



Urban Christian Outreach (Ottawa)

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Dear Friends,

We want to thank you from our hearts, for your beautiful and generous support of our ministry work to the rejected poor, homeless and marginalized of our great City of Ottawa. Because of your generosity and kindness, and by the Grace of God, Urban Christian Outreach has succeeded in ending our 2013 Fiscal Year with a balanced budget. How great is our God!

During financially difficult times, when many churches, charities and families are struggling to make ends meet, we give thanks to God for His wonderful provision. We realize that difficult times call us to give up comforts, and to be more obedient and faithful, as we are called to be good stewards of His provision. A year ago last summer, I felt God calling me into homelessness. After my youngest headed off to university, I felt called to reduce my living expenses to a bare minimum in order to pay off tuitions and personal debts. I left my apartment and put my belongings in storage. Through the faithfulness of the Christian community, I have been provided with places to lay my head, and rooms to call 'home'. It has been a challenge, indeed, but also a blessing. It has taught me to put my trust more in God, and less in the comforts around me.

It has taught me more about humility and rejection and caused me to look upon my fellow man with more compassion. For all these things, I am thankful. In addition, in order to supplement my income, I am grateful for extra part-time work as a facilitator in the mental health and addictions field.

January and February have always been challenging months financially for UCO, and this year is no exception. We are praying and asking God for an outpouring of financial provision, in order that we might have a sound fiscal base from which to continue to serve in faithfulness. We are encouraged each time a donation appears in our little mailbox!

Without our ministry, an old man would be back on the streets tonight; a young woman would have a criminal record that she doesn't deserve, and a lonely single mom may have given up. The needs are so many and the workers are so few. We must examine our hearts and ask, 'Why is this so?'

***"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."
1 Corinthians 3:9 ESV***

I would like to share a story with you about a woman I met downtown, who has lived a hard life of rejection. She faces many challenges, including some physical ones, and yet despite it all, has the most caring and generous heart that you can imagine. She is a Christian, living in poverty. One evening, she called me in distress, telling me that she had boarded a local bus, became distracted and sat down, forgetting to deposit her bus ticket.

Moments later, with her bus ticket still in hand, she was confronted by 3 Transit Officers, who removed her from the bus. She felt embarrassed and afraid. She wasn't given a second chance to deposit her fare, or to explain. However, she was given a \$150.00 ticket. I know this woman, and have known her to purchase bus passes regularly. Having been ill, she just bought tickets for the remainder of the month. Jesus knows her heart; not only would she never try to avoid paying, she would be the first person to offer to pay for another.

She made the decision to go to court, and asked if I would accompany her. We prayed, asking God for peace, grace and mercy. We also prayed for the judge whom we were soon to meet. What I witnessed in court that day brought tears to my eyes. Our friend spoke so eloquently and honestly, detailing her intentions, as well as the trauma she had experienced. This was her first ticket and she was afraid that she would have a criminal record as a result. She pleaded guilty and confessed to having forgotten to put her bus ticket in the dispenser. She sincerely apologized, and then asked the judge if she might be able to reduce the fine. It was a privilege to witness as she asked for the court's mercy, with a humility and authenticity that moved me.

The judge's eyes filled with tears. Not only did the judge completely cancel her ticket, she also removed it from the system, ensuring our friend that there would be no record of her wrong. Beaming with gratitude and relief, our friend asked the judge if she could hug her, and the judge complied.

What an exquisite image of God's love for us! When we come to Him, asking for forgiveness, he not only forgives, but cancels out debt. He removes it from 'the system' as though it never happened!

When we engage the poor and others who struggle, we are faced with our own vulnerability and our own need for grace and mercy. God invites us to see ourselves through the eyes of the poor, to be His hands and His feet, to speak His words of comfort, and to share the hope that we have been blessed with, in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Praise be to God!

In His Service,
Jill

"I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

1 Corinthians 1:4-9 ESV