



*WE are a reconciling in Christ,
welcoming community of faith*

Lutheran Urban Mission Society

Winter 2010

STREET MINISTRY

“In response to the gospel & the needs we see around us, our mission is to serve God by being a prophetic Eucharistic community... we provide comprehensive pastoral care to the disenfranchised & marginalized of our society...” –LUMS mission statement

Many of our DownTownEastSide friends often say how comfortable & welcome they feel in our space here at 360 Jackson avenue. They regularly comment on how different the atmosphere here is compared to the many other places in the ‘hood. They feel safe & therefore free to open up & express themselves in ways they haven’t the opportunity elsewhere. Often very honest intimate vulnerable & emotional things come tumbling out because our friends feel safe here among us. We are trying to carry on the apostolic ministry of hospitality modeled by Jesus in his public ministry, his being companionable & identifying with those shunned & folks of ill repute. We really strive to pay attention to our guests. We carefully spend time attending, intently focusing, listening to what each individual wants to say, responding to the urgencies they raise. Sometimes someone will ask, well what is it that you guys do here? It hard to answer, it is difficult to describe. We don’t’ve a packageable commodity. We don’t really offer programming. What we do is pastoral care, accompanying our siblings through the on going rollercoaster ride that is life in the

DTES for more than 15 years now. Sure we feed 300-350 people each month at our sit down 4th Saturday hot meal; but that is really for church folks. To provide an opportunity for Christians to put into practice what we say we believe. Yes, we put good homemade lovingly prepared & served food into people’s stomachs, but there are plenty of places for food in the ‘hood. We are really trying to feed their souls, their inner persons, their human dignity; which is why our meals are all about the quality of hospitality that we offer. We’ve recently been recognized by one our partners, the Roman Catholic archdiocese who runs “the Door Is Open” who hosts us as we host the meal in their facility, as a model of hospitality they’d like to hold up & imitate. Yes we give away many bags of pantry food to those struggling to survive in this increasingly expensive city of wealth, with the lowest provincial minimum wage in Canada, with a welfare rate frozen for years while provincial politicians continually raise their own salaries; we give away blankets to shelter, warm & comfort our exposed friends; we give away hand-me-down clothes; we give away hygienic & body care items; but these are not what we do. These things are only the added extras; they compliment what we really do. That is treat our sisters & brothers as the precious in-the-image-of-the-divine: “Imago Dei” that they are. We treat them with some little human respect & dignity. We expend hours of our time on any given individual who needs us at the moment. My lawyer charges me \$500 an hour. What are the innumerable hours I have spent listening & caring for

our siblings on the DTES worth? Much of life in the DTES is dehumanizing & debilitating. That is why it is so very important that we provide an alternative. An alternative that against their daily lived experience says “you are precious, you are valueable, you are not discardable.” An alternative where we learn our friends names, listen to their stories, know small details about their everyday lives, things like their birthdays or that they or someone they love are ill or in distress. And very often this alternative opens to flood gates allowing our friends to open up & expose their vulnerable human selves to us. It is holy & humbling. Don’t be fooled, this doesn’t come cheaply. It costs Aidan, Intern-Pastor Lori-Anne, our volunteers & myself. For years while at 1st United I had to step over folks sucking on their crack pipe or sticking a needle in their arm on the door stoop as I entered to our office. It always broke my heart. Out in the rear alley behind our new digs there are several dumpsters. They are a popular gathering place. Dudes use it as a public bathroom. Others shoot up there. Some are dumpster diving for useful recycleables to make some small profit from. Early one morning recently there was a woman out there totally naked, she was barely standing, but kept twitching, her body repeatedly convulsing, on the drug trip she was on. What does it cost us who serve here to have to witness such human suffering day after day & year after year? So pray for us. Often please. Regularly. Pray that we might continually afresh have the compassion of Christ.

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Intern Pastor Lori-Anne Boutin...

On one of my walks in the downtown core, a man said to me: “No one cares about what happens to us. We are just the dregs of society.” As I listened to his story and his struggle to survive, I looked around the Downtown Eastside at the cars filing by with their gazing occupants, and wondered how many people in Vancouver actually shared this perspective.

Shame most often defines the experience of poverty within our country despite the fact that poverty is one of the most commonly human experiences in this world, for there is often some prevailing injustice impeding the ability of the masses to live in a manner that is imbued with dignity. Most nation’s citizens are incapable of procuring the necessary wealth to sustain their physical and material livelihood, let alone attend to their emotional and psychological development through educational or social means. Often this is due to a lack of systematic infrastructure aimed to care for more than those who are deemed ‘most fit’ to survive, or the lack of an accountable political will to ‘evenly’ disperse accessible wealth to the collective whole.

However, within our Canadian nation is a prevailing myth of self-sufficiency and of equal opportunity, and the myth that all are equally capable of achieving ‘success,’ which is usually defined by the wealth one is able to accumulate, the education one is able to acquire, and other outward signs of success that comes with wealth: housing, vehicles, investments, clothing, accumulated items, and a healthy body. When one is incapable of obtaining these objects of wealth, who is typically left to blame but the one with empty hands? Yet all too often, we forget that all systems bear their cracks, whether they are found on the national, social, familial, or personal level.

Recently a Franciscan nun, Sr. Elizabeth, shared with me her inspiration for living amongst the urban poor and providing years of service, outreach, and advocacy for the underprivileged. Her incredible passion is rooted in the simple message that all are created in the image of God; as all human beings in this world are bearers of God, all should thus be regarded as incredibly valuable persons.

Jesus Christ spent his time in the company of those who were deemed dregs and misfits, with those who were cast away from his society’s inner circles. But perhaps more importantly, it was these people in whom he found great friendships, for they were not only persons to minister but were his friends to embrace in love.

Let us recall that regardless of our outward appearances or our ability to bear the signs of health and wealth, our integrity and value as human beings is rooted in the source of all life and love. Thanks be to God that our common human brokenness is embraced and finds its wholeness in the inclusively welcoming body of Christ.

Shortly after my internship began in September with LUMS, MK popped into my life. Distraught from the difficult reality of life in the Downtown Eastside, the LUMS office provided MK with a venue for rest and consolation, and a place where she could be heard and encouraged. Over the last couple of months, I have noted how MK has grown in strength and tenacity, finding her courage to deal with the devastating disappointment that often comes with immigration to a democratic nation purporting the myth of equal opportunity.

The first time I heard MK’s story, I returned home and wept over my wholesome supper praying in gratitude for the gifts before me, and praying for this amazing woman caught in a horrific web. I realized that little differentiated MK and I, for I too had experienced devastating tragedies that left me on more than one occasion uprooted and displaced. However, my solace was the fortunate birth into a family that consistently caught me whenever I fell, and held me up until I learned how to stand and walk again on my own.

I asked MK to share her wisdom, her eyes, and her powerful story that has so profoundly touched my person. MK is a very intelligent woman writing in her fourth language, and has the gift of her ‘voice’ to share as a valued member of our LUMS community. If you feel so moved, please take the time to write MK and share with her how her story has increased your understanding of the poor’s plight in Vancouver.

In peace,

Lori-Anne Boutin

MK’s Article

Homelessness is denigrating to humans as it puts them to the animal level – human individuals are rendered unable to rest their brain. The mere fact of closing the eyes for sleeping makes them vulnerable to unwanted attention (especially women) or even physical attacks. Six months ago, Vancouverites were stunned by the brutal attack and the senseless death of Tom Sawyer, a gentle flower man and connoisseur of the British Columbian botany. He used to sleep in the downtown core, which is not even considered a dangerous area. Also Tom Sawyer was not a user and stayed away from criminal behaviour. A

homeless couple, a woman and a man were using the heater to stay warm during night time. They were burned in the explosion that resulted due to malfunction of the heater. Later, the man succumbed to his burns. This incident happen in December of 2007.

Another, more recent incident involved a homeless man, who was injured by the passing garbagetruck – the driver failed to distinguish him in his black attire, while he was sleeping on a pile of garbage.

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In homeless individuals, a sense of frustration appears during the day due to lack of proper night sleep, contributes greatly to subsequent antisocial behaviour like swearing, spitting, urinating in public spaces. Drug/alcohol use/abuse destined to mitigate mental and physical suffering make an appearance to stay for way too many of them. Substance abuse and dependency come into place with all social and health repercussions include long term ill health, brain damage and deaths. Sleep-deprived people do not make attentive employees during work hours. Let us not to forget costly harmful long-term effects of addictive substances on our descendants.

Here are some facts that put us to shame as a first world country. There are homeless children in BC! "Since 2002 amendments to social assistance and disability regulations, approximately 16,000 women have been removed from social assistance. A BC Housing report in 2008 found that homeless shelters turned away people more than 40,000 times – with **16,000 women and CHILDREN TURNAWAYS.**" (Just Another Dead DTES Hooker? publication in *The Vancouver Province* 07-30-09 by Harsha Walia).

It looks like BC authorities don't take serious steps to stop already staggering homelessness rates from climbing any farther – Rich Coleman, the Minister of Housing and Social Development (formerly welfare) refused to postpone or cancel evictions even during Olympics because "It was unfair to landlords". The postolympic British Columbia is left with a debt to repay for the upcoming 30 years. Massive cutbacks of all programs in education, culture, even disability benefits. **Canada is the only G8 country without a national housing strategy.** We need to dedicate only **1% of federal budget to housing.** Many of our seniors and disabled citizens live in crammed quarters, so called SROs (single room occupancy) apartments, where kitchen, living and bedroom are located in the same space without bathroom and storage. Moreover Canada, being a vast country (the second largest in the world), where people migrate in search of employment opportunities and, therefore, without sufficient economical means. A large segment of our population is composed by immigrants who have no relatives or family members to rely on (or to crash on the floor in their living room in case of an extreme need). Last but not least, the harsh reality of Canadian winters calls for urgent measures to prevent any further victims of frost bite or frozen to death by exposure to low temperatures. Canada already has a **bad track record in this matter in the United Nations.** In 2007, a UN envoy was sent to investigate housing issues in our country after multiple complains of deaths due to hypothermia.

In these times of economic meltdown, many British-Columbians find it increasingly difficult to make ends meet, especially when it comes to rents. It is of common knowledge, in Canadian market place, we observe two processes: Jobs are being taken overseas; Cheap foreign workforce, temporary and permanent (immigrants) are arriving to our country. "Each year, more than 150,000 temporary foreign workers from more than 100 countries come to Canada. Statistics already reflect ...their numbers nearly doubled since

1998" (August 18, 2010 *24 Hours edition* Foreign Workers Play a Valuable Role in Canada). Their arrival drives labor prices down, while keeping available housing vacancies filled.

The one who writes these lines has a personal story to tell. I was laid off along with others and my own job taken overseas. I guess it was some sort of Christmas present.

As I was scrambling to secure a new source of income here, my former employer was boasting higher profit in the faraway lands. My landlord evicted me after I ran out of unemployment insurance payments. As a result, I lost the last personal possession and the last shirt of my back.

I also have a personal story to tell how a woman that lacks affordable private space becomes vulnerable to unscrupulous manipulations of people without moral principles. A male friend offered to me a place to stay on his premises. He assured I was secure and safe. He announced to me he broke up with his girlfriend back in his country of origin because she did not tolerate my presence in his apartment. He was the one who informed her about it because I made sure not to answer the phone. He alleged I was the culprit of his personal misfortune and proceeded to make passes on me, while I was staying in the living room of his one bedroom dwelling. Then the wannabe-boyfriend asked me to vacate his premises on a 5 days notice. I stepped out his apartment 14 days after I moved in. He offered to me to hold my personal belongings. I was faced with betrayal one more time four months later, when I contacted him to claim them. He alleged my clothing, jewelry, books and bedding he threw to trash two months earlier. The unwanted boyfriend with a full time job did not bother to use the contact phone which I made available to him.

As a newcomer to Canada, I was explained that homeless are individuals with addiction problems, hence they have difficulties keeping jobs. This is not my experience - I have never used toxic substances, I hold a university degree but I failed to secure an accommodation during a full four months and a half. Get this – I moved into the residence for recovering addicts a full four months and a half after being on the street during the day and sleeping during nights at Lifeskills, which opens between 11pm and 7am as a low barrier shelter for women. Words 'low barrier' mean they are allowed to come in any time, on drugs or intoxicated. I often was awoken in the middle of the night by screams of women on drugs or cleaning efforts of the staff engaged in removal of vomit associated with withdrawal.

I am not alone in my predicament as a homeless woman! Others shared with me similar experiences of being vulnerable and exposed to undesirable attentions (mostly from men), when possibility of moral downfall is very real.

Such social malaise as addictions, prostitution and youth crime, can be largely prevented by the presence of affordable long-term accommodations for all Canadians. There is a persistent and growing need to join the civilized world of countries with national housing programs by dedicating to this matter only 1% of the federal budget.



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The “programme” LUMS offers, that nobody else in this ‘hood, not even the other religious communities in this community offer, is this one on one, human scaled, pastoral care. And I have a hunch, it is a very explicitly Lutheran pastoral quality. The largest line item in our LUMS budget goes to salaries of our staff. We unashamedly & unapologetically put the resources you place in our care back into the DTES in the form of pastoral care. (“We put our money where our mouth is.”) That is our priority & we back that priority up with how we expend the precious gifts to

God that you share with us. What do we do here? We attend those discarded. We listen to the deaf. We mourn with our aboriginal friends in grief. We share hospitality with those often dehumanized. We are convinced that this is worth doing. And we are grateful that you continue to support us in this costly & precious ministry.

“We are merely servants: we have done no more than our duty” - St. Luke 17:10

Your street priest
 Pastor Brian



Desirables for pantry goods donations:

*can openers
 or pull top lids
 proteins are favs
 so bragg chili con carne
 & tin raviolis are top of list preference items
 spam
 tuna
 and canned salmon are next favs
 stews & soups
 beans
 pastas like kraft dinner
 those chinese noodles to which you just add hot water
 canned veggies; corn, mixed veg
 canned fruit*

*fruit cups
 puddings
 canned milk
 small portions of coffee, yes even instant powder
 teas
 hot chocolate
 fruit juices
 cereals often we give away quaker oats again just add water
 honey
 peanut butter
 these are some mainstays
 treats are also appreciated
 like chocolate bars
 thats a quick basics list*

*Join us each fourth Saturday of the month
 for the LUMS Hot Meal
 with a service at 10am
 and a hot, sit down meal at 11am.*

*If your congregation would like to host a Hot Meal in
 2011, contact the LUMS office. See the website for
 more details.*

CHRISTMAS CONCERT - LOVE FOR LUMS
MT. OLIVET LUTHERAN CHURCH
1700 MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY
NORTH VANCOUVER
DATE: TUESDAY DECEMBER 14, 2010
TIME: 7:30 P.M.
FEATURING: SEA TO SKY WIND ENSEMBLE
(formerly North Shore Concert Band)
Conductor: Tak Maeda

Do you have extra blank holiday cards to donate? LUMS offers assistance to community members who wish to send something out during the holidays.

Do you want to receive your newsletter electronically instead? Email your name and email address to lumsadmin@lums.ca with “Go Green” in the subject line. We use your postage costs to help those in the DTES.