

PARTNERS



A Resource for Church Leaders from Diaconal Ministries Canada

Overcoming our fear

By Pam DeWilde

I'm usually not afraid of heights. It did, however, take some mental gymnastics to convince myself that it was safe to step out onto the glass floor of the CN Tower almost 350 metres above the ground. I discovered that when I kept my eyes focused straight ahead and my feet moving, I ended up where I never imagined I could be.

Perhaps a greater fear that many of us share is the fear of talking to strangers—more specifically, talking to strangers about ourselves and our faith and expressing an interest in them and their faith.

Many biblical heroes wrestled with God when He sent them to talk to people they feared. Imagine being Ananias (Acts 9: 10-19)! Undoubtedly, when he said, "Lord, I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he had done to your saints," he was hoping that God would reconsider sending him to speak to Saul. Ananias delivered a very powerful message to Saul, and that message continues to bear fruit.

But blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.

They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7-8 (TNIV)

I was only able to do it because God was in control; and the Holy Spirit empowers.

If your church is considering visiting the homes in your neighbourhood, be encouraged by Sheila Murphy's story on page 2 of this issue of *Partners*. Sheila shares how she faced her fear of knocking on strangers' doors. When she first told me her story, she said, "I was only able to do it because God is in control; and the Holy Spirit empowers."

Spending time with people isolated by poverty may be another way in which your church can get to know its community better. When confronted by situations and habits that are different than our own, we often let stereotypes and fear take the place of love and compassion.

For weeks before my first shift as a volunteer at a local youth centre, I prayed earnestly that God would replace my self-centred fears with a longing to meet these young people. It is painful to hear the stories of their broken lives week after week, and yet I love being there because together >>

Operation Manna helps make the connection

Frank* attends Making Connections Clarington, one of 22 Operation Manna partner organizations across Canada. Frank is middle aged and recovering from a mental illness.

He recently approached one of the regular volunteers and asked, "Are you my friend?" The volunteer replied sincerely, "Yes, Frank, I am!" "You know," Frank said, "I've never had one before."

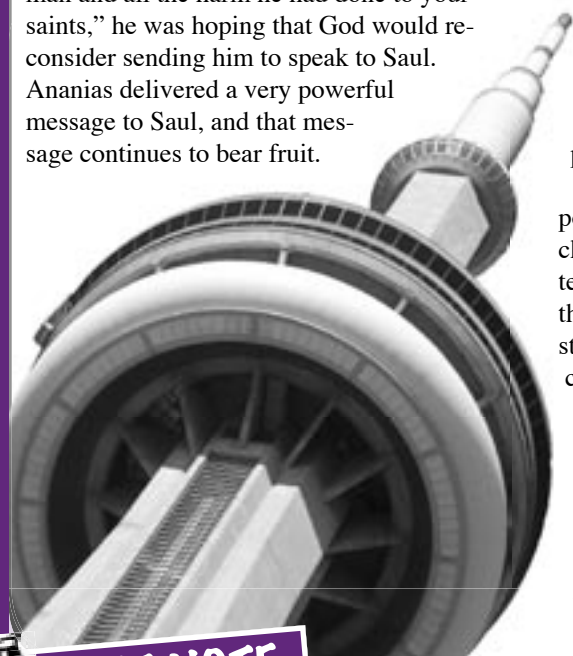
In youth centres, community music schools, support groups, art studios and pregnancy care centres, seniors' homes and numerous other ministry venues, people who are often isolated by their circumstances are discovering that God sees their needs and sends His servants to walk alongside them.

Because of your support for Operation Manna, we are able to provide funding and development services to these and other new, local ministries. Watch for stories and information about Operation Manna's partners in advance of the annual May 2007 offering.

To discuss your community ministry ideas and learn more about a partnership with Operation Manna, talk to one of DMC's Outreach Ministry Developers: Henry Bosch in Western Canada, and Pam DeWilde in Eastern Canada; or a Diaconal Ministry Developer in your Classis.

Send us an e-mail or go online to find more information: info@diaconalministries.com www.diaconalministries.com

* Not his real name.



TAKE NOTE

1. Operation Manna Sunday is May 6, 2007. Watch for promotional material coming to your church soon.

2. Diaconal Ministry Developers are available in each classis to strengthen and support the diaconal ministry in your church and community.

3. A mini-workshop accompanies this issue of *Partners* online, providing a venue for further exploration on this topic personally and with other deacons. www.diaconalministries.com

Greater awareness of the people around us



This past fall through a series of “God-incidences,” I found myself volunteering to go out with Community CRC in Dixon’s Corners—knocking on doors in the community (something I had said I would never do).

Leading up to it, the fear I faced was almost crippling. I realized that the only way to get through it was to completely surrender everything to God. It ended up being a wonderful experience, and I knew it was because of the power of the Holy Spirit. While I was out with this church, I had a vision of my own church, Kanata Community CRC in Ottawa, Ontario, doing this in its community.

This past December, 16 people from my church went out and knocked on doors in the neighbourhood. We asked about the needs of the community and how we as a church could meet those needs. We also asked questions about spiritual beliefs. In the space of a few hours we learned a lot about our community. We were able to engage many people in spiritual discussions and share the gospel. We came away with a greater awareness of the people who form the community around us.

I teach evangelism courses, but through these experiences, I have realized that it is not enough to teach people about outreach. I had to get involved myself and take some risks as well. I realized that I was organizing my life in such a way that I always did the things at which I knew I would succeed. These experiences brought me to a new awareness. The result has been a feeling of exhilaration that God will use me, imperfect as I am, for His ministry, along with a willingness to be used by Him in the future.

Sheila Murphy is the Outreach Ministry Developer for Christian Reformed Home Missions in Classis Eastern Canada.

... Overcoming fear

>> we experience God’s grace and love in a place called The Refuge.

What stories have been shared in your own church? Be encouraged by the deacon who made a difficult visit and later reported, “I was surprised how smoothly it went. I was really blessed by the conversation.” And the young person who participated in a Service Night at the local shelter and said, “I was a bit intimidated by the people who

smelled and looked like they sleep on the street, but we had a lot of fun playing cards.” Your community is waiting to meet you!

Fear comes from what we think is going to happen. Experiencing God and loving our neighbour comes from knowing He is in control.

Pam DeWilde is an Outreach Ministry Developer with Diaconal Ministries Canada.



More than just doing something

A favourite story of mine is about a woman who criticized D. L. Moody for the way he shared his faith. Moody’s response was, “I agree with you. I don’t like the way I do it either. Tell me, how do you do it?” When the woman said she didn’t share her faith, Moody replied, “Then I like my way of doing it better than your way of not doing it.”

I used this story to encourage members of our church in Dixon’s Corners as they set out to meet their neighbours door to door. It is not the only way to reach our community and may not always be the best way, I said, but it is important to do something. It turned out to be a far more positive experience than merely doing something.

As much as going door to door is often a ‘put-down’ method of trying to share the gospel, I would argue that it’s not entirely unlike the biblical pattern.

When the Holy Spirit was poured out, the apostles were to go to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth, not sit in their comfy pews waiting for the world to come to them. When they dragged their feet on the going out part, the Lord sent persecution to mobilize them.

And what response did folks in the early church get as they went? In some places they encountered hostility, while in other places there was a great openness.

Thankfully, as we went out, few of us experienced hostility. Sure some people were indifferent, but we also gratefully discovered that many people were open and even appreciative of a visit.

We discovered that visiting door to door was a good way of getting to know our neighbours better and what their needs are. We’ve renewed our commitment to becoming a church focused on ministering to the needs of our community.

Rev. Clarence Witten is pastor of Community CRC in Dixon’s Corners, Ontario.

www.DiaconalMinistries.com