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UPDATE SUMMER 2011

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“Laura, the Samaritan Woman, and Me”

Several months before I became involved with Sanctuary London, I saw Laura on a downtown bus - hunched down in her seat and staring out the window, with her hair damp from the rain. I ran into Laura fairly often and knew about her struggles. So I prepared myself for hearing more about the pain in her life. I had been wishing for good people to enter her life— healthy relationships that didn’t always leave her hurting. But, when I asked her how she was doing, I was surprised to hear Laura’s mood. She told me she felt happy because she had done something really fun the night before.

“I went to this place downtown. A church...They have a group meal sometimes,” she said. “They invited me and I ate with them...and I’ve been hanging out with their community. They’re really nice. I love it there!” She told me how she joined them to sing worship songs, pray and hang out, and how she was considering the possibility of God in her life. To be honest, this was one of the last things I expected to hear from Laura, and so I was curious about these new people in her life. At the time, I didn’t know much about the community meal she was referring to, or the people involved, but I was relieved that Laura was connecting with a warm, inviting community.

Several months passed. I hadn’t seen Laura for a while, and I had forgotten all about our conversation. I began attending Sanctuary London as a volunteer. One day, to my surprise, I ran into Laura at one of the drop-in meals, and then I soon remembered our conversation and pieced it all together: this was the place she had been talking about, and these were the people she liked so much. All along, I had imagined her and I were so different; yet God had brought us to the very same place and very same people, where he was meeting us both.

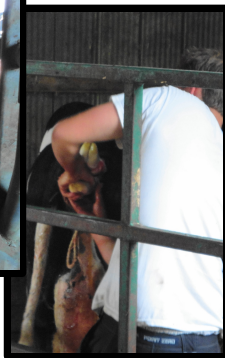
One evening, while sitting with Laura during a meal, I noticed more than usual how comfortable she felt in this community. Her face lit up and she was laughing a lot when Gil talked and joked with her during dessert. And at the end of that same meal, Laura asked me where Darryl was. I told her he had left a few minutes ago.

“Whaaat? Noooo...” she exclaimed with disappointment, “I really wanted to talk to him!” She explained that she had wanted to tell Darryl about a problem she was having with her friend.

In that moment, I realized God was really up to something. Laura was smiling a lot, laughing more than usual, and had someone trustworthy to confide in. I realized she had found a community where she felt accepted, comfortable, and safe. She had friends around her, and male figures in her life who would treat her with kindness and respect. And now that I was involved with Sanctuary London and could experience Laura in this context, it was simply the best thing in the world to see the love she was receiving and to realize she had a place to share her story and be known.

Watching Laura that night reminded me of one of my favourite Gospel stories: the Samaritan woman with Jesus at the well. I imagine there was no one more surprised than the Samaritan woman herself to realize Jesus wanted to be with her, to talk with her, to know her story, and to listen with a compassionate attentiveness, realizing he knew her more deeply than anyone else possibly could and loved her completely, no matter what. To be known and loved when we don’t think we are worth knowing and loving can be a gift that opens our eyes to the deepest heart of God. And as I watched Laura that night, my eyes were opened too.

SUMMER ON THE STREETS



The streets of London seem to be most crowded during the summer months. Some people are drawn back to the city after months elsewhere, some newcomers begin to "try out the streets" in the summer, and some (especially younger people) have found that sense of home no longer exists so they begin looking for "home" on the streets.

As a result of these increased numbers, all of our regular programming hours continue as usual. Consistency and reliability is of utmost importance to our friends, therefore we never miss a drop-in or a worship service. After our Sunday worship service we try to organize a special time of fellowship and hanging out at one of our homes, either with a **campfire or barbecue** and games. Furthermore, we celebrate this "family" that God has given us together.

In June twelve members of our community embarked on a three-day **'family' camping trip** to Pinery Provincial Park. For some, it was the first time away from the hard city streets in many years. We cooked all of our meals together over an open fire, and enjoyed all the usual camping activities including swimming, hiking, fishing and... oh yes, of course, the infamous bocce ball!

On July 28th Sanctuary took a whole busload (literally, we rented a bus!) of our friends from our community to the **Ysselstein Family Farm** just south of Woodstock, ON for an enjoyable and relaxing day of swimming and hanging around the pool. Helen and John Ysselstein hosted our community for the fifth straight year and provided a delicious BBQ dinner for us all. In between games of bocce and volleyball and jumping off the ten foot waterfall, we witnessed the miracle of four calves being born in the cow barn!

We also have the added joy of reaching out into the greater church community. So far this summer we have hosted, or helped to host, over eight different **missions teams** here in London. We have taken dozens of groups on educational **'walk-about's'** to present to them life in the city from the eyes of those who have experienced poverty. Gil has also been invited to be a **guest speaker** for mission groups, schools, and church services in London, as well as many other cities. In the past year alone, Gil has spoken to over 5000 people, young and old, as an advocate for the poor and disheartened in our cities and of Jesus' call to these people.

We ask that you keep us in your prayers. Pray that we would not be distracted from our calling to love and be among the hurting people of this city. And we would continue to put our faith and hope in the One who strengthens and sustains us, so that we may continue this good work in the name of Christ our Lord.

"When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand."

Henri Nouwen

HOMELESS OR STRANGERS?

This group was fairly attentive. After nearly two weeks of bringing groups of young people through downtown London, it seemed like one more group. We cover mostly the same territory every walk we do – a stop by the bridge under which people are sleeping every night, a discussion of the priorities of London as we look at the spikes around the city planted flower beds preventing my friends from sitting comfortably, listening to the loud classical music designed to move our “loitering” friends from the front of the library...often we share lots of points of view about poverty to stimulate questions and provoke discussion. Our friend, Mike, who has experienced life on the streets, accompanies our group as a guide.

As we turned from the Horton St bridge towards Richmond St, a young man in the group asked me, “Don't you get afraid?” I stopped. I knew the question. I've heard it many times before. Almost every time we take a group on this type of walking tour of London, I hear that question. So, I want to make sure he is asking what I think he is asking. “What do you mean?” I enquired. “Well...” I saw he was struggling not to offend me with his question. “I mean...uh...when you are meeting someone homeless for the first time...or at night? Aren't you afraid something might happen?” He finally blurted out. I paused before I answered. Frankly I'm offended. I know I shouldn't be. I know everyone needs to work out the fact that someone who is impoverished is just as human as anyone else. Someone who is homeless is just as 'risky' as anyone else. But I've learned that our impoverished friends are just as beautiful...just as much the image of God as anyone else...If we just took the time...if we listened to their stories...if we just got to know these people...So with all that whirling through my mind, I ask back, “Do you mean I should be afraid because they are homeless or because they are strangers?”

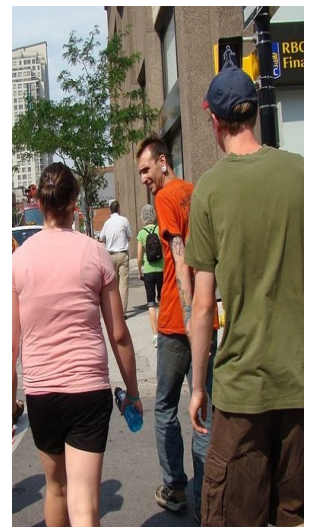
And for the next half hour we talked about these two words – strangers and homeless. “Strangers” are people we don't know. And if we don't know them, we may be afraid of them. It's actually okay not to trust everyone you meet. It's even alright to be afraid when you don't know the person. We suggested taking time to get to know someone. And maybe have a radar going while you talk for the first few times...trust could and should be earned. Strangers only become friends over time and through mutual response to invitations offered. Perhaps that is one of the points of being human – reducing the number of strangers in your life. Our friend Mike piped up, “You have to get out of your comfort zone for people like me. That's how you get to know me better...and then we're friends,” Mike concludes with a smile.

Mike's right. But, to be honest, I was afraid when I first met Mike. He carried himself as a man on a mission. His stare was intense. His eyes and words pierced you – intentionally done to make you feel uncomfortable. And I was afraid. But we chatted anyway...awkward and uncomfortable to begin with...more of duty than anything else. His trust grew in me...and I began to feel safe with Mike. Last night, Mike called me at 11pm. “I just needed to talk,” he shared. “My father just told me he's really sick...” I asked some questions, got some details, and then asked how he was doing. “He must trust me now Gil. He shared his pain with me because he trusts me...I've been clean for quite a few months and now he trusts me...He even said he was proud of me...hasn't said that since I was a child.”

Just before hanging up the phone, I shared with Mike, “I'm praying for you brother.” We are strangers no more.



Is it okay to be afraid of someone just because they are homeless? Or can we see “others” as people we don't quite know yet?



WHAT'S GOING ON?

Sanctuary London Presents:

A Royal Ball

"A Dance for the King"

Saturday October 1st 2011 at 6:30pm

At the London Polish Hall – 554 Hill St, London

Join with members of our community as celebrate Sanctuary London's official launch. It's a party!

The evening will feature a great line up of desserts while listening to our guest speaker Greg Paul, founder of our parent organization – Sanctuary Toronto. Then we'll have professional dance lessons with instructors from "Ballroom Breeze." After which we try to put our best foot forward (one two three, one two three) as we dance the night away together with the young and the old, the rich and the poor, in a unity that can only be described as "a taste of the kingdom of heaven!"



How can you get involved in "A Royal Ball?"

1. Come out on October 1st for the Ball! This is a great opportunity to make a first contact with our community. Tickets are \$30 each. Contact Darryl or Gil for tickets.
2. Can't make it to the Ball on October 1st? Donate the price of your ticket(s) so that we can invite some of our friends to come at no cost to them as they would not otherwise be able to afford to come.
3. Our expenses for this event will be approximately \$3000-\$4000. You can help by donating towards our expenses so that any money raised on the evening of the Ball will go directly to helping Sanctuary continue to reach out to those who are marginalized in our society.
4. Help us by advertizing the Ball and encouraging your friends and family to purchase tickets. But if you have a friend who you think would really benefit from being there, act fast! We have a limited number of tickets available.

YES! I want to get involved with Sanctuary London...

- ☐ I would like ___ tickets for the "Ball." Included is a cheque for \$_____.
 - ☐ I cannot come to the "Ball" but would like to sponsor ___ friends to come. Included is a cheque for \$_____.
 - ☐ I would like to help sponsor the cost of the "Royal Ball." Included is a cheque for \$_____.
- OR**
- ☐ I would like to become a monthly donor at the rate of \$_____ per month (include a void cheque with your name and address)
 - ☐ I would like to make a one time donation of \$_____.

**All cheques can be made out to "Sanctuary Ministries" with "Sanctuary London" written in the memo section. Send cheques to Sanctuary London, 103 Tecumseh Ave W, London ON, N6J 1L1
For credit card donations, please see info at <http://www.sanctuarylondon.ca/donations/>**