

Urban Christian Outreach (Ottawa)

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Update #58

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Dear Friends,

Happy Thanksgiving! There is so much to be thankful for: for God, for Jesus, for the Holy Spirit; for family, friends and loved ones; for you, our faithful supporters; for 'M.C.', UCO's artist who took a verse of Scripture and interpreted it in a way that brought me to tears; for turkey and stuffing; for beautiful weather and scenery as the leaves burst with colour; for a roof over our heads, for jobs or for a sustainable income. It can be easy to get comfortable with these 'constants' in our lives, and to take them for granted; after all, many of us have become accustomed to the predictability of our lives, and from time to time we may even harbour a spirit of entitlement. As I prepare to celebrate a family Thanksgiving supper, and begin to write out my grocery list, I am reminded of our friends who live out their days in crowded isolation on the sidewalks and in the shelters of downtown Ottawa. Instead of looking forward to Thanksgiving, many dread this time of year, a time when they will not be with family members, a time when they will not feel loved. Holidays can be a stark reminder of their circumstances and a reminder of broken dreams and love lost. You may not be able to see the pain behind the smiles of gratitude, the smiles of a life lived in perseverance- mode, but I can assure you,

that there are many tears just waiting for an opportunity to be shed and for a safe person with a compassionate heart, willing to collect them.



Many such tears flowed this past summer, when a young, homeless woman was brutally murdered in downtown Ottawa. There were tears of anger, of how anyone could carry out such a despicable, evil act; tears of frustration at a system so broken, a system that often perpetuates the cycle of poverty; and tears of fear, wondering if and when the person responsible will be brought to justice. When I read the news, my heart broke. I longed to be deep in the woods where I could wail and cry out to God in the face of such evil and injustice. She was a daughter, a granddaughter, a sister, a friend to many. As I reflect on her life and death, I struggle to find peace. What were the events that led her to live out her life in a shelter? What about her family, her friends? At what point do we intervene in someone's life without being seen as interfering? How many 'if only's' do we need to process in our minds? Our laws protect our right to choose, but there is such a grey area when it comes to the question of whether or not one is in a position to make wise life-style choices for themselves.

Do we enable by doing nothing? What about one's right to be given the help they need when they are not able to discern this? Our systems are faulty and waiting lists for programs and housing are so long and discouraging to the point of detriment. This young woman - one person, so precious, so beautiful, created in God's own image and knit together in her mother's womb; the 'lost' sheep that Jesus ran after. Our Father had plans for her: 'plans to prosper her and not to harm her; plans to give her hope and a future,' and in an instant, those plans on earth were destroyed. This is a very, very sad reminder of the dangers and darkness of life on the streets. I am reminded that Jesus died and rose again so that she might have eternal life with Him. Did she know Jesus? Is she 'in paradise' with Him this

day? Both her life and her death must cause us to reflect on what God is calling us to do.

Her life and her death must not be in vain, and I am determined now more than ever that the work of UCO will make a difference in the lives of each person that our Lord puts before us as we seek to serve Him.

We cannot do this without your help. Will you please help UCO to continue for another day, another week, another month? I know that our work is making a huge difference. I receive many phone calls and cards of thanks from the clients that we serve.

John (not his real name) was struggling and living in a shelter two years ago when I met him. His outbursts caused others to avoid him. He was estranged from his family. By the grace of God, and with our help, he is now on medication and rarely has outbursts. He has made some friends, and now has his own place. He is working part-time and has reconnected with family. Prior to our meeting, John was in and out of prison. Not once has he been back in prison in the past two years. Last week he called me just to say 'thank you' and to tell me all about a recent visit with his family.

'...give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.'
(1 Thessalonians 5:18)

There are so many people like John that need our help. Being poor is hard work! This is UCO's mission - to reach out to those who struggle to live their daily lives, to shed the light of Christ, to offer practical help, Bible study and literacy training, and to share the hope that we have in Christ Jesus. Do you remember when you first loved Jesus? Do you

remember how your life changed forever? How do people manage without Christ in their lives? The poor among us manage poorly and so we need your help to fulfill the mission that God has called us to do. Without your support, we won't be able to continue with our work. Over the summer and winter months, UCO has traditionally struggled to make ends meet. We are struggling once again.

'We do not want you to be uninformed, brother, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.
(2 Corinthians 1:8-11)

By the grace of God, we have found an affordable way (50 cents per transaction) to offer a **Pre-Authorized Remittance (PAR)** program option for your convenience. You will now be able to donate on a monthly basis without having to send post-dated cheques. The program can be stopped at any time (by the 10th of the month to change arrangements for the current month). Withdrawals will be made on the 20th of each month, for the amount that you designate. I have enclosed a PAR authorization form; simply complete it and return it with a cheque marked, "VOID" attached. Thank you for your prayerful consideration. It is our hope that PAR will bring a more consistent flow of donations to UCO and help us to budget more accurately for our financial needs.

May I humbly ask for your continued prayers for our clients, for provision for our Street Alpha program and for opportunities to speak to churches and groups about the amazing things that Jesus continues to do on the sidewalks of downtown Ottawa? So many are lost and need the healing and saving touch of Christ.

Thank you, dear supporters, for helping us to help others to remember Jesus. Without you, we cannot carry on. Together, as partners, we can continue to serve Christ in a ministry dear to his heart – a ministry to the poor. It is my prayer that our Lord will bless you with quiet moments in his presence and that He will provide for all your needs.

Thanking God for you,
Jill Wilson,
Executive Director

