

SANCTUARY LONDON

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UPDATE Christmas 2011

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That sense of belonging...for the first time

"I spent most of my childhood in my room. That kept me away from my dad and his buddies when they would drink." Kimmy didn't like being alone. She just got used to it. Her dad would drink and get violent. Her mom defended dad's anger. So Kimmy's room was solace. There, she got lost in a book or game of solitaire. She loved cards. Kimmy had very few interactions with her older sister and they have grown apart. "I live my life...she lives hers." Seclusion continued into her adult days. A few lost relationships along the way. A few friends. But recently, no one comes close. At least, Kimmy doesn't allow anyone to get close. She has learned that letting someone get close hurts too much. Letting someone get close means they will leave, abuse you...or worse. It's easier to be alone.

A few months ago, Kimmy began attending one of our drop-ins. She would grab a sandwich...sit on her own...and watch us. An invitation to a card game was something Kimmy could not refuse. Over the next few weeks, she played euchre with us. We learned little. Call her "Kimmy" not "Kim." We learned that. Don't challenge her card playing strategy even if it doesn't match yours. She just gets upset and leaves. We learned that. But Kimmy kept her life to herself.

Two months ago, we were getting ready to go to a spiritual retreat. Good friends of mine had offered their cottage on Lake Erie to Sanctuary for the weekend. So we planned a weekend to study scripture, eat meals, sing worship songs, play games, and pray together as a community. We were pumped. The weeks leading up to it, we offered this opportunity to our Sunday evening worshipping community. And one Monday, we looked for others who might be interested. We were quite open. This weekend would be about studying the life of Jesus – not just a get-away weekend vacation. Kimmy signed up.

The weekend arrived. Friday night, we sang worship songs. And late into the night, we played euchre until our eyes could no longer stay open. Breakfast was followed by another session in the morning...and games all afternoon. That evening, we lowered the lights...and met around a cross made of two pieces of driftwood. Darryl shared about putting our old life down at the cross AND picking up a new life AT the cross. Then we offered to each person that they could come forward to lay down their life...and pick up a new life...lighting a candle to honour that new light in their life. After a few stories, a few tears, we knew God was making Himself known...and Kimmy came forward. "In all my life...I have not belonged anywhere...until now. I want to pick up this life...I don't know where its going yet...but its a lot better than I've ever known." Kimmy lit a candle. And sat looking at the cross. She placed the candle on the cross...and our community shared a moment of sacred silence together.

We gave Kimmy a Bible. She now attends our weekly Bible study and Sunday evening service. But much more than that. She belongs. She belongs to a family that loves her for who she is. She belongs even when she sleeps in a shelter at night. She has joy. She has purpose. We are learning more about her each week. And she still enjoys a game of euchre every Monday.

safe enough to approach

When I first began to see Wayne in downtown London about three years ago, I had no idea he would become my friend. Wayne lived on the street, and no matter what the weather or season, he was always there, hanging out on the same stretch of sidewalk, wearing his weathered and faded grey winter coat or carrying it slung over his shoulder. He collected spare change, and though I was happy to give him change, what I really wanted was to say hello, introduce myself, and get to know him. The only thing was, I was nervous about approaching him: what if Wayne didn't want to know me? What could I possibly have to offer him? What if I was bothering him, or he wanted to be left alone?

When I finally worked up the courage to say hello, Wayne surprised me with his kindness—he seemed appreciative and happy to chat. From that day on I began to say hello on a regular basis. At first I didn't know how to ask him about his life. None of the questions I would normally ask new friends about work, home, or family felt right. Gradually though, as I gained a bit of confidence, I asked him if he had a warm place to sleep at night, whether he liked London, and how he spent his time. I realized he wasn't any different from anyone else—he had a past, he had family, he had things he wanted and needed. There was something very special for me about Wayne and his presence on the street. He was soft-spoken and gentle, and his eyes were very kind; most of all, he made me feel welcome. I began to look for him on my walks downtown. I became aware that every time I saw Wayne, it was the best part of my day. I felt a larger sense of God's nearness, love, and invitation during each conversation. I longed to know why I could go from feeling empty and restless to feeling God's love and stillness. What was this about? What was God offering me through Wayne?

During the first year that I knew Wayne, he never remembered my name. It was always me who approached him, and I assumed it always would be. I wondered if he even remembered me, until one afternoon, when I was walking downtown. I hadn't seen Wayne anywhere, and just as I was passing one of his usual hang-out spots, I heard someone saying my name. I stopped and looked back, and there was Wayne coming out from under the protected shadows of the building's overhang. For the very first time since meeting him, *he* was the one stepping out towards me and calling my name. He remembered me and he knew me, and he felt safe enough to approach me. It was an incredible moment that I will never forget, and a turning point: we were building friendship and it was beautiful.

I've learned a lot from my friendship with Wayne. I thought I was the one reaching out to him, but the reality was that God was using Wayne to reach me. When I was feeling lonely or disconnected from the world, chatting with Wayne helped me feel more comfortable and at home again. I became more aware of God's blessings in the present moment. I can't take this friendship for granted. Every time I see Wayne, it's an unexpected and wonderful surprise. Because he has no fixed address, I can't phone him or drop by his house as I might with other friends. Often, when I want to invite him to a Sanctuary drop-in, I can't find him at all. And when I do find him, he usually politely declines, and so I've realized that our friendship will continue to slowly build through our random encounters on the street. And I'm learning to be happy with that.

This friendship can't be on my terms. I can't have an agenda, and I can't control the way it goes. I am constantly reminded that this friendship is a gift from God that comes when I least expect it. All I can do is open my heart, receive, and give thanks. All I can do is trust that Jesus will keep showing up in Wayne, and in the many friends I am fortunate enough to make in the Sanctuary community. All I can do is be grateful.

"I am constantly reminded that this friendship is a gift from God that comes when I least expect it."



Love and Tolerance:

Gil Clelland

In the past 5 years or so, I've heard a lot in several media forms about tolerance. Last week, I saw a TV commercial that stood up against bullying (and rightly so!) stating that "love is louder" - than intolerance, racism, sexism, and many other labels. "Love is louder" the commercial proclaimed. Yet, in that commercial, there was a very clear link between "love" and "tolerance." If I heard the commercial correctly, it declared that *we love people when we tolerate them*.

I hear this sentiment regularly. We love people by tolerating them. Is this true? Tolerance is that sense that you can sit on your side of the room with your opinions and I'll sit on my side of the same room with my opinions and we'll try not to bother one another. We accept one another. We try not to get angry with each other. We try not to hurt one another with our words. We tolerate each other. You may enter my space. But don't try to change me. I can come near you. But don't worry, I won't try to change you either. This is how I understand tolerance. Is this good? Maybe. But, is it love?

With his words, Jesus painted many pictures of love. None perhaps more vivid than the returning prodigal son from Luke's Gospel (the watermark on this page is Rembrandt's drawing of the Prodigal Son). In this parable, a desperate son wandered back to his home, tail between his legs, and hoped to be accepted as a slave in his father's house. The son knew he was wrong and just wanted a place...to be accepted. To be tolerated. The father would offer so much more than that! The father ran (unacceptable and undignified for man of his stature to do) to greet his son, offered full membership into his household as a son, and even threw a party in his son's honour. The father did much more than accept or tolerate his son. He welcomed him home!

In Mark's Gospel, we read about a moment when Jesus was in a hurry. A synagogue leader named Jairus had asked Jesus to come to his house to heal his dying daughter. Jesus rushed through the crowds to Jairus' house and suddenly stopped. The disciples were caught off guard. Jesus' explanation, "Someone touched me." Off course someone touched you, thought the disciples, its crowded. That someone was a woman who had been suffering from bleeding for 12 years. According to Torah, she was *ceremonially unclean* and not allowed to be with others. Somewhere between desperation to get healed and fear of getting caught in the crowd, she crept up to Jesus with the hope of just touching a little of his robe...and get a little healing...a little acceptance... without anyone knowing she had broken "unclean" rules. Jesus felt something and stopped. He turned to see this woman...she was afraid and so alone. "Daughter," Jesus called her...and welcomed her with love and healing. They spoke for a while. They shared stories...in front of the crowd...perhaps even teaching the crowd - "This is what God's welcome looks like!"

At Sanctuary, we meet many desperate people who are looking to be accepted. God longs to welcome each one of them with open arms and running...or welcome by stopping to love them even when He is *busy* with other things. We mean that much to Him. When we begin to see each other with God's eyes, we find that accepting people is not enough. Tolerance is not enough. Love is fully welcoming the other person into your presence. Love is inviting them to come close. Love is going to cost us...But if we are honest with one another, we may just admit, we are the desperate ones too.

BAND AID THEN AND NOW: In 1984, under the direction of Bob Geldof, a group of music artists from the UK got together to write a song. This was not unheard of...BUT the reason was new. They cared about their global 'friends' struggling with poverty in Ethiopia. *Do they know its Christmas* was the song and **Band Aid** - the group. I was 12 years old as I listened to the song and watched the music video (and subsequent videos *We are the World* by **USA for Africa** and **Northern Lights** singing *Tears are not Enough*). But, I want to highlight this: **there is not doubt as I heard those songs and discussed them with my family, something formative was happening to my character.** I was 12 then...and my imagination was stirred towards a loving response to poverty...Today, I work among our friends struggling with poverty every day. Allow me to suggest: the world's issues are not something to hold back from our children. Let them see the pain, the struggles, the poverty, and show them some hope...For God so loves this world...and as the Christmas story reminds us, sometimes a little child leads us.

Come Celebrate with us

- Dance
- Party
- Karaoke
- Music by:



All are welcome!



Sunday January 8th, 2012. 7:00-10:30pm

**513 Talbot St – the site of the newly renovated
First CRC Building!**

Celebrate:

- Our first year as Sanctuary London
- Our fourth year in partnership with First CRC
- Our return to this wonderful facility!
- Our “official” status as a church

Our First Year:

We began ministry as Sanctuary London on January 1, 2011 – nearly one year ago – with this goal: becoming a healthy, welcoming community to all people. In this year, we have seen tremendous growth and support. God has been kind. You have been kind in your support. We have had 2 fundraisers, a retreat, and weekly programming, partnered with many new churches and organizations, and met many new friends. Yet, we are not content just to sustain what we have. So, with God's help and your continued support, we are beginning to dream. What could God do with this community and through this community in London?

Partnership with First CRC

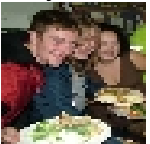
Over four years ago, we sat down with friends at First Christian Reformed Church to discuss the possibility of working together with a common goal. That year, we held a Christmas party at 513 Talbot St and the partnership began. As Sanctuary, we run all our programming in First's building, we have volunteers from First with us...In fact, you may say that you cannot often tell where First CRC ends and Sanctuary begins – a messy relationship that we love! Over the past year, First CRC built a wonderful addition to their facility on Talbot St. SO, we are excited to go back to the newly renovated church building at 513 Talbot St.

Our official status as a Church!

As you might know, Sanctuary London began officially as a program of Sanctuary Toronto until the time that we were able to apply for and receive charitable status and registration as a church with the government. This past year, when a church in London closed its doors, that congregation approached Sanctuary London with a gift of their church registration and charitable status. After discussions with our legal people and papers are signed, we will become an official church on December 12th, 2011. Over the next year, we will be working to bring all of our administration and accounting to London to be ready by 2013!

**Christmas is HERE: Not sure what to get that special someone who has everything?
How about the opportunity to feed 60-100 of our friends for one week?**

Merry Christmas



...and thank-you
from
Sanctuary London

When you let us know the name of your friend or family member, we will send a Christmas card to them on your behalf...declaring that your Christmas gift to them was a good meal ON THEIR BEHALF to our friends...

Each Monday drop-in, we feed lunch to 50-70 people. The cost of the food is usually around \$100.

Each Wednesday, we feed supper to 60-125 people. The cost of the food is usually around \$200.

Contact us today via email (gil@sanctuarylondon.ca or darryl@sanctuarylondon.ca) with the name of your friend or family member, their address, which meal you'd like to support, and then put a cheque in the mail for that amount (\$100 for Monday lunch, \$200 for Wednesday supper) made out to Sanctuary Ministries (with Sanctuary London in the memo section).

Send cheque to Sanctuary London, 103 Tecumseh Ave W, London ON, N6J 1L1