes to a drop-in like ours at CCM where he hangs out till 3 o'clock. By then, it's time to start thinking about supper. He ends his day riding his bike or walking the streets.

When Freddie comes in to the drop-in at CCM, he is always polite in making any requests: "May I do some laundry? I just have one backpack. It's all I have. It won't take long."

Two of Freddie's greatest challenges are keeping his medications straight and finding people to listen to him talk. Freddie loves to talk – about hockey, nature, his kids, whether Debbie will ever be healthy enough to live with him again, who's going to court, who's at Innes, who's just got out. And why he never wants to go back.

If you were to ask Freddie about his friends, he would say, he's got good ones and bad ones. If he can stay away from smoking up and he remembers to take his medication, he's fine. Looking blankly out at the world. Somehow he stills knows how to smile. Maybe that's the best medication Freddie's found so far.

## How Can We Understand Poverty?

Freddie's story is just one of the over one hundred that could be told of the souls who visit daily at CCM. Perhaps it sounds stereotypical of the inner city "lifestyle". Yet these people do not look at themselves as poor but as people doing what they must do to survive in a world that perhaps they don't understand or perhaps doesn't understand them.

How can we understand poverty? Prejudice can operate subtly in our lives. When you read stories such as Freddie's and when you go near others that are different from you, is your response, "**Thank you, God that I'm not like that?**" Jesus assured us that "the poor will be with you always" (Matt. 26:11) and "Even as you do unto the least of these, you do unto me" (Matt. 25:40).

No doubt understanding comes from education. But it also comes from action. When we offer ourselves as mercy gifts and seek to stop judging and start responding to others with unconditional love. As a first step, please pray for our guests and our staff, that all will share as a community in God's blessing.

**Rev. Timothy Meisenheimer, Director**

**How to Become Involved:** Telephone Timothy or Matthew at 241-2407 or e-mail at [capitalcitymission@sympatico.ca](mailto:capitalcitymission@sympatico.ca)