

# Urban Christian Outreach (Ottawa)

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Update #62

December 2012

***Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. Isaiah 41:10 ESV***

Dear Beloved,

It is 4:30 in the morning as I begin to write this letter to you. I love these moments – moments when our Lord wakes us up before sunrise, and places words and ideas upon our hearts! We know that He is speaking to us because the thoughts that come to us have not crossed our minds before, and surely the strength to rise at this hour comes from Him also! As I write, I am as excited as a child on Christmas morning, wondering just what will be unwrapped before me!

How amazing is our God! He knows our struggles. He knows my struggle to write, and is teaching me to put my trust in Him. Sometimes, I pace the floor as I write. Sometimes, it is painful. Surely God is at work, but it is only when I am able to be still and cooperate with The Holy Spirit, that His words can bi-pass my mind, and truly touch my heart. This morning, I have been given a gift of grace.

And so it is when He sends us out, onto the sidewalks, to meet with those in need. When words fail to comfort, by grace, He moves in power and causes us to be still. He fills us with that beautiful peace that Paul talks about in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter and eleventh verse of his letter to the Philippians, in which he refers to as, ***‘the peace that surpasses all understanding.’***

As we gather with our clients in various downtown locations, our Lord does mighty things: at times, he gives us words to speak; sometimes he causes our words to fall silent and fills our hearts with overwhelming peace, transforming the moment, and changing our lives.

‘This is amazing!’ one client recently said during such a moment. He had called me at the onset of a panic attack. While his problems hadn’t disappeared, he *knew* that he was going to be okay. He knew that he was not alone; he had experienced the power of the living Christ in the moment of his despair. Jesus had become his new best friend.

***“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:11 ESV***

Just as on that first Christmas morning, when our Father sent his Son to live among us, to forgive us and to save a world in despair, so He does today. He calls us to trust Him, just as Joseph and Mary put their trust in Him. As Christians, we may experience rejection in this world, sometimes from our own family members, but we can find refuge in the arms of Jesus, and rest and peace from the pain and chaos of this world.





What is it about Christmas that we love so much? As Christians, certainly it is the celebration of the birth of Christ Jesus, our Lord and Saviour! God sent us the most precious gift of Jesus! How can our hearts not be filled with joy and anticipation? We recognize the power of Christ to transform our hearts, especially during this season, but what about those who don't yet know Jesus? Of those who don't, many will acknowledge that there is something special about this time of year. Perhaps it is the peace that fills their hearts and that seems to fall over the land on Christmas Eve, or love shared as families and friends gather together. Perhaps it is the joy they find in exchanging gifts? Perhaps it is because wars cease, if only for a day? Yet sadly, there are many poor, homeless, and marginalized people among us that will not have peace this Christmas. They may be well fed by the kind generosity of those who serve the poor, and be blessed with some needed material items. Yet, they may be rejected by family members and reminded of their own brokenness. Many know the searing pain of separation. Some of our clients have no family. One client recently told me that I am his only friend. Trust does not come easily. It does not come overnight. We need to nurture relationships and this takes time.

This is one of the beauties of our ministry work with Urban Christian Outreach. We are called to spend time, to linger, if you will, and to wait upon the Lord. Our success is not measured in dollars and cents, nor in numbers, but rather in lives changed - one by one, one to one, renewed by the living Christ. We are only facilitators. Nothing we do or say apart from Christ has any lasting significance.

What a privilege and joy it is when Christ breaks through, and softens hardened hearts! Unafraid, Christ shines his light into the darkness of our lives, takes our hand and walks us into Glory! This is the miracle of the Christmas story. As we prepare to celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> year of ministering to the poor, the homeless and the marginalized of Ottawa, I am reminded of God's unending faithfulness. I am also reminded of Katrine Barton-Coward's beautiful faithfulness, and of the faithfulness of those who walked with her during her fifteen years as Executive Director of UCO. We thank God for your faithfulness, because without your heart for the poor, your beautiful generosity of spirit, and your unselfish gifts to UCO, we would not be able to do as our Father has commanded us.

UCO remains very poor and this may very well be the will of God. As a ministry, we are homeless, as well. We face many trials. Was Jesus not poor and homeless? Did He not face many trials? How fitting it is that we are a ministry after God's own heart. Yes we are poor in terms of earthly possessions, but how rich we are in terms of blessings! We have an inheritance in Heaven! How wonderful and authentic it is to witness Christ move in another's life, and in our own lives, as well. When we give to the poor, we are immediately blessed.

***"But the Lord is in His Holy Temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him." Habakkuk 2:19, 20 ESV***

Jesus tells us that we will always have the poor among us. We need the poor. They help us to examine our hearts. They teach us much about what it truly means to be humble. Jesus tells us that the poor are blessed, and if we take the time to sit among the poor, we come to understand what this passage of Scripture means. Not long ago, I learned a lesson about forgiveness from one of our clients who shared that she recently attended an event with her boyfriend, only to find her two former husbands there, sitting together at the same table. She approached them and asked if she and her new boyfriend could join them. They said, "Yes!" She told me that they all got along well now, because they had chosen to forgive one another. I was moved by her story, and remembered that Jesus was born so that we might be reconciled to the Father, and to one another.

As we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour, may we all be blessed with the gift to forgive one another, as Jesus has commanded? May we learn from those whom we serve, and from the beautiful example of this humble, divorced woman, (who just may be an angel among us) and begin to mend relationships with those whom God has surrounded us with?

May we, this Christmas, ask for the heart of Christ Jesus, that we may be able and willing to forgive our pastors, fellow church members, family members, neighbours, and governments? May we ask for the gift of humility, that we may be able to ask others to forgive us? May we come to know the joy and freedom that reconciliation brings? We all fall so short of God's glory. May God forgive us, as we forgive one another, so that his Kingdom may come in Glory this Christmas!

Thank you for blessing the poor. We remember you in our prayers. On behalf of all of us at UCO, I would like to wish you and your loved ones a holy, peaceful Christmas and a blessed and prosperous New Year.

To God be the Glory,  
Jill Wilson

### **A Note from the Treasurer**

We thank God for all of you and for your generosity in 2012. As we don't receive any government funding, we rely on God, and the faithfulness of our supporters to provide for UCO's expenses. Our monthly budget is approximately \$4000, and we are currently two months behind in meeting our budgeted expenses. We are praying in faith, and asking God to provide for all our needs so that we might end our year with a balanced budget, and be able to continue to serve the poor. May we humbly ask that you prayerfully consider making a donation to UCO at this time, as you are able? For those of you who have already sent in your Christmas donation, we extend our sincerest gratitude.

May the Lord grant you a holy and blessed Christmas as we remember the One who gave us the best gift of all.

Mary Anne Zwicker

### **Please mark this date on your calendars:**

*On Saturday, May 11, 2013 from 2 o'clock to 4 o'clock in the afternoon, UCO will give thanks to God for 20 years of sidewalk ministry to the poor, with a celebration service. Invitations and more details will follow in the New Year. We are delighted that Katrine has joined our planning committee for this event, and we would like to extend an invitation to you to join our planning committee, as well.*