



*Pastor Gil Clelland, smiling face of Sanctuary.*

## Sanctuary for the 'poor in spirit'

### Cathy Smith

In a typical church basement in London, Ontario, there's a place where those in need of shelter, food, and companionship gather together and offer it to one another. It's called Sanctuary. Pastor Gil Clelland, a former Christian high school art teacher, and Darryl Reckman, a part-time student at UWO, run the drop-in centre located at 75 Blackfriars Road, the temporary home of London First CRC, one of the key partners in this ministry. Darryl and Gil also conduct a mobile ministry downtown where they connect with their "street friends" and facilitate a Bible study in the public library.

Recently I dropped in at the drop-in centre. People were playing cards, setting up lunch, working on art, potting plants and chatting. I could not distinguish between the volunteers and "the homeless," something Darryl found encouraging. He pointed out that Sanctuary serves to minister to spiritual impoverishment first, and that their "church" is open to all who need to meet Jesus, whether rich or poor. He explained that many individuals who become involved with Sanctuary are not necessarily homeless at all, but struggle in life for all sorts of reasons, including the stereotypical issues such as addiction, mental illness, and developmental disabilities, but also deep brokenness from their lack of relational rootedness. Darryl added that many of those who end up on the street or in need of Sanctuary's services are "homeless" long before they leave home. Pastor Gil and Darryl introduce hurting people to Jesus by building authentic friendships with them.

Sanctuary grew out of a Youth for Christ initiative. As an organization, Youth for Christ, however, maintains a "youth only" focus, and Sanctuary's leadership team saw the need to continue befriending street



*Darryl Reckman and Liz prepare lunch.*

people into adulthood. The ministry is now temporarily under the umbrellaship of Sanctuary Ministries of Toronto, an urban ministry led by Greg Paul (author of *God in the Alley*), and by other supportive networking such as churches and individual donors. In the meantime Sanctuary London is applying for its own charitable status designation.

### Finding refuge

I was warmly welcomed, even though I circulated with camera and notebook in hand. Mike showed me a painting he was working on, an evocative scene featuring a full moon reflected in a lake. He said he was thinking of calling it "Light meets darkness," and was planning to give it away. "That's my witness," he told me. "I use my talent to the glory of God." He then showed me another painting of a wolf baying at the moon in a ring of trees. "That's about my loneliness," he said.

Sanctuary is a place where loneliness is addressed. It's where sandwiches, conversation, affirmation and love are offered in the name of Christ. I saw things that pushed against my own prejudices. The "poor" indistinguishable from the volunteers. The poor with iPhones. The poor lifting each other up. The poor sharing joy and laughter. When I asked where the food for the meals comes from, my neighbour quipped with lightning wit, "From the grocery store." Sanctuary is a place where the "poor in spirit" experience a taste of the kingdom of heaven. ✨

*Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is features editor with CC.*

