

# Urban Christian Outreach (Ottawa)

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**Update #54**

**October, 2010**

Dear Friends of the Poor,

How great is our God! As I glimpse outside of my window, I am in awe of the breathtaking beauty of the changing leaves around me, and I cannot help but give thanks to God for this beautiful gift. I also thank God for all of you, and for your prayers and financial gifts that make it possible for us to continue, month by month, to serve the poor, the homeless and the marginalized in Ottawa.

Our sidewalk ministry was very busy this past summer and we were blessed in many ways. Because of your support, I was able to accompany clients to court on a number of occasions, and helped one client to arrange for a lawyer. Some of our clients suffer from mental illness and as a result, can be vulnerable when it comes to understanding our laws. The process can be daunting, and without our help, at least one of our clients would have been unnecessarily incarcerated.

Sarah (not her real name) struggles with ordering her day to day life. I was able to accompany her to her doctor, and after two years without medication, she is now back on her medication. As a result of her new schedule (which will include visits to her family doctor, social worker,

and psychiatrist) Sarah now qualifies for a free monthly bus pass. This is one of the tasks of UCO: to build or rebuild a network of support around our clients,

I never cease to be in awe of how our Lord works in and through the lives of those whom we serve. What began one day with John (not his real name) arriving for bible study, suffering from back pain and wearing shoes three sizes too small, (his entire heel was hanging off the back of his shoe!) has become an enormous blessing for many.

Our search for proper-fitting shoes and corrective orthotics began with a visit to a specialty shop, where they were not able to help us to navigate the extensive paperwork trail for those on disability. By the grace of God, John knew of another such business nearby and after discussing our needs with this business, they offered to handle all the paperwork between doctors and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). All we had to do was to get a prescription for orthotics from John's family doctor. The retailer looked after the rest.

John was fitted for much-needed orthotics, as well as new shoes. ODSP was able to cover both the orthotics and the shoes. In addition, John is entitled to receive a new pair of shoes each year, under this plan. He chose track shoes this year, and hopes to get boots next year and sandals the following year. This has made a huge difference in John's comfort and his ability to get around.

Since that time, three more of our clients have been fitted with orthotics and new footwear. One such client, who spends a lot of time on her feet, has said that her new shoes have been life changing. They have increased her confidence, her comfort and her overall wellbeing. She cannot remember the last time she received new shoes, if ever. Used to wearing ill-fitting shoes that have been handed down, her new shoes have been a huge blessing.

However, this blessing goes far beyond the shoes. In order to get the shoes, we need to visit the family doctor, and with permission, I accompany our clients for such visits.

This has given me an opportunity to raise other health concerns and to arrange for additional supports for our clients. Some of our clients are now using calendars and day-timers to plan for appointments, and new skills are being developed. The ripple effect from this ministry has spread in so many ways.

While our main ministry work remains one-to-one, God occasionally calls us to run a program. Building on the success of our first Alpha course, we have now begun another Alpha course. We are blessed to have five new guests, in addition to the six returning guests from last season, who now make up our team. In total, there are twelve of us. Each team member is gaining new skills as part of the leadership team; some arrive early to help with set up; some help out in the kitchen; others are small group helpers; one is learning to run a small library of books. Used to spending their days alone, some are learning to interact with others in new ways. A few are beginning to attend church. Laughter is shared, and tears are shed, as our guests learn to put their trust in Jesus and to find new hope for their lives. What an amazing privilege it is for me to witness God's love for the poor.



We rely on the generosity of others to provide food for our Alpha course. If you are able to help provide a lunch for twelve, we would be most grateful. We meet on Thursdays at noon in a downtown church.

***Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."***

***Luke 14:12-14***

UCO recently hosted a small garden party, held at Dominion Chalmers United Church and we are so grateful to the Rev. Dr. Anthony Bailey for sharing a thought-provoking message with us, and for his wisdom concerning God's ministry to the poor. Thank you to our guests and board members who were able to join us for this wonderful event. We hope to host an annual event, such as a Spring barbeque, for our supporters and guests. More details and an invitation will be mailed to you with our 2010 Year-In-Review next April.

I give thanks to God for all of you and for your generosity, and I put my trust in God to provide for our expenses each month. Like those whom we serve, UCO depends upon the generosity of individuals and a few churches to meet our monthly expenses, and without your support, we are at risk of having to reduce our ministry hours. I humbly appeal to you at this time to prayerfully consider supporting our ministry work on a monthly basis. We are hoping to increase our number of monthly

supporters, which will help to sustain us throughout the year. ●

In addition, I am hoping to increase UCO's awareness by speaking to more congregations and small groups. I would be most grateful for an opportunity to speak to your home church or small group about our ministry work to the poor.

Our work with the poor can be very challenging at times, and I am grateful for your prayers that uphold me as I walk go about my work. A volunteer outreach worker recently asked me how I can do the work that I do. She shared that she is often reduced to tears at the end of a shift. I do see so much brokenness, so much gut-wrenching sadness, and sometimes I do cry. Sometimes I cry along with our clients. Sometimes I cry out to God, and then I am reminded of why we do this work: we do this all for Jesus; all for Jesus.

***For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'***

***"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'***

***40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'***

***Matt 25:34-40***

What sustains and upholds me are your prayers, and your words and notes of encouragement, for which I am so grateful. I have also come to rely more and more on the wisdom and prayer support of UCO's Spiritual Advisor, the Rev. Dr. Anthony Bailey, who has a keen understanding of the poverty scene. I am grateful for our board members, who give freely of their time and talents.

Our client numbers are increasing, and I am acutely aware of a steady increase of stress levels and problems in the downtown scene. Even among friends and acquaintances, I am hearing more and more stories of despair. I sometimes wonder if I am imagining a surge of problems during these times, or perhaps you might agree with me that life is becoming more difficult for many. People are exhausted, hurting, depressed and discouraged, and so our need for encouragement and prayer increases.

Some of you may recall a time a number of years ago when a group of UCO supporters met monthly to uphold Katrine, (founder and former executive director of UCO) and the ministry work of UCO, in prayer. The group stopped meeting formally, due to time restraints, but the prayer continued. God has put it on my heart to begin such a group again. Please prayerfully consider if God might be calling you to join me in a prayer group to meet once a month for an hour, at a time convenient for all, to pray for the poor, the ministry needs of UCO, and for one another.

As we take turns giving thanks at the dinner table this Thanksgiving, I will be thanking God for the poor among us, who know what it is like to be without, and yet are so very grateful for what they do have. I will thank God for the refreshing

authenticity that they bring to every conversation, having traded their masks for a meal long ago.

I thank God for the poor, who cause me to examine my attitudes and my own imperfect life. Jesus said that we will always have the poor among us, and this is a good thing. When we are so privileged as to share a meal with one so poor, we learn about who we really are. We are forced to remove our own masks, lest our egos be exposed. In doing so, we are more able to clearly see Jesus in them. For Jesus, who sat among the poor, ate with the poor, had mercy on the poor and advocated for the poor, was poor himself. Jesus was homeless. He came just as he was, and loves each one of us, just the way that we are, with or without our masks. This Thanksgiving, it is my prayer that we will all have the privilege of sitting down at a table with the poor, and in doing so, share a meal with Jesus.

May God bless you and those whom you love this Thanksgiving.

With Love in Christ,  
Jill Wilson  
Executive Director  
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