

Urban Christian Outreach (Ottawa)

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And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" Luke 2:8-14 (ESV)

Dear Followers of Jesus,

As we prepare to celebrate the birthday of our Lord and Savior Jesus, I am moved to tears by the many blessings of grace and mercy that I see unfolding all around me. In the midst of the pain and despair in the lives of those we serve, how can I not give praise to our God, who in His infinite mercy gives great gifts to those who cry out to Him, to those who ask? And so, struggle as I may to write to you this day, it is to Him that I must pen my words in a

prayer of thanksgiving: "Father, thank you for hearing our prayers. Thank you for drawing near to us in our hour of need. Thank you for inviting us to be still before you, to sit with you, to walk with you, to listen to you. Thank you for your 'peace that passes all understanding.' Thank you for keeping our friend out of jail. Thank you for his wonderful lawyer. Bless her, Lord. Thank you for providing friendship and fellowship for our homeless friends. Thank you for healing two broken relationships. Thank you for the new shoes for our disabled friend. Thank you for healing the knees of two friends and the back of another. Thank you for providing clothing and books. Thank you for the prayers and tears shared in the coffee shop. Thank you for the hope that you gave to our friend who was hurting and in despair. Thank you that she did not take her life, but that she put her hope in you. Thank you for revealing yourself to her.

Thank you for a new bed for one and sleeping bags for two. Thank you for providing gifts of toiletries. Thank you for the delicious meals. Thank you for our Board members, past and present. Thank you for our prayer partners. Thank you for our financial supporters. Thank you for our churches. Bless them all, Lord. Thank you for Jesus. Thank you that he was born into a poor family- so simple and yet so

perfect. Thank you that he lived and walked among the poor. Thank you for revealing yourself among our poor.

Thank you that Jesus died for us. Thank you for the Cross. Thank you that He rose again, so that we might have eternal life, so that we might find peace and hope in Him. Thank you that you did not leave us alone, but that you sent your Holy Spirit to comfort us, especially when those around us less us down. Bless those who are hurting at this time. Bless our families, our friends, our neighbours and co-workers. Comfort them and provide for them. Bless our ministries and the ministry work of UCO. Lord, help us to continue to shine your light into the darkness of their lives. Help us to grow in your likeness: to be loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled. Help us to share the hope that we have in your son, our savior, Jesus. Thank you, Father, for your many blessings. We bless you, in Jesus' name, as we celebrate his glorious birth. Amen."

Like those whom we serve, UCO is a poor ministry and dependant upon God for his provision. We pray to God for all our needs, and we put our trust and hope in Him, that there will be an envelope or two in our mailbox each week, so that we will be able to continue to befriend the poor, and to point them to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. One client, who admitted that he didn't have a friend in the world, now has a friend in Jesus, a friend that will never let him down, a friend who was born and died just for him.

I leave you with the lyrics of a song by Chris Rice titled 'Untitled Hymn' (Come to Jesus) that has been a blessing to me and to some of our friends on the sidewalks.

It is my prayer that you will come to know Jesus in a deeper way this Christmas. I wish you a blessed Christmas filled with the peace and joy that only Christ can give.

With gratitude,
Jill Wilson
UCO Executive Director

**"Untitled Hymn (Come to Jesus)" by
Chris Rice**

Weak and wounded sinner lost and left to die
Raise your head for love is passing by
Come to Jesus, Come to Jesus, Come to Jesus
and live

Now your burden's lifted and carried far away
And precious blood has washed away the stain
So sing to Jesus, sing to Jesus, sing to Jesus
and live

And like a newborn baby don't be afraid to
crawl
And remember when you walk sometimes we
fall,
So fall on Jesus, fall on Jesus, fall on Jesus
and live

Sometimes the way is lonely and steep and
filled with pain
So if your sky is dark and pours the rain,
Then cry to Jesus, cry to Jesus, cry to Jesus
and live

O and when the loves spills over and music
fills the night
And when you can't contain your joy inside
Then dance for Jesus, dance for Jesus, dance
for Jesus and live.

And with your final heartbeat, kiss the world
goodbye
Then go in peace and laugh on Glory's side
And fly to Jesus, fly to Jesus, fly to Jesus and
live.

UCO President's Report

It is with regret that the UCO Board accepted the resignation of outgoing President, Janice Fiamengo, who has served faithfully and diligently for the past three years, ably leading us through a time of transition after Katrine Barton-Coward's retirement. We thank God for her many gifts which she freely shared in order that the ministry of UCO might continue and flourish in the future, and we wish her all the best as she continues to serve our Lord in other ways.

I was elected to take on the presidency and am delighted to do so. We have been graced with two new board members, Donna Appleton and Mary Anne Zwicker, and look forward to working together to support Jill in her work with the poor on the downtown streets of Ottawa. We are still looking for new board members so don't be shy!

I was disheartened to read in the paper recently that only 23.1% of Canadian taxpayers claimed a charitable donation on their tax returns last year, down from 30% in 1990. One of the reasons given for the decline is that "religious participation, traditionally the route through which many Canadians give, has been falling." It makes me even more grateful to all of you, who have heard Jesus' call to care for the poor in supporting the work of UCO even in these challenging economic times.

Knowing that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6), it's no surprise that the birth of Jesus in a stable was not announced to the rich and powerful, but to lowly shepherds "keeping watch over their flocks by night." Poverty is humbling. Most of us have never

experienced going without, and so the Lord humbles us in other ways, perhaps by leading us to give sacrificially, or by asking us to reach out to the lonely and the lost in other ways. Christmas is a wonderful time to invite friends to come to church with us, and to offer hospitality. May we all pray for the humility to see Jesus, not only as the baby in the manger at Christmas, but as our Saviour who gave us the gift of himself, so that we can be "sorrowful yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything" (2 Corinthians 6:10).

Merry Christmas!

The Rev. Karen Bergenstein
President, UCO

