

PRAYER

for THE CITY



FEBRUARY 6 – MAY 13, 2012



YONGE
STREET
MISSION

By: Bill Ryan
Director of Staff Care



Saving the City

When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices...By the blessing of the upright a city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.

– Proverbs 11:10, 11

In the city of Antioch, where the followers of Jesus were first called Christians, there comes a story from 387 A.D. The emperor Arcadius had introduced yet another set of taxes and so the people rioted in the streets. In the process, they smashed down the statues of the emperor and his family. This conduct was considered an act of treason and afterwards the people became terrified that the response of the emperor would be to come with an army and destroy the city.

Quickly the bishop journeyed to the capital, Constantinople, to plead with the emperor to spare the city. During the twenty-one days while he was away, the people met daily in the churches to pray for the salvation of

the city. Finally on Easter Sunday, the bishop returned, bringing with him the letter of pardon from the emperor.

Our current situation in Toronto is nowhere nearly as dramatic as Antioch in 387 A.D. Over the last couple of years, we have had protests and some violence but they seem insignificant in comparison.

Nevertheless, we are called to “pray without ceasing.” It is our heritage to pray for the salvation of the city. I believe our city is one of the greatest cities in the world to live in because people in the past have prayed for it. And it will continue to be great as long as we commit to continue praying for it.

As you read the following reflections from various staff members, may you be inspired to pray earnestly for the many challenges that the city faces.

Blessings and Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B. M.', written in a cursive style.

Prayer for the City is written by
Mission directors and staff.
Names have been changed for privacy.

When [Paul] came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles... – Acts 9:26-27

In Evergreen's Connecting Youth to Work (CYTW) Program, we journey alongside street-involved and at-risk young adults. We provide connections to meaningful work, and empower them as they work to provide for themselves and their families. We are grateful for employers who, like Barnabas, are willing to partner with us and advocate for a person who might otherwise be turned away without that support.

Matt grew up without a father figure and positive role models in his life, facing family difficulties which led him to drop out of school as a pre-teen, and turn to a life of hustling and street-involvement. In coming to Evergreen, Matt found a new community which welcomed him and helped him to have hope for the future. Matt entered the CYTW program, overcoming many obstacles, and received employment under the supervision of a caring employer who was willing to see beyond his past and believe in his future.

Please pray for the young people in our program who are motivated for change. Pray for employers and YSM staff to have the discernment and love of Barnabas to encourage and coach a young person to their potential.

What do French toast, basketballs, guitars, and colourful beads have in common? They are just a few elements that make our Saturday Morning Children's Breakfast Club a huge hit!

Every week kids from the community visit the CCC to participate in this amazing program where they eat a delicious breakfast, play sports, learn to play instruments, make beautiful crafts, and learn about God's love. Staff and volunteers spend their morning giving their 'all' to the kids and sometimes even have to get dirty doing the dishes!

Pray for the staff and volunteers that God's love would shine through them in every task that they take on. Please ask that He would sustain them and give them the energy and strength needed to show the kids His love, so early on a Saturday morning, and for the continued creativity to make each week exciting, unique and fun!

This program simply would not be so great without the support of donors and volunteers. We thank God for them every day! Would you pray with us, that the needs of this program would continue to be filled? We pray for continued generosity from our friends who donate food for breakfast, supplies for crafts and money for everything else.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. – John 14:27

Reema arrives with her two-year-old daughter, excited to begin her first basic computer class, but she's uneasy as she leaves her daughter in the childcare room. "My daughter cries whenever she leaves my side." Reema is learning a lot in the class, but she wonders, "Will my daughter ever adjust?"

Johanna, a single mother of two boys, has begun a part-time job at a community organization. Excited as she is about this positive change, Johanna is concerned about her teenage son who has been exhibiting signs of depression and isolation. How does Johanna balance the responsibilities of this new position while trying to help her son?

The learning and skills-building opportunities offered by the Women & Family department have enabled many women to be connected to new opportunities for employment, education and personal growth. But balancing new roles and responsibilities and changing family dynamics can be very stressful for all involved.

Please pray that staff may continue to show grace and understanding to women seeking support. Pray that we will provide engaging and stimulating programming for preschoolers while their mothers are in our programs. Please pray for youth facing serious mental and psychological challenges and for the courage to seek help.

...And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this? – Esther 4:14

Each new staff member who comes to work at the Mission is part of a special New Staff Consecration service. They are asked to reflect on why God may have called them to the Mission at this time.

“You have answered God’s call. You are here, like Queen Esther, “for such a time as this,” Bill Ryan tells the new staff.

Some are here to work one-on-one with troubled youth. Others may be called to drive the truck, pay the bills, care for infants or help people find employment. Some come to serve on the front lines, others behind the scenes. All believe God has called them to serve in the city, and they offer themselves freely and with love.

Yonge Street Mission is one body with many parts, and as St. Paul says, all parts are important. Together we make up the body of Christ and together we do His work.

Please hold the Mission staff in prayer, especially new staff. May God guide them and bless them as they discover why they have been called “for such a time as this.”

Hagar thought, "Have I really seen God and lived to tell about it?" So from then on, she called Him, "The God Who Sees Me."

– Genesis 16:13

Like Hagar, who ran from Sarah's not-so-happy household, Evergreen's single moms fled their homes at a tender age, feeling unloved, discarded and invisible. Like Hagar, most girls we encounter are maltreated by people in positions of power. Like Hagar, many young women live like slaves in the tents of another.

Though she was pregnant and rejected, Hagar soon discovered that God had a plan for her. She needed safety and community to raise Ishmael. Hagar obeyed God and returned to Abraham and Sarah for provision during the critical years of Ishmael's life.

Today, as then, God sees young women, their circumstances and their needs. God leads them on journeys of restoration, sending many to Evergreen for emotional support, childcare, baby supplies, parenting programs, and health care. While here, they work on housing, education and employment goals. Hagar's daughters begin their journey of healing when they can say with her, "I have now seen the One who sees me".

Please pray that God will open the eyes of the 'Hagars' of our generation to His love and His planned destiny for each woman and her children.

*Be alert, stand firm in the faith, be brave,
be strong. Do all your work in love.*

– I Corinthians 16:13-14

“**W**hen is March Break camp? I can’t wait,” asked 9-year-old Omar in September.

This week is March Break in the Toronto public schools. In the Computer Literacy Centre, thirty children and ten high school volunteers will join together for a week of computer activities, group games, crafts and an unforgettable field trip. Last year students were able to ‘tap’ maple trees and taste delicious maple syrup on our outing to the sugar bush. This year we have other adventures in store for the kids.

Parents can rest easy, knowing that their children will be cared for in a safe and enriching environment. Families look forward to this adventurous week many months ahead of time. So do we! As you think of us this week...

- Thank God for all the children that will participate in our March Break programs
- Thank God for the high school students who will volunteer their time for the week
- Pray for a safe, fun and exciting week together. Pray for the friendships, new and old, that will be nurtured here.

*For I am poor and needy, and my
heart is wounded within me.*

– Psalm 109:22

A seed lies in the cold earth surrounded by dirt, worms and the garbage of fall. As spring comes, water flows and the seed begins to crack. Growth burrows upward towards the light, air and warmth of the sun. It's a mysterious process and one that we love to see.

In New Hope Fellowship, our community of adults, we believe in the seed of life and potential in every human being, regardless of what we see on the surface. Each person does their part in challenging, growing, learning with and sharing with the others we are privileged to know. As staff, we are forced to see our own brokenness as we work to foster healing and mend the wounds that have accumulated over a lifetime.

This process can take years. Just as seeds must weather a winter before a spring, the human spirit takes its own time to emerge and break through ground. Many hands are needed to tend and nurture new life. As we foster new beginnings of leadership and personal healing, it can be all-consuming.

Pray for endurance and wise leadership for staff. Pray for faith, hope and love for all on the journey.

We love because he first loved us.

– 1 John 4:19

“Some day, I want to go on a missions trip to Haiti because the people there have a lot of needs,” said Karan.

Coming from the mouth of a youth who has spent time in the shelter system, having fled from the abuse and pain experienced at home, this statement is incredibly surprising and hope-inducing. How is it possible that youth who have endured such difficult lives can hold a deep desire to love and help others in return?

At Evergreen Employment Services, when staff ask youth about future career plans, the response is often “youth worker” or “social worker.” Somehow, God has kept a part of their hurting and broken hearts soft toward the needs of others, despite the heavy load of numerous burdens. Somewhere in the brokenness, youth have experienced enough of God’s hope and love to carry many toward sharing love and care with others.

Pray that the youth from the Evergreen community will experience God’s deep love, and that God will keep hearts from hardening against the bitterness frequently faced.

Pray that the youth’s capacity to love will not be diminished despite various challenges and barriers but will grow mysteriously and joyfully with abundance.

Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!

– Luke 24:5b-6a

The heart of Christian faith is not love or grace or forgiveness as ideas, although they are great ideas. The heart of Christian faith is those things manifested in a Person. Jesus Christ manifested love and grace and forgiveness once and for all in the gift of His life given for us on the cross.

It is tragic that despite the beauty of His words, His life, His ideas and His character, He was put to death. How can One so beautiful have been so despised?

The amazing part is that He willingly went to the cross and doing so He proved His love for all humanity. If ever we should doubt love or grace or God's forgiveness, we can look back at the cross and be reassured.

At Yonge Street Mission the best we have to offer, as we serve our community, is not ideas, not great programs or services. The best we have to offer is Jesus. Jesus is best practice. Jesus is the best future, the greatest hope, the fullest gift we could ever give to the people we serve.

Pray that at Easter, as at all times, our efforts would lead to many coming to know the Best, the Christ, God incarnate, God who is with us always.

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain. – Psalm 127:1

The empty cross of Easter is a symbol of new hope.

There is fresh promise in our community today as tenants settle in to newly-built affordable housing units at 40 Oak Street.

YSM is working with Toronto Christian Resource Centre to provide support to residents, who include two youth from our Connecting Youth to Work program. For the young people, the bachelor units represent a chance to create a real home.

“It is a struggle to find anywhere to live in this city, especially somewhere I can afford,” says 19-year-old Monica, who has been staying in over-crowded conditions with relatives. “This is a fresh start for me.”

“I am really excited,” agrees 22-year-old Micah, who has been living in transitional housing since arriving in Canada 18 months ago.

Other tenants are former Genesis Place residents for whom the move to 40 Oak Street is highly symbolic. The new address is a sign of increased ability to handle the demands of independent living.

Pray that our tenants find community and that, relieved of the worry of the search for affordable housing, they can focus on building lives for themselves.

May these units be much more than four walls – may they also be a true place to call home.

*But as for me, I am poor and needy;
may the Lord think of me. You are my
help and my deliverer; you are my God,
do not delay. – Psalm 40:17*

The Double Take Store has been in business since 1999 and is one of our vital ministries in Regent Park. It does a flourishing trade in second hand clothing and household items at very affordable prices. But our primary purpose for opening the store was to create employment and training opportunities.

Our store manager is proud of her “ladies,” mainly refugee new arrivals. For most this is their first job in Canada and their first job ever – a real achievement. Confidence grows with working at Double Take, along with language and social skills. Shyness is overcome and a wider understanding of living in Canada is gained through daily contact with the rest of the staff and the store’s customers.

Double Take staff takes great pride in “their” store, always cheerful and smiling and eager to help shoppers. “This is the first time I have felt valued in my life,” said one young woman.

Please pray for the Mission’s ongoing work through Double Take.

Pray for the trainees who gain work skills, self-esteem and a sense of belonging and contributing to their community.

Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order to provide for urgent needs and not live unproductive lives. – Titus 3:14

How do you share one case of eggs among 800 families? This is the kind of dilemma faced daily by the good-hearted volunteers in our Food Bank. In a time of scarcity, with food prices rising and the economy slowing again, their task is difficult.

Our volunteers meet and greet clients and help each individual select enough food to meet their needs. “We find the best way to help everyone who comes in here,” says one volunteer. “It’s a struggle but we’ve learned how to share what we have. I tell people, don’t take what you don’t know how to cook!”

Such practical advice, along with the caring guidance from our volunteers and the ability to select one’s own food, brings dignity to a visit to the Mission’s Food Bank. This makes it “a unique place,” in the words of one volunteer.

Please hold our Food Bank in your prayers – the staff, volunteers and the 3,000 individuals who rely on it every month.

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The commandments...are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself." – Romans 13:9

“I have never prayed for anyone other than my family,” said Jeya. “This is an opportunity for me to pray for others and for my community.”

Jeya is part of a group of women who meet regularly for prayer in our St. James Town office. It is open to women of all faiths or no faith. Through this time together, the women have a chance to draw closer to God and to make deeper connections with their neighbours. Many have never had the opportunity to be part of a prayer group. But they have eagerly embraced the new experience and are now sharing leadership of the group.

Two women in the group had not been speaking to each other. In the safety of the circle, they were able to share their feelings and experience forgiveness, peace and new beginnings.

Please pray for the women of St. James Town on their spiritual journeys. Pray that God will bless them as they strive to do His will in their lives and in the community.



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