

The Community

Erb Street Mennonite Church

December 2006

The Community seeks to promote greater familiarity among Erb Street members and adherents through articles on faith and life and is published three times yearly.

Editorial Committee
Sarah Mohr
Katherine Snyder

In this issue:

| | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| My Experience on the Street | 2 |
| Contributing to a Family's Dream | 3 |
| Life in Laos | 4 |
| Why Give up Thanksgiving Dinner? | 5 |
| Dear God | 6 |
| Kid's Corner | 8 |
| Birthdays | 8 |

Gifts Given and Received

By Eleanor Epp-Stoebe

"I received so much more than I offered." A familiar reflection from volunteers who seek to share gifts with others. As gifts are offered, all are abundantly blessed. I have meaningful memories of a summer volunteering in southern Mississippi with a vacation Bible school (VBS) program of the Mennonite Church. This was a faith forming experience, not only for those who came to VBS, but primarily for me at the age of 13.

Volunteering is responding to need, providing a ministry of service. Volunteering builds community. Volunteering transforms lives. Thanks be to God for the blessings of time, talent, and resources.

Locks of Love

By Monica Blais

Right out of university, I volunteered with MCC in Bangladesh. I noticed that most Bengali women wore their hair long and braided, so I decided to let my hair grow.

Well, that hair grew to below my waist and, except for a few radical cuts to shoulder length, I kept it long for the next 16 years. I never thought much of it except when it was a tangled mess.

I did wonder if my hair could be useful for someone else. I called the Canadian Cancer Society, which gave me the addresses of a few hair studios that collect long, unprocessed hair to make wigs for those who have lost their hair due to illness or chemotherapy. The minimum length was to be 12 inches.

In March 2006, I told my stylist that I wanted to donate my hair, and that she could decide how short to go. She looked at me, held on to my braid, and said, "let's go then." I walked out of the shop smiling, with a spiky one-inch do and an 18-inch braid to donate.

Since then, I have chatted with a lot of people who have also donated their hair, thought about it, or whose kids regularly donate their long hair—and then grow it out to donate again.

I am growing my hair out again. We'll see how long—or short—I keep it this time.

My Experience on the Street

By Andy Cressman

“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me ... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Matthew 25:35-40

Although these words have always seemed important to me, it is only recently that I have begun to take them seriously enough to give of my time in living them out. I moved to Toronto from Waterloo nine months ago, and was immediately struck by the immense poverty and need in this otherwise wealthy and prosperous city. It's not that there wasn't homelessness in Waterloo, for there was. It's just so much more visible here. At first I felt paralyzed, like there was nothing I could do. I didn't want to give out change in case it happened to support an addiction. However, I found the pervasive strategy of ignoring the very existence of a panhandler to be too painful to continue. Eventually, I began to carry oranges with me wherever I went and gave them out to anyone in need. This was an effective “feel good” strategy, but I knew that I wasn't whole-heartedly following the message of Jesus. Then, a couple months ago, I heard about the work of Doug Johnson Hatlem and Lazarus Rising, and I knew that God was calling me to get involved.

Every Monday afternoon, Doug and I walk the streets of downtown Toronto stopping to speak to any street person we find. We give them gift certificates for Tim Hortons and make sure they know about the meals and other services they can find at Sanctuary (the partner organization of Lazarus Rising). We are not out there to *feel* good, but to *do* good. Although most people appreciate the help we give them, when we handed one aboriginal gentleman a gift certificate, he told us that it wasn't enough and accused us of “cheap Indian giving.” That didn't feel good, but we still tried to show him that we cared. We are not out there to feel safe, but rather to leave our comfort zones and offer the safety of a loving community

of God's people. Once, we left the beaten trail and found a pair of men, one of whom was quite inebriated. At first I felt threatened, but I think we were once again able to show love to someone who hadn't experienced a lot.

When we first met a man I'll call Dave and told him about Sanctuary, he told us that he didn't want that kind of thing. He's independent and just stands on a corner with a coffee cup for people to put money in; he won't beg. He tells us that he's not there so much for the money, as to keep his mind busy. After all, he doesn't smoke, drink, or do drugs, so his needs are modest. He tells us that he can tell whether people walking by his corner work in any of the three nearby office buildings. The young guys from IBM are kind and generous; the men from Molson have a self-important swagger; and the ManuLife people have yet another personality. Independent Dave, who wants nothing to do with anything else that goes on at Sanctuary, spends 45 minutes sharing all of his observations with us. It doesn't matter who we are, we all need a sense of community and to feel that someone cares about us. However, not everyone is as free from addiction problems as Dave. Sometimes, in meeting people on the street, I feel like giving their heads a shake and rebuking them, sternly telling them that if they would just stop smoking and drinking their lives wouldn't be like this. But I know this wouldn't help. We are out there to meet these people where they are at in their lives. I have learned that we must respect them and build their trust before we can even begin to help turn their lives around.

My thinking about the issues surrounding poverty has become at the same time, more complicated, and more certain. I am less sure now about our ability to *solve* the problem of homelessness. We can put people up in affordable housing, and we should, but it won't solve the myriad of physical and mental health and addiction problems. After all, Jesus himself said that the poor will always be with us. But I am more certain now that the Church has a vital role to play in walking with people on the street, meeting them where they are at, and

welcoming them into a loving, caring, Christian community. Lazarus Rising is a great start for the involvement of GTA Anabaptist churches in addressing the poverty in this city, but I hope and pray that we will continue to come up with new initiatives. We all have a role to play as individuals as well. Before I started doing this weekly street walk, I found myself unable to stop and talk to someone on the street. Now my confidence has been built so that I am able to take time and talk to people on the street on my own, outside of the official street walk. If a shy, introverted guy like me can do it, so can you!

“What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”
Micah 6:8.

Contributing to a Family's Dream

By Arnie Dyck

This summer, from mid August until mid September, the Waterloo Region was invited to participate in building four town homes for four local families. Responding to the challenge were ManuLife Financial (two homes), the Hammer family and the Mennonite churches in Waterloo Region. Three people from Erb Street volunteered their time: Eric Martin, Greg Oulahen and Arnie Dyck.

On the morning of Monday, August 14th, 2006, the three of us arrived amidst much anticipation and a certain level of confusion. As the more than 60 volunteers arrived at the construction site, we were invited to confirm our registration. By the time we found each other, Eric had registered as a Hammer family member with his yellow t-shirt and Arnie as a ManuLife employee with his green t-shirt. Only Greg had the correct beige t-shirt. After some quick shuffling we managed to get our “uniforms” straightened out. And yet our initial mistake wasn't so far off the mark—the various teams of volunteers all worked to support each other.

Each day began with morning devotion—with the Mennonite singing voices leading the way. Then, with hardhats, nail pouches, tape measures and hammers, we reported to our individual work sites for duty. The volunteers ranged in age from late

teens to late 70s, from experienced builders to novices who had to learn how to hold a hammer. Nevertheless each person's skill level was put to good use.

Previous work crews had prepared a concrete slab for each town house to build on. Within the first hour, we were nailing together the first-floor wall partitions. Imagine the sound of 60 hammers all pounding at once. It was music to the ears of the partner families. Our Mennonite crew was joined

by Bob and Joyce Seymour, who will move into the house with their two children. Working with Bob and Joyce made the experience very real—they are a very unassuming, kind-hearted couple and we enjoyed working with them and imagining how their life will unfold in the place we were working.

Eric, Greg, and Arnie flowed from task to task, sometimes working together, sometimes paired or grouped with other fellow Mennonites, men and women who were also volunteering their time. Eric was great at keeping the

various tasks supplied with materials. His strength was appreciated as he heaved 4x8 sheets of particle board up to the second story for others to nail into place. Greg, among other things, became an expert at applying glue to the floor joists while straddling the 2x8s eight feet up in the air—without falling!



Arnie learned the hard way that fitting tongue and groove sheets together is made tougher if your nails are too close to the tongue thereby keeping the grooves from slipping into place. Ah, but that was the unexpected joy of the project—we all learned so much through the patient guidance of those who had learned themselves from years of volunteering. People like Elmer, who approximated that this was his 70th build, ranging from western Canada to Newfoundland to the builds in Augusta, Georgia where the Habitat movement had its origin, commemorating the 20,000 and, less than a year later, the 30,000 homes that had been built world-wide since the inception of the Habitat model.

In addition to the building skills, participating in the project taught us the satisfaction that comes from working together for the benefit of others. We connected with other volunteers with whom we will look forward to building with again in the years to come. We now know why “Habitatitis” is contagious!

Life in Laos

By Alisa MacBride-Smith

It has been almost two years since I left my busy life in Toronto and moved to a sleepy village in rural Laos. Hard to believe. The past few months have been especially full. I have shared joys and sorrows with our community here, enjoyed visits from family and friends from Canada, and faced new challenges and rewards in my work.

We live in Ban Hoi Khun, a village of about 1500 people a few hours outside of the capital of Laos, Vientiane. My husband Ben teaches English at an Agricultural college and I work at a health clinic in the same village. It is a small community and we share each other's joys and sorrows. In June, the local restaurant burnt to the ground. The family who owned the restaurant was not harmed, but they lost everything. I visited Khao (the owner) the day after the fire at her mother's house where she was staying. She wept for what she had lost and told me she did not know how she would rebuild. The community came together to support this family. The village offered land to rebuild, family and friends gave building supplies and labour, and MCC supported the family by buying some kitchen supplies including a fridge and freezer. In August the restaurant reopened and we celebrated together. Khao cooked a feast and much of the community came to eat and celebrate together.

Over the past few months Ben and I have received many visitors from home in Canada. Those visitors included my parents, Richard and Dorothy MacBride; my sister and brother-in-law, Jen and Josh Hiuser; Rebecca Jutzi; and Tara Gingrich.

Spending time and catching up with friends and family from home has been wonderful. Showing them where we live and where we work was exciting. Our friends and colleagues in Laos were wonderful hosts to our visitors, sharing meals, stories, Pepsis and traditions. I think it deepened my experience here in Laos now that many people from home in Canada know firsthand about my life here, and that my friends here in Laos have met and spent time with my family and friends from Canada.

In August I took a short leave from my work as a community health worker and joined Ben teaching English. The college runs an intensive English course in the school break. Due to its success last year, many people wanted to study and another teacher was needed. I enjoyed the challenge and after five weeks of studying together we celebrated our success with a graduation ceremony and then a party at Khao's re-opened restaurant.

I am now back at the clinic and we are entering an exciting time. Health kits from MCC's material resource centers in North America have arrived! Each kit contains soap, toothpaste and toothbrush, nail clippers and a towel. They will be given to students in the rural schools where we teach health education. The contents are perfect, giving the students the tools they need to apply the knowledge my colleagues and I have been teaching. Thank you very much to all the volunteers and staff at the material resource centers across North America!

I don't know what this next year in Laos will hold for me, but am looking forward to meeting the challenges and enjoying the celebrations.

More about our experiences can be found at www.macbridesmith.blogspot.com

Why Give up Thanksgiving Dinner?

by Andrew Cressman

I'm passing up the juicy, tasty Thanksgiving turkey this year. Why would I do that? Well, reflecting on my experience on the July/August 2006 Christian Peacemaker Teams delegation to Kenora, Ontario, it becomes apparent to me that what I have always seen as a celebration of thanksgiving for the bounty God has provided us is experienced very differently by Aboriginal neighbours.

I grew up with the thanksgiving story of early European settlers who were cared for and kept alive by the generosity of the Aboriginal people for the first few winters. That story feels good to me; something to celebrate. Sadly, the story does not end with the first few winters. In return for generosity, we have systematically stolen land, stolen culture, and stolen lives.

With an understanding that the land belongs to the creator, Aboriginal people made treaties with European settlers for the sharing of the land. Europeans on the other hand, staked claims of ownership, denying common use of the land. Under British law, people native to a colonized land were customarily given rights to land already used for agriculture. Being hunters and gatherers, the Aboriginal population in Canada was not considered to have claim to the land which provided their livelihood. The written English version of Treaty 3, which applies to the region surrounding Kenora, recognizes Aboriginal peoples' rights to small reserves of land to live on and guarantees traditional land use rights in surrounding land "until such time as the crown

requires that land for development." However, Aboriginal leaders were told they were agreeing to use of the land for as long as the rivers flow. Meaning, one might reasonably conclude, forever.

We have not lived up to our bargain. We have passed laws preventing Aboriginal participation in certain economic activities, such as garden marketing in the early 1900's. We have placed Aboriginal children in residential schools, depriving them of traditional knowledge and wisdom until the 70's. We have poisoned rivers with mercury, destroying self-sufficient Aboriginal commercial fisheries and causing great illness.

It is tempting to play the distancing game that says, "This all happened so long ago, I'm not responsible." Sadly, we continue to take advantage of our Aboriginal neighbours. Aboriginal trappers check their government licensed trap lines, to find that government licensed logging companies have clear-cut the whole area, destroying their livelihood.

The European occupation of North America has so deeply hurt the Aboriginal people that it is no wonder some find thanksgiving to be an occasion to fast and mourn. To stand in solidarity with our Aboriginal friends, the members of this delegation have committed to share this thanksgiving fast and use the occasion to reflect on our complicity in a system that perpetuates injustice and broken relationships.

Dear God

(extracted from children's letters to God, compiled by Stuart Hample and Eric Marshall)



Dear God,

I like the Lords prayer best of all. Did you have to write it a lot or did you get it right the first time? I have to write everything I ever write over again.

Lois



Dear God,

Who draws the lines around the countries?

Nan



Dear God,

When you made the first man did he work as good as we do now?

Tom



Dear God,

Thank you for the baby brother but what I prayed for was a puppy.

Joyce



Dear God,

Is it true my father won't get in Heaven if he uses his Bowling words in the house?

Anita



Dear God,

Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?

Norma



Dear God,

Please put another holiday between Christmas and Easter. There is nothing good in there now.

Ginny



Dear God,

Are you really invisible or is that just a trick?

Lucy



Dear God,

If you watch in Church on Sunday I will show you my new shoes.

Mickey D.



Dear God,

In Sunday School they told us what you do. Who does it when you are on holiday?

Jane



Dear God,

I think the stapler is one of your greatest inventions.

Ruth M.



Dear God,

Maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they had their own rooms. It works with my brother.

Larry



Dear God,

In Bible times did they really talk that fancy?

Jennifer



Dear God,

It is great the way you always get the starts in the right places.

Jeff

Kid's Corner

Psalm 100

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q | R | S | T | U | V | W | X | Y | Z |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | 9 | | | | | 16 | | | | | | | | |

M

9 10 13 21 10 24 25 20 5 17 18 12 25 26 11 21 17 12 23 25 23 6 21

R

18 25 16 8

Birthdays

- 🕒 Gretta Hunsberger celebrated her 92nd birthday on September 14.
- 🕒 Roy Snyder celebrated his 91st birthday on October 23.
- 🕒 Mary Shantz celebrated her 93rd birthday on November 7.
- 🕒 Vera Good celebrated her 91st birthday on November 13.
- 🕒 Florence Shantz will celebrate her 94th birthday on December 19.
- 🕒 Mable Brubacher will celebrate her 91st birthday on January 13.
- 🕒 Margaret Good will celebrate her 95th birthday on February 11.