

Urban Christian Outreach (Ottawa)

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Update #48

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The word “Thanksgiving” has taken on a whole new meaning for me this year, as I pause to reflect on the last few months, and the many blessings that I have been privileged to witness. I thank God for all of you, and for your faithful support of the ministry of UCO. When I consider all that our Lord has done through you, it becomes so clear to me, that those who support UCO, through prayer and financial gifts, have the very heart of Christ Jesus. I know, without a doubt, that Jesus walks with me, as I set out on the sidewalks of downtown Ottawa. I know this, because I am increasingly becoming aware of my own limitations, and of God’s unlimited power. As I walk, and wait on our Lord, I am completely humbled by his presence, his ability to provide, and the knowledge that I am being lifted in prayer by an army of faithful supporters.

The summer months were filled with wonderful moments, too many to fit into this message; however one story in particular is on my heart and I would like to share it with you. Our client has given his permission to share this story. One summer morning, I set out walking on the sidewalks of downtown Ottawa, as has become my routine, silently praying, asking God for direction, to order my steps, and to make a way. I asked for the mind of Christ, for the heart of Christ, for the very words to speak. I prayed that I would have one ear to our Lord, and one

ear to his people, and asked how I might serve him and be a blessing to others. As I walked, I noticed a person up ahead, sitting on the sidewalk. This individual appeared to be suffering from the effects of his addiction, and my thoughts were to stop and chat, as I normally would have, to see if I could be of any help and to enquire if he had eaten breakfast or had a morning coffee. However, this particular morning, I sensed God saying, ‘No, keep walking’, and I immediately felt uneasy, as it is part of my ministry and routine, to stop in such a case. I asked God again, because I felt that I must be hearing incorrectly, and again, I heard him say ‘keep walking’, and so, I greeted the person on the sidewalk with a friendly ‘hello’, and reluctantly kept walking. I walked another block, until I sensed God saying ‘Sit’, and so, I found a place to sit next to a bus stop. I sat there, waiting on the Lord, and watching. There were many people around, some waiting for a bus, others scurrying off to work. I noticed a gentleman, approximately ten feet away, who appeared to be sleeping, and so I waited and continued to pray silently.

After about ten minutes, the gentleman sat up, looked directly at me, and said “Are you here to help me?” It was one of those moments that felt as though the whole world had become quiet and faded into the background, and I knew that God was so present in that moment. I

noticed a suitcase next to the gentleman, which had doubled as his pillow. I gently answered "Yes, I am, if you would like my help." He replied, "Well, I have been lying here, praying, asking God to send me someone to help me." I answered, "I have been walking along the sidewalk, also praying, asking God to send someone that I could help." We sat in silence for a moment, in awe of God at work in our midst, his all-consuming love for us, his amazing grace and his mercy in answering this young man's cry. How great is our God!

Together, we headed to a drop-in centre, to find shelter from the heat and to feast on a sandwich and a coffee. On the way, he told me his story, and how he had ended up on the streets. He had been staying in a shelter, but his life had been threatened, and so he fled for the streets. He hadn't slept much, for fear that he would be found. While at the drop-in centre, I began to make phone calls, to find safe housing for him. It was my first experience of searching for housing, and I soon became sadly aware of the waiting lists for safe housing in Ottawa. One agency told me that there was a 2 to 3 year waiting list, and another said that the waiting list was closer to 7 years. Call after call led nowhere, but we persevered. We closed one drop-in centre, and went to another. The gentleman ate, and had fellowship, while I made one phone call after another. Being new to sidewalk ministry worked in our favour, as I was naïve enough to be determined to find housing before sunset. God used this occasion to teach me to trust him completely; only he can do the impossible. This last drop-in centre was about to close, and our client, so very gracious, who had persevered with me all day long, graciously thanked me for my efforts, and said that he would sleep on the street again that night. I promised him that God would

answer our prayers, that he would not bring us this far and leave us, and with that, I made my last call. It was the last number on my list, a number that was a 'wrong' number, according to my handy list of who provides what. From this call, we were led to an agency who offered us a crisis team meeting, but I was told by the team not to get my hopes up.

During our meeting, I was in awe of how God had brought the perfect team into our situation. Criteria were met, and by early evening, this gentleman was on his way by taxi to a safe home. Before the cab left, he jumped out to thank me, and said "Nobody has ever helped me this much in my entire life. Thank you so much." I replied, "Thank God, because he is the one who helped you. He loves you more than you can imagine and he heard your prayer, and has answered you."

I have had the opportunity to meet with this gentleman on a number of occasions since then, providing pastoral and practical support for him and meeting for Bible study. A local church provided a perfect Bible for his needs. You provided the ways and means for us to reach out to him. Thank you for your support that enables me to serve God on the sidewalks of downtown Ottawa. I may be the one doing the walking, but we all share in God's glory and in this ministry, which I could not do without your prayerful and financial support. I thank God for each one of you.

I recently told this story during a talk at one of our supporting churches, and a member of their congregation generously shared how she was moved by this story, in particular to the time when the Holy Spirit directed me not to stop at the first person, but rather to keep walking, and finally to sit and wait. She kindly gave me

permission to share her insight, and commented that this reminded her of Paul the Apostle, as written in the Book of Acts 16:6-10:



6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. 8 So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. 9 During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." 10 After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.
(New International Version)

God moved in many other lives, over the past few months, through our ministry work of UCO, helping three of our clients to navigate their way through the legal system, a few others assistance with social supports, and one client well on his way to finding employment, to mention a few. Our clients continue to ask about Katrine, and how she is doing; she made a lasting impression and was able to touch many lives. Bible studies continued and new ones began. I had the pleasure of company on the sidewalks on a couple of occasions, when faithful Christians 'shadowed' me. I attended a conference at the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre (ROMHC), on street drugs and mental health, and was blessed to be able to attend a prayer ministry school with Wholeness Through Christ ministries.

I am grateful to be back in the classroom at the ROMHC, and grateful for the faithfulness of our classroom volunteer, Nadia. Her expertise and presence in the classroom are a blessing to students and staff, and I give thanks to God for the blessing that she is. We have some new students this year, and a new ROMHC volunteer, as well.

This Thanksgiving, I am reminded that God has prepared a harvest for us, and the harvest that I speak of is one not of food, but rather of people: people who, through life's struggles, have turned to God, who has heard their cry. His children are the harvest: the poor, the homeless, and the marginalized. This is our mission, and the mission field is ready for harvesting. May our Lord bless you and those you love, and may he provide in abundance during this wonderful season of Thanksgiving.

**Jill Wilson,
UCO Executive Director**

UCO Board News

As our trees burst with colour, we see God's faithfulness all around us, as he prepares for a new season. So it is with UCO; as we sadly say goodbye to some of our valued board members, God continues to be faithful in raising up new Christians to serve our ministry. On behalf of the Board of Directors, I would like to give our heartfelt thanks to Barbara Faught for so faithfully serving UCO for many years, both as a Director, and as Interim President of the Board. Barbara brought many gifts to her various roles on the board, and we wish God's blessings upon Barbara and her family.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I am delighted to announce that Janice Fiamengo has been elected as our new President of the Board for UCO. Janice has served UCO faithfully as Secretary in the past, and we thank God for the many skills that she brings to her new role as President.

I am equally delighted to announce that David Hayman has been elected to the role of Secretary of the Board for UCO. David has served UCO faithfully as a Director in the past, and we are blessed by the qualities that he brings to his new role.

On behalf of the board, I am also delighted to announce the appointment of the Rev. Karen Bergenstein as a new Director of the Board for UCO. Karen, too, brings many gifts, and we are very grateful for her willingness to serve as a board member.

From UCO's Incoming President of the Board:

Dear friends and supporters of UCO,

It is my great privilege and pleasure to write to you in my new capacity as the President of Urban Christian Outreach, a position I assumed this past summer, 2008. I have been a member of the UCO Board for more than 2 years; last spring, I was delighted to welcome Jill Wilson as our new Executive Director and to be a part of her work in sharing God's love on the sidewalks of downtown Ottawa. As winter approaches and as the world enters a period of financial instability and anxiety, it is more important than ever that loving assistance, support, and pastoral care be provided to Ottawa's poor. I am committed to helping UCO continue to be a witness to God's love; and I am very much looking forward to a year of loving effort, prayer, and good management. We welcome your prayers and your ongoing financial support.

Janice Fiamengo

