

Pennies and Sparrows

A Central Saint John Community Ministry Newsletter by Terence and Jasmine Chandra

Since the coming of the present pandemic, the whole world has fallen upon difficult times. Simple pleasures like sharing a home cooked meal in the kitchen of a good friend, hosting a sleepover for our kids and gathering together for coffee in the church hall after a communion service now seem like luxuries — luxuries which, just a few short weeks ago, we all took for granted. Now, we find ourselves (physically) isolated from the people whom we love- extended family, friends and fellow church-goers.

Strangely enough, there are many similarities between our current situation and the post-resurrection life of Jesus. While the good news of Jesus' resurrection is a tremendous joy that has rippled through time and space, there was also a kind of distancing involved. The disciples of Jesus — so accustomed to walking and talking and eating with their master — suddenly had to let go. “Where I am going, you cannot come” (John 14:2) are among the final words that Jesus says to his disciples just hours before his arrest, trial. And, when on the day of the resurrection, Jesus presents himself alive to a bewildered Mary Magdalene his first words to her are “Do not hold on to me. I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (John 20:17). No longer would Mary speak with Jesus face-to-face, share a meal with him or embrace him. This old way of being with her Lord was quickly coming to an end.

Instead, Jesus comes to Mary and the disciples in a new, different and far more intimate way; namely, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, two-millennia later, the Holy Spirit remains with the people of Christ — binding us together as one, working in each of our hearts, guiding us and comforting us, especially in trying times like these.

These are times when, like so many of you, we've had to seriously rethink what we do and how we do it — not only in terms of our community work through *Pennies and Sparrows* but in our work as interim priests at Stone Church in Saint John. As restrictions became more and more necessary, we had to forego many of our face-to-face social connections and programs in order to keep everyone safe and healthy. We really miss the weekly gatherings that we enjoyed and have struggled with how to continue to live lives that contribute to the community in these times of social distancing. However, just like the first disciples, we too have the power of the Holy Spirit, not only to guide and direct us in our work, but provide us with a sense of intimacy and connection with both the Lord and the people whom we serve. Hopefully, this will become clear in the following updates on our ministry.

Updates

We are working on launching our new website and logo thanks to the work of Zack Ingles who has spent hours helping us have a clearer focus and a more functional platform.

Emergency Food Program

The Emergency Food Program is a collaboration of not-for-profits, philanthropic businesses and individual donors who help deliver emergency groceries to people isolated or in need. This program is skillfully helping address food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis. When time permits, Jasmine has been helping pack and organize the food that goes out (thanks to her experience packing groceries for the Food Purchasing Club). Groceries go out on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. The distribution is organized at the Vineyard Church and everyone is practicing social distancing while there. We wash hands upon entry, sign in so that everyone knows who has been in the building, and use different doors to exit. Packers go around the room in a wide circle keeping a distance from each other. The orders are then placed according to neighbourhoods and get picked up later by the drivers who deliver them. Those receiving the orders have to pick them up outside their door to minimize contact. As of March 30th 1262 people have been helped through the program.



English Language Bible Studies

Every Tuesday evening for nearly two years now, Terence has met with a small group of newcomers to our country- a diverse group of people from Asia, South America and Eastern Europe, all of whom are trying to learn English as a Second Language. Typically, they used to gather together on the 2nd floor of Trinity Anglican Church to study the Bible together. Not only did this give them an opportunity to develop their vocabulary, hone their grammar skills and practice conversation- it also drew them into an exciting encounter with God's word. Unfortunately, with the current social isolation measures in place, Terence was forced to temporarily stop meeting with his class. However, after two weeks, the group was finally able to reunite online via Zoom conferencing. Not only did the regulars attend but a few other people as well. Ironically, this new online English Language Bible Study has been better attended than the one previously hosted in the church!

Kids Lead

We have started our 3rd Kids Lead program which teaches kids aged 7-12 about how to make a difference in the community starting now! We have obviously had to move from meeting in person to zoom video meetings. This has come with technical glitches and all the drawbacks of not being together. We have been able to visit some organizations in unique ways. Jasmine has been sharing some videos of places she has been to and some fantastic individuals have joined us through zoom to tell us about how they are working to help the community amidst the Covid-19 crisis.

Jeunes Leaders en Action

Jasmine had a great time engaging with the grade 8 class at Samuel de Champlain School. She came in to do a session on community development then organized for them to take tours and hear presentations on 11 different non-profit organizations in the city. The students then broke into 14 groups and have started initiatives to help these organizations. Many of them were able to complete their projects before school shut down, but others are still trying to help in some ways. We have been in contact with some staff at the school who have sent out information on the needs certain organizations have in our city. We have also been able to contribute lists of resources that people are able to access in these difficult times.



Training and Presenting

One of the ways that we feel we can make a difference in the community is by training ourselves as well as training others. In January we helped to organize a 5 day SACIT (Sexual Abuse Crisis Intervention Training) workshop in partnership with the Diocese of Fredericton and SVN. 30 people took the course, among whom were 9 people sponsored by the Diocese of Fredericton through *Pennies and Sparrows*. This training has already been invaluable as we hear disclosures of people who have undergone sexual abuse and violence. It has been helpful to have the latest data and to know what words to say in order to provide healing. Thank you to those who made donations and who prayed for this training to happen.

Jasmine and Erin Rideout of Inner City Youth Ministries (ICYM) have also been offering workshops on ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences). These workshops help community members understand how Adverse Childhood Experiences impact the health and behaviour of those whom we work with, our loved ones, as well as the broader population. We had a list of upcoming presentations that had to be cancelled for the time being, but this will give us an opportunity to adapt the material to a faith-based model that can be shared with churches and para-church organizations.



Stone Church

At the end of December, the minister at Stone Church - (Rev. John Paul Westin) left to become a full-time prison chaplain. We have been blessed to work under John Paul and have deeply enjoyed his mentorship, encouragement and joyous faith. In the (almost) 6 years since we have been attending Stone, we have come to see the members of the congregation as our family and the church as our home. They have been extremely supportive of our community endeavours and have freely shared their gift of encouragement with us. It only made sense then that we would fill in as interims as

they search for a replacement priest. We are glad to be able to keep up the connections with the members of the congregation through weekly telephone calls, mail outs, and online church. Terence is honing his skills as a videographer and editor, each week putting together a virtual service that parishioners can take part in via Youtube.

Friday Night Supper Club

A couple of years ago the Catholic Bishop of Saint John and the Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of Fredericton signed a partnership agreement as part of IARCCUM (International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission) and funded by the Walking Together Foundation. The

initial project was a Dads and Tots group which encouraged dads to engage with their kids while getting support from other dads. We were asked in the Fall to look at how we could expand this program to include a broader community participation. The result is a partnership with the local k-8 school - Saint John the Baptist and King Edward School - for a monthly Friday Night Supper Club. During the supper club families are invited to come and cook a meal with their children. They set up tables with fine linens and centre pieces and invite other families from the community to come eat with us. The first Friday Night Supper Club took place at the end of February. The kids loved being 'chefs' for the evening. They commented on how pretty the glassware was, enjoyed the linen table clothes and went home with lots of leftovers. Unfortunately we will have to wait to continue this program until the school reopens, but we look forward to the opportunities we will have to grow when the times comes.



Emmaus Way

As many of you know, the Emmaus Way is a program that we launched years ago— one that creates teams of support around individuals or families struggling in unstable life circumstances. Since the program began, we have launched four teams, two of which recently came to an end. In both cases, the individuals/families are now in a more stable place. Although the friendships persist, there is no longer a need for formal monthly meetings and systematic, organized support.

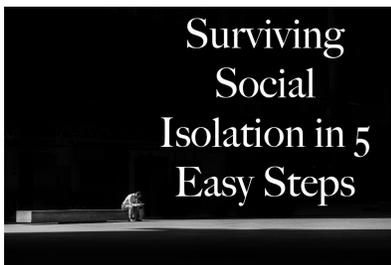
The team formed around a single mother is still running and doing quite well. While we can't get together in the same place, we are still maintaining connections through phone calls, Facebook, and dropping off needed items.

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, we were in the process of creating two new teams around a couple of individuals in need— one, a person struggling with substance abuse issues and the other a man recently released from prison. Unfortunately, we need to postpone the formation of these teams due to the complications imposed by social distancing. Please pray for these people, asking the Lord to uphold and protect them in these difficult times.

Finances

We are very grateful for those who continue to donate monthly and yearly to our ministry. We know that these are economically difficult times for everyone. We had some generous donations in December which allowed us to start the year in a good position. At this point we are amazed at how God has continued to provide for us. So while we are always accepting donations we are blessed to have enough to make it through the next couple of months. In addition to this, the Diocese of Fredericton will be exploring if we are eligible for any of the government funding initiatives that are being unveiled.

Our Latest Blog post:



<https://penniesandsparrowsdotorg.wordpress.com/2020/03/16/how-to-survive-social-isolation-in-5-easy-steps/>

If you would like to contact us for any reason, even if it is just to have someone to talk to, you can reach us at jasminechandra@gmail.com and tjchandra@gmail.com.

All the best, and may the real presence of Christ be with you, no matter how isolated you may be.

Terence and Jasmine Chandra

