

Urban Christian Outreach (Ottawa)

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During the summer months the social life of our city sidewalks has been in transition. New implementation of bi-laws has changed the face of poverty on our sidewalks but not the realities of poverty. Panhandling is a risky occupation nowadays. In this new era, some of our poor tell us they feel safer going about their daily lives, whilst others feel marginalized.

There are complex issues surrounding these decisions. UCO honours all good attempts to make our streets safe and we thank God for our police; some of the poor themselves are the ones who benefit the most from safe streets. But UCO appeals to us all to remember the now- silent poor on our sidewalks. Because the streets are free of aggressive panhandling, will we as a community be in danger of brushing past the needy as we go about our business and commerce on the downtown streets? Will we become a hardened and callous community?

UCO continues to reach out to the poor with courtesy and appropriate assistance, whether that be referral to health and education centres, encouragement, spiritual conversations, an occasional coffee or meal, or simply a touch of shared good humour with an opportunity to laugh together.

During the summer months it was my privilege to preach in a number of different churches. As always, the Scripture readings were set readings for the day, and that was the basis for my reflections from the pulpit. Every time, the Word of God challenged us to remember the poor and the struggling, and to sacrifice some of our own benefits for the sake of the less fortunate. This theme is written all through the law, the prophets and the gospels. We cannot live godly lives and ignore the plight of the poor. It's my hope and prayer that Ottawa will be a safe and godly city – both.

After Labour Day, UCO's Adult Education Class resumed, in partnership with the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre. Nadia Behmann assists me with the teaching task, and the ROMHC provides us with a wonderfully gifted math volunteer, as well as fine mental health professionals to partner with us. The old building has been razed to the ground and over the summer they laid new grass in that area. Often as I walk through the front door of the amazing new facility on that same site, I have a sense of the old and the new, and the importance of both. Our students this year are highly focused and hard working, even in the midst of their own health challenges. It is exciting to work with them.

Whether you receive this letter before or after Thanksgiving, let's each of us stretch Thanksgiving right on into the winter days so that it becomes the over-arching reality of our lives.

Thank you for caring enough to read this, enough to pray, enough to give in so many generous ways.

Katrine Barton-Coward, UCO Executive Director

President's message

I grew up in the country, surrounded by farmland. Perhaps for this reason, thanksgiving has always been a very important holiday for me. Farmers, as a rule, are painfully aware of the limits to their craft. Despite the hard work and careful planning, the harvest of a good crop depends on a thousand contingencies beyond a farmer's control, including seasonable weather, fruitful seed, reliable machinery, and the farmer's own good health. When the crop is finally in, and they have reaped what they have sown, the farmers in whose company I was raised were quick to acknowledge that the good results are not simply the product of their own efforts. They had encountered God's grace. I remember Thanksgiving services as the most reverent of times, as the community expressed gratitude to God for the miracle of harvest.

I now live in a very urban setting, and I have made my peace with that. But at thanksgiving I feel the difference from my rural roots. It is more difficult, in the city, to see the hand of God acting in gracious mercy toward us. It is much easier to credit our successes to our own initiative and hard work. I am convinced that the separation from the contingencies of nature is one of the main reasons why cities can become hard, alienating and merciless. When we regard ourselves as self-made, it becomes easy to dismiss our suffering neighbours. On the other hand, when we see our lives upheld by God's gracious hand, and see the fruit of our labours as a gift from God, our hearts become much more responsive to the needy ones in our midst.

Thanksgiving is an opportunity, particularly for those of us who make our homes in the city, to remember that our lives, and everything we have, are gifts from God. Those of us who have received much are blessed with the opportunity to give gifts in turn to our neighbours in need, and to joyfully participate in the great cycle of grace that finds its ultimate expression in Christ's death and resurrection.

Thank you for your ongoing support of UCO's ministries.

Clint Curle
President, Urban Christian Outreach

Excerpt from UCO's Charitable Objectives:

Staff engage in mobile outreach on the streets, and in the coffee shops, parks and other communal places of the city.... We seek to be present to [a person's] need, even when there are no apparent solutions, thereby offering hope, respect and dignity to the individual.

Urban Christian Outreach works in cooperation with other agencies by referring clients to social, medical, shelter, educational, employment and Christian organizations that will further expand the individual's personal network within the community, and will serve his/her various needs.