

Opinion: A Modest Proposal: Revelation

“... is a power incessantly ready for action, and is immeasurably superior to man's feeble efforts, as the works of Nature are to those of Art” (prophet A)

Is there order to this complex thing we call nature?

According to the above author, there is indeed a *power* greater than man is. What is this special power? Religions have fought about it for centuries. Although each religious ‘prophet’ sent by the power, brought a message of peace, all ‘religion’ seems to be is a series of schisms and fighting. “My idea of god is better than your idea of god”. It sounds like playground banter to me, “...my dad is better than your dad!”

“In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed” (prophet B). I have a modest proposal: what if we roll the clock

back to one power, creator, god, force, order or whatever you wish to call it.

Abraham, acknowledged by most modern religions, thought of only one God, who was all-seeing, all-knowing etc. Some of our Native Canadians believe there is one creator who simply, “is the oldest ancestor” and knows the plan. That is a good start!

The name is not important; creator, god, or the force - what is important and easy to see is nature - the nature we are and the nature we live in. Many have noted that nature can be cruel and at the same time wondrous. I think that the order of this earth is amazingly brilliant. For that reason, I do not believe that something or someone so brilliant could be mean, spiteful and inflexible - that sounds too human. Secondly, I do not believe that ‘God’ is so insecure that he/she/it requires people to kneel, bow and humble themselves to be in good graces - that sounds too human.

In my modest proposal, the creator that I would like to believe in would be like the best parent imaginable who had many different children. There are many types of parents, teachers, and spiritual leaders. Two parenting styles stand out to me and apply here. The authoritarian parent who is rigid, domineering and punishing; there is no understanding, simply obedience and ‘bow before me’. This type of parent is often abusive in their demands for compliance and these methods sound very human to me. I would wish for the other type of parent; the kind of parent who is confident and secure in the plan, patient, and compassionate. This type of parent promotes learning and understanding instead of demanding deference.

The first thing a good parent does for their child is let them know they are there, i.e. give the child security. A good parent also teaches a child how to relate and get along with other humans. Finally, a good parent would encourage learning and independence. Because the creator has many children, variation in instruction for each child is

necessary. In my fantasy world, the creator would want to share and reveal the wonders of this world, and would teach us like a caring parent would.

The first step would be to let humans know that they are not alone and secondly, that there is some sort of order to what seems to be an overwhelming universe. It is not hard to understand that in a large family such as humans, there would be a lot of variation in intelligence, interests, and spiritualism between all the kids. Some may not be too bright and some may not be very clever, interests vary from arts to science and everything in between.

A good parent first gives the child security - letting the child know there was someone there for them. In my fantasy world, this is exactly what the creator did. The early prophets/teachers, Buddha, Christ, Allah to name only a few, were sent to tell humans almost the same thing, god, force, creator says, “Hey, I’m here! You are not alone”.

Additionally, “Here are some basic rules on how to get along with the other critters on earth.” Cool, now we can work together towards the creator’s master plan - whatever that may be.

Second, my fantasy creator would be so happy with the world, that he/she/it would want to share it intellectually..

After all, the main big deal with humans is our ability to think. Most parents want their children to be bright and inquisitive. My fantasy god would want everyone to use the gifts given to them, in order to understand the wonderful world around them. So, in my fantasy world, the creator/god sent a second wave of teachers: Galileo, DaVinci, Newton, Pasteur, Darwin and a host of others.

In my fantasy world, god is compassionate, kind and a good parent and teacher. The first wave of teachers revealed that we are not alone and there is some higher power at work. They also stress how important it is for humans to get along together. The second wave of teachers begins to reveal some of the inner workings of this fascinating world.

God/creator does not want us to fight about how to get peace, duh! He leaves it to us to learn about the wonders of the world. People do not have to openly declare their humility before god. God does not need it! In fact, being an atheist is no problem either. The creator loves all children. What you declare to other humans has no meaning, because an all-knowing creator can skip that part. An all-knowing creator sees you as you are, not what you profess to be. I hope that this is true because then that would mean I have become a little more spiritual lately after being touched by a brilliantly conceived and written book.

This book was written by prophet A and B above, Charles Darwin.

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ESN

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EDMONTON STREET NEWS

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The views presented in this publication are those of the writers.

Looking to 2010



New Years greetings from Edmonton Street News.

As the year 2009 draws to a close, I want to thank the people who supported Edmonton Street News and our vendors during the past year both financially and in so many other small ways. Special thanks to those who generously donated including the writers' group from MacDougal United Church, Vello Reili, Paul Kailek, as well as all of the people who purchased papers, gave out coffee cards, bought lunches, etc for vendors.

The more things change the more they are the same, at least when it comes to homelessness and poverty. January 23rd there is another memorial for those who died due to homelessness, and many of the people on the list are people I knew personally - some stayed over night, some I saw at the mission, or they sold Edmonton Street News. In the past six years, 15 vendors have died. As I remember them, I regret the time when I acted impatiently, or with anger over a situation, but I have no regrets about any of the good things I have done. Perhaps that says something about how we should live our lives - so that we can live with no regrets.

By Linda Dumont

Thanks from Edmonton Street News

When our managing editor's van was stolen in early December, we lost almost three quarters of the newspapers our vendors were counting on for the Christmas season. Thankfully, an emergency fund drive caught the attention of three donors whose goodwill ensured our vendors were not left in the lurch.

Edmonton Street News vendors buy and sell the publication for some extra pocket money. For others, our employment program is a living.

A larger organization could have absorbed this loss, but not Edmonton Street News. Our mission and financial model don't have, as they say, a lot of wiggle room. Volunteers publish a paper, vendors buy it at just above cost and those dollars are needed to start the cycle over.

When that van was stolen, we had no money in the coffers to pay the \$589 needed to reprint the lost papers.

That's why losing these papers was not some small operational hiccup, but a problem that potentially could have left our vendors not so much high and dry, as outside in the cold.

But thanks to an impromptu fundraiser that started online and then picked up by some local media, Edmonton Street News was able to go back to our printer to request another run.

One of our board members alerted his social media network about the incident. One contact immediately offered \$100, then tripled that number, and, in a final fit of goodwill, threw another \$200 on the pile to ensure the need was met.

Local radio station iNews880 interviewed our managing editor, Linda Dumont, and the incident was also picked up by Global TV.

By the end of the week, it was like nothing had even happened. Our vendors had papers to buy and they were hitting the streets pedaling the December issue of Edmonton Street News.

As chair of Edmonton Street News, I want to thank everyone who helped us out during this incident: our volunteers, the media, and most importantly, Focus Communications, Todd and Carrie Carriere, and Diana Grouard, the donors who heard our story and decided it mattered.

Also, at this time I want to say thank you to those who helped with the Edmonton Street News Christmas dinner on December 11 at St. Faith's United Church. Unfortunately, due to the intense cold, only a dozen vendors and writers attended.

Thank you to the Edmonton Food Bank, Sharol Penner, and Allan Sheppard who donated food for the dinner, to Maria, who brought gifts, and to St. Faith's for donating their kitchen and dining room.

And thank you to those who helped prepare and serve food, set up and clean up.



Thank you.

By Allan Sheppard

Is it the housing or the thinking that is functionally obsolete?

It's not the goal that bothers me. It's not the concept. And it's not the good intentions of the people involved. It's the approach that I worry about.

The goal is to give more low-income Edmontonians opportunities to buy decent homes. The concept is to attract or persuade private-sector developers to build enough such homes. The good intentions include helping to build or rebuild decent, livable communities in our city. What's not to like about that?

The best answer to that question is another: How are we going to do those wonderful things?

Randy Ferguson has an answer, but it worries me. Ferguson was the keynote speaker at a National Housing Day Breakfast, held at the Westin Hotel on Friday, November 20, last year. He has the credentials to speak on private housing initiatives as matters of public policy. He is a mover and shaker in Edmonton, chief operating officer of Procura Real Estate Services Ltd. and board chair of the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation. He seems public spirited. He wants to make money in Edmonton's housing market, and

he wants his housing colleagues and competitors to make money, too. To be fair, I believe he also wants to make Edmonton a better place for all of us to live by making it a better place to live for the neediest among us. There's self-interest in that, but self-interest can be creative. It does not have to be destructive.

Yet Ferguson's proposal has destruction at its core. He wants to tear down what he calls "functionally obsolete" housing and replace it with "infill housing" built using construction techniques that keep costs and purchase prices down.

The problem with that is this: We've already tried that.

Well to be fair, we only tried the tearing-down part. In the 1990s, then mayor Jan Reimer spearheaded a drive to rid the inner city of sub-standard housing. Today we can see some results of that initiative in the Boyle Street area between 97th and 95th Streets and Jasper Avenue and 104th Street: acres of empty ground waiting ... waiting ... (don't hold your breath) ... waiting for redevelopment. The 1990s were the days when Jean Chrétien's

(Liberal) federal government pulled its money out of housing and Ralph Klein's (Progressive Conservative) provincial government declined to take up the slack. So the building up part never happened.

The city can't provide replacement housing. Only the higher levels of government have the resources and authority to do that. And meanwhile, the private sector always seems to have more profitable things to do with its time and money.

There's nothing wrong with getting rid of sub-standard (or, if you prefer, functionally obsolete) housing. It's the right thing to do—but only if we are willing and able to provide replacement housing as we destroy the old stuff; otherwise where will the people we displace live? We see answers to that question on our streets every day downtown and in areas like Old Strathcona, Alberta Avenue, Beverley, and Jasper Place.

Of course the homeless people we see on the streets would never qualify for the promised new housing, call it affordable or attainable, as you prefer. That housing is aimed at people who are not at

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Arts are alive and well in the urban core

Everyone has a creative part to their being. And everyone is able to make more sense of what life is all about by creative activity but the time and resources for creative activity can be harder to find when a person does not have very much money. Joining a club or taking a course might be out of the question. Even buying the supplies for many creative activities can be a challenge.

But in Edmonton there are good opportunities for people to explore their creative side. Edmonton Street News welcomes art and writing from people to ensure a wider range of voices and views can be shared. Galleries such as Global Gallery and Nina Haggerty Gallery provide places for the art of those not usually displayed in mainstream locations to be viewed.

Michael Hoyt has been active over the past year working with a group of refugee men in creative expression. He coordinated an initiative that gave men living at Trinity Manor and The Haven, two apartments operated by Mennonite Centre for Newcomers to provide affordable supported housing for refugees coming from difficult backgrounds, the chance to explore both their new world of Canada and the meaning of their lives using a camera.

“The men had left behind their homelands and all that these contained: family, friends, language, indigenous culture, as well as war, poverty, and injustice. They found themselves, on arrival in Canada, betwixt and between old and new lives. They had separated from their former communities but not yet integrated into new ones,” Hoyt explains.

Hoyt believes that being able to take a camera and create images of themselves and their understanding of their worlds provides a way for them to express their common belief in humanity. “We all seek freedom and opportunity, through and for our communities. But often newcomers are only seen as different from the rest of us. The photography club provided a chance to share these common visions.”



Men gather around the computer viewing photos. From left, Bekele (Ethiopia), Shibiti, Mohammed (Afghanistan), Abdulakee (Sierra Leone) and Greg (Philippines).

ing a place where a group of us can get together to paint is that we learn from each other. I get good suggestions or ideas from the comments of others,” she offers.

Hoyt sees a similar value in the men’s photo group. “They came together most Sundays to share pictures of a family birthday, a graduation, a day at work, or sights around the neighborhood. It created opportunities to make friends, share about their lives, and to learn about their new community. The digital camera provided a comfortable way to come together and satisfy the longing to see themselves in process as they joined into their new Canadian community,” he says.

Johann, another Mustard Seed regular, says he believes art can be used for healing the world. “Artists are planting hope,” he affirms. This healing of the world begins with the individual. Johann explains he began painting nothing but exploding volcanoes but has moved on to more variety as he has used painting to connect with his own memories and understand himself better.

Art offers not only a place for personal development and new relationships, Johann also explains he is building his “artistic self-esteem” as his skills improve and he experiments with different media. “I aim to make things alive when I paint.”

The value of a time to make and share art, both for supporting creativity and leading to friendships, is clearly demonstrated in Johann’s comment “It’s terrible when 10 p.m. arrives and we have to stop.”

Coming together around art also bridges generations. Both at Trinity Manor and Mustard Seed youth and older people work together. The Mustard Seed group includes a woman of 92 years and children in elementary school. Volunteers oversee the Mustard Seed group and invite professional artists to come along as special guests some weeks. People make choices about how to use their time. Some want lessons and instruction, while others appreciate being able to experiment on their own.

The Mustard Seed group recently selected some examples of their favourite work to produce sets of note cards now being sold by Mustard Seed to raise funds for its work. Both the Mustard Seed and Trinity Manor groups have also had art shows of their work in recent months. People interested in purchasing work by artists in these groups can contact Delmy Garcia-Hoyt at Trinity Manor (dgarci-hoyt@emcn.ab.ca) or Caitlin Beaton at Mustard Seed (Caitlin@mustard.ab.ca).



Left: An example of one of the art cards being sold by The Mustard Seed.



Photo by Vdkan Sankaya

Canoeing on Lake Wabamum

A few blocks away, a diverse group of artists gathers each Thursday evening at Mustard Seed to make art in many media— painting, drawing, and sculpture. Some of the regulars there are also poets. “I don’t like to stick to just one thing,” says Will Barbiche. He has a thick folio of poetry as well as cartoons, portraits, and sculpture in foam and balsa wood.

Shirley Bourassa, another of those who gather most weeks, is working on a series of paintings to create a record of all the places she has lived over the years. She sees these homes each telling a bit of her own story and as she works on a painting it opens her memory to think about the people who were part of the neighborhoods where she lived. She prefers to paint in oil but finds it a challenge, so often uses acrylic. “One of the best things about hav-

Housing - Continued from Page 2

risk of homelessness but cannot find housing they can afford to buy or rent in current markets: students, seniors, immigrants, single parents, among others.

But we don’t have to tear down any more housing to get land for that. Some land is still available in the Boyle Street area and much more exists on unused school properties in many parts of the city.

Soon after Mayor Mandel took office for his first

term, he announced a proposal to make land occupied by abandoned schools available for infill development. To my knowledge, not a single developer has come forward with a project on any of those properties.

There are reasons why those (functionally obsolete) school properties were not snapped up. There are reasons why Boyle Street has not been rebuilt, in spite of the city’s best efforts. There are reasons why any functionally obsolete housing torn down

under Randy Ferguson’s proposal will not be easily replaced by housing that low-income families can afford and that people of goodwill agree we need.

Maybe we need to talk about those reasons. More to come.

By Allan Sheppard

Bissell Centre: 100 years of community service

Jessica Smith-Perry Bissell Centre will be a hundred years old next year. We started in 1910 under a different name as a furniture depot for Ukrainian immigrants, primarily. Bissell has evolved since then. During the depression, the Bissell Centre was an overnight shelter. Today we have 18 different services for adults and families with small children that are struggling with poverty or who have issues like fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD).

There are two groups that we don't serve: teens and seniors. We never send anyone away from our drop-in because of age, but we refer teens and seniors to other programs that can better support them.

We're not an overnight shelter anymore. We are only open weekdays, during the day. We're not a soup kitchen with three meals a day. Our drop-in provides sandwiches in the morning and bag lunches for people who are going out on jobs through our Employment Services. We serve one meal a day and two large snacks for kids in our early intervention program. There is a twice-weekly women's hot lunch program. But that's all the food that we offer. That's the extent of our food program.

Edmonton Street News Where do you get your food?

Peggy Hodge Mostly from the Food Bank, plus donations from companies and organizations.

JS-P We are an outreach ministry of the United Church. They are a huge partner. They provide in-kind donations (food, clothing, and tangibles), and they provide a set amount of funding every year. A lot of individuals and families who attend the United Churches are big supporters, as well. But the Bissell Centre is autonomous. It is a registered charity.

It was started by the Methodist Church, but in 1925 the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Congregational Church got together to form the United Church.

ESN Does religion play a role here?

JS-P We are non-denominational and non-religious. We support the spiritual needs of our community, but that certainly doesn't limit us to Christianity. There is an office for the Inner City Pastoral Ministry in our building. We also have an Aboriginal elder on staff.

PH The Inner City Pastoral Ministry (ICPM) holds services here every Sunday.

JS-P For the Sunday service, the only thing Bissell does is open its doors. Because ICPM has an office here, and because we have a great relationship with them, they have keys to the building.

ESN Who else gives you money, besides the United Church?

JS-P The United Way is a huge supporter. They gave us over \$340,000 this year. As well, there are hundreds of businesses that interact with the United Way, and their employees donate through their payroll to the Bissell Centre and other organizations. We are also supported by the municipal and provincial governments.

PH Our Employment Services program is funded by Alberta Employment and Immigration. FASD services are also funded by the province and Cross Ministry.

JS-P Part of our children's program is, too. We also get some funding from the city for our children's programs and a small amount for our drop-

in.

PH Edmonton Community Foundation also helps. We've applied for Housing First money through Homeward Trust. But in the last few years, Edmonton Community Foundation has helped us with housing.

JS-P We also get support from families, individuals, and corporations.

ESN How many people do you serve?

JS-P In 2008 we provided services for more than



"We'll support somebody as long as they need it. We have people who come to the drop-in every single day. They started as teenagers and now they're in their forties. We'll never ask them to leave. They have relationships with our front-line workers. In the FASD program, a lot of those relationships are two- three-year commitments, because routines are so important for people with FASD."

—Jessica Smith-Perry.

14,000 people. That's not all homeless individuals. Some of them only came one or two times, just needing some help to get back on their feet after losing a job. It includes families, and most of them are in homes.

PH A lot of that 14,000 is are people who come to our drop-in. We have a limit now on the number of people in the drop-in at one time. We became very concerned about the safety of the participants, the safety of the staff last year. In the morning, between 7 and 9 or 9:30, Employment Services operates out of the drop-in, and we let 200-250 people in to get them out the door to a job. But after that, we limit the numbers to 85. At first it was really hard for the participants. It was really hard for the staff, because it's horrible to see people lined up on the sidewalk in cold weather. But people feel much safer now. With 85 people at a time, we might have over 250, 300 different people in a day rotate through. Some people will come in the morning, have a shower, do their laundry and stay all day. Others will come in to warm up, have a coffee, put their name in for employment services and be gone in an hour or two.

ESN Tell me about some other programs.

PH In FASD services we have people that work with pregnant women that are at risk of having children with FASD. They work with small children. They work with adults with FASD and help them cope with life and day-to-day living—employment, housing, court.

FASD workers have a small case load, because FASD is so intensive. Each advocate only has a

case load of 10 to 12. FASD is not something that you can work on intensively for a week or two and send someone on their way. It's lifelong. Workers do try to get them off a caseload after a year or two, but to give them the skills they need is difficult.

We have a related program called Corrections to Community (CTC) with Fort Saskatchewan jail. In our prison population, a huge proportion have FASD. We have an advocate that goes part-time to the prison, part-time here, working with people as they move toward release and then helping them once they get into the community.

ESN How many case workers do you have?

PH When we are fully staffed, we have five case workers, and we also have three half-time community educators. They go out to different agencies, to the junior highs, teachers' workshops, with hundreds of presentations about fetal alcohol: how to prevent it, what the causes are.

Our Employment Services program is a casual labour exchange where people register for work with employers who need workers for a few hours, a day, a couple of days. They line up at 7 o'clock in the morning. We do a bingo draw-ball thing to make it as fair as possible for who gets picked for jobs, select community members for work each day. We make sure they have the skills the employer needs and send them out on their jobs.

We place thousands of people each year. Some days are really slow. We might just get 10 or 12 people out for a day's work. Other days we might get 70 to 100, depending on the weather, depending on the economy. It's different now than it was a couple of years ago, with the boom. October was a good month, though. We placed a lot of people.

The employment program helps people with their resume, helps them with their interviewing. We put a lot of people through safety tickets programs—fork lift training, safety first, CPS—because that also helps them get employment.

Another employment program, Strengthening Our Spirit started out with an Aboriginal base, but we don't select just Aboriginal people. A lot of immigrants from Africa also are involved. That program lasts several weeks, and it's very intensive. It has a great success rate.

Moving Up is another pre-employment training program, which works on employability as well as issuing safety tickets, is a new women's program. Our newest employment is pre-employment training specifically for women. We weren't serving as many women as men, so we got some funding from Alberta Employment and Immigration for a program geared to women. We help with some childcare while they're doing the course. It's pre-employment training to help them. All of these programs work with the community members to get them back into the workforce, and get regular, long-lasting employment.

JS-P We do computer skills, as well. We have a small lab upstairs. And we do fax-and-file services for people looking for a job applying for jobs.

ESN Do you have long-term relationships with people? I assume that you want to turn people over and get them off the street fairly quickly.

PH With Employment Services, some of the people have been around for years. Other people will just be once or twice, a week or two, a month. They'll get enough money to go where they need to go, they'll get a place to live, or they'll get full-

time employment. Other people we've seen for years. Some of them may have some mental health issues or addictions problems. When they're doing well, they'll come in and work to supplement their income.

JS-P We'll support somebody as long as they need it. We have people who come to the drop-in every single day. They started as teenagers and now they're in their forties. We'll never ask them to leave. They have relationships with our front-line workers. In the FASD program, a lot of those relationships are two- three-year commitments, because routines are so important for people with FASD.

The person who sits at the front desk of our child-care program, Tina Fatima, has been here 23 years. You can call this good or bad. Some think it's sad, some think it's amazing, it doesn't really matter, but she's now seeing second- and third-generation children coming through child care. She's had relationships with all those families.

It's not a matter of Bissell Centre bringing someone in and then shooing them out the door as fast as possible. That's not what we're about. It's building relationships and providing the services for people who need them, and that's different for everyone. When someone comes to Bissell only needing help once or twice, that's great. But they're only done when their ready to be done.

PH We've also got Central Essential Community Support Services. That involves the drop-in where we have many things: there are showers, there are washrooms, there's laundry, there's coffee. We have different activities: beadwork, bingo, movies, that kind of stuff. We hope to get more programs happening in the drop-in, because meaningful activity leads to progress and better things. But that depends on funding

We also have two adult support workers who help people get their Alberta Health card, their ID, help them with referrals. It's not case management, but we try to do some quick things to help them get what they need.

ESN What would you do, if you got some Housing First money?

PH We'll have a team of five or six staff. A couple that we have now would move into that program, but we would be able to hire more. We've submitted a schedule Schedule A to Homeward Trust and the provincial government to place between 75 and 100 people within the next year. We'll get them into the apartments. We'll get them set up. We'll work with the landlord. And then we'll do follow-up support throughout the year. The big goal is to keep people in the housing and get them integrated into the community. Housing First doesn't put everybody in the inner city. They want to get people into many different buildings throughout the city. Then follow-up support workers would do some intensive case management: take them to the Food Bank in that area, get them a library card, get them to their rec centre, help make sure their rent gets paid on a monthly basis, help with issues that come up—facilitate the process of integrating into the community and feeling comfortable there. We know it's cheaper to assist people to stay housed than it is to have them homeless, accessing emergency rooms, ending up in jail, that kind of stuff.

ESN Scattering people can leave them isolated.

PH That's why you've got to have the follow-up support. The target is to graduate people off the program at the end of a year. Some are going to say in the last few months, "I don't need you any more, goodbye." But they sign contracts that they will allow the follow-up. And other people, if the need to be supported a bit longer, the hope is that

they will be extended. But the follow-up support worker might not see them on a weekly basis, then. They might check in every few weeks, just to make sure things are going well.

ESN If you take someone on and make a commitment to support them at a certain level, you want to be confident funding is going to be there if they need an extension.

PH I guess you have to have some faith that the ten-year plan will go to the end and that the government will support it.

JS-P Some of our current funding comes over three years.

PH Yes. FASD services, Employment Services, and some of the FCSS (Family and Community Support Services) money from the province is for three years. United Way funding tends to be for three years. We're hoping the Housing First money will be the same.

The count for homelessness is over 3,000, and right now they have placed just shy of 400 people. We've still got a lot of people to go.

ESN The economy is in worse shape than it was a year or two ago. Do you still have hope?

PH I have lots of hope. And I see hope in the community. We go to meetings with several agencies that are doing Housing First. They admit there are challenges, but also they're amazed by the successes. The province has targets: 85 per cent need to stay housed and there has to be a reduction in the use of emergency services and police services.



"I used to be a high-school teacher. Then I married a military man, and we moved a lot. I ended up working in several different non-profits over the years. It's where I belong. I just feel like I want to go to work and make a difference every day. And Bissell Centre is the best place to do that. Some days you go home thinking about all the things you wish you could have done, but it's very seldom that you go home and feel like you did nothing. You do make a difference every day, you just wish you could do more."

Peggy Hodge

That's all being tracked. I think they're going to see such positive results that it will be possible to keep doing it.

ESN At the same time there is a group of people who are not, for a variety of reasons, able to live independently under Housing First.

PH They need the supportive housing.

ESN Is Housing First going to free up resources for that?

PH That is the hope of the ten-year plan, that there

will be more supportive housing. Some people don't fit the criteria for Housing First and the Homeless to Homes program. They will need more supportive housing. That has to happen, too. But we're just scratching the surface of the people that could be independently housed.

ESN If I were to make either or both of you queen for a day, and gave you an opportunity to make a decision that would improve things for the people you serve, what would you do?

JS-P I'm a marketing person. But I'll give a front-line answer, because I feel strongly about it. If I had all the money in the world, I would throw most of it toward Housing First. I believe in the program. In other Canadian cities and a variety of U.S. Cities, they've just had a great success rate.

We're moving into a weekend with really extreme temperatures—I don't know what I would do, because we're not a night shelter, and I don't think that's part of Bissell's mission—but I'd want to do something for people that have nowhere to go, especially people who are banned from most places. They are still human beings. We still need to provide some—

PH Dignity and chances: a second, third, fourth, thousandth chance. You can't give up on people. We struggle with that every day. We open at 7 o'clock, but we close our doors at three. On a really cold day, between three and whatever time they can access other services, people don't have a warm place to go. But the place that gets the least funding here is our drop-in. We don't get government funding for that.

We've applied for more money. We don't want to get into the nights, and the beds, and everything, but to be open at 6 o'clock in the morning and stay open to 8 o'clock or 9 o'clock at night, so that there's time for people to be warm before they go to the shelters or wherever else they're going. Weekends, too. And to have drop-ins in every quadrant of the city. I don't think we need hundreds in the inner city, we need them all over the city.

ESN With funding you could have more drop-in time here or in other locations.

PH Bissell could, or other agencies could. Or churches. It comes down to staffing. Some of our programs are very well funded. Employment Services: great funding. FASD Services: great funding. Things like the drop-in: not as much. So it's difficult for us to have more staff, more programs, more co-ordination. To offer some art classes, some yoga classes. To do all kinds of amazing activities in there.

That would be my choice. Housing First, and extended drop-in.

ESN Talk a bit about why you're at Bissell. I assume that you could be doing other things that might have a little more glamour or prestige or financially rewarding.

PH I used to be a high-school teacher. Then I married a military man, and we moved a lot. I ended up working in several different non-profits over the years. It's where I belong. I just feel like I want to go to work and make a difference every day. And Bissell Centre is the best place to do that. Some days you go home thinking about all the things you wish you could have done, but it's very seldom that you go home and feel like you did nothing. You do make a difference every day, you just wish you could do more.

ESN Such as?

PH I think getting away from just making people nests to actually trying to - **continued on page 6**

Bissell Centre - continued from page five

get them out of it. That's been a big shift for Bissell—finding ways to get people out of poverty and out of homelessness. So Housing First is a huge hope. It's not perfect, but it's such an improvement on the thoughts of the past and the way things have been done. To get people into homes to lessen that line-up: it will make a difference, but it takes time. For anybody that works in non-profits, that's a daily struggle. But you don't quit. You keep trying to move forward. If it's small steps some days and bigger steps other



Best Wishes for the Holiday Season

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PETER GOLDRING
Member of Parliament
Edmonton East

CANADA-UKRAINE FREE TRADE TALKS A GOOD IDEA

For some time I have been calling for greater recognition by the Government of Canada of the mutual opportunities involved in closer economic ties with Ukraine, well placed as the economic and political hub of Eastern Europe, to accompany the already strong cultural and diplomatic ties between our countries.

I am pleased that our Government has recognized the importance of Ukraine and the Ukrainian-Canadian community. The Honourable Stockwell Day, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, visited Ukraine in September and announced the launch of talks between Canada and Ukraine on a free trade agreement (FTA).

"Our government is once again taking action to open doors for Canadian business in new markets," said Minister Day. "Canadian companies are steadily building a deep business presence here in areas like aerospace, communications technologies and in agriculture. Free trade negotiations could help to extend our deepening partnership. We know the support is there—on both sides."

At subsequent meetings Canada and Ukraine will discuss a range of trade and investment issues to facilitate economic relations and fight protectionism.

Ukraine is a very influential Eastern European nation, the largest country in Europe, is home to a highly educated population of 46 million, has a diversified industrial base and substantial natural resources. Canadian merchandise exports to Ukraine have increased greatly in recent years, totalling \$229.7 million in 2008, with agricultural and aerospace machinery topping the list.

An FTA with Ukraine could further open markets for Canadian exports ranging from agricultural and seafood products to machinery and pharmaceuticals. It could also help to address non-tariff barriers.

Free trade agreements also help to strengthen the Canadian economy, to create new jobs and to lower prices for Canadian consumers.

To me, concluding a free trade agreement with Ukraine seems like a win-win for both sides.

What do you think?

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days, but that's what we have to do. When I first started working here, I was concerned that it would be depressing. It's not. You see so much positive happening that it's not depressing on a daily basis.

By Allan Sheppard

The power of forgiving is great

The therapeutic power of forgiveness is great. The destructive power of unforgiveness can be devastating. I have a friend who lost access to his children because of an outbreak of rage in public that scared his children and others in his family as well as bystanders. Because of this his visits had to be supervised.

Unfortunately my friend refused to take full responsibility for his outbreaks of anger at that incident and several other times. Instead he blames others for his problems. Even if others are partly or wholly responsible for our problems, Joseph's reply in the Bible to his brothers is an example of true forgiveness. After being sold as a slave by his brothers and spending time unjustly in jail, he said to his brothers, who feared his wrath, "As for you, you thought evil against me but God meant it for good to bring about that many people

Bissell Centre is a registered charity that accepts cash and in-kind donations and offers many opportunities for volunteers to use or learn a variety of skills. Call the main switchboard at 780 423-2285, Ext 110 or visit their web site at bissellcentre.org.

should be kept alive as they are this day." (Genesis 50:20)

I feel compassion for my friend. His rage and unforgiveness landed him in jail and a mental health facility. I pray that he soon sees himself as God does, forgives those whom he believes wronged him and that he radiates God's peace, love and joy.

He has been an example to me in healthy living, taking vitamins and helping many people, especially poor ones. I value his friendship.

Not forgiving has serious consequences not only health wise but also spiritually. In the Lord's prayer we ask God to forgive us as we forgive others, and Jesus plainly says in Matthew 6:15 that he will not forgive us if we don't forgive others.

By Pedro Schultz

Letter to the editor:

I am writing in response to Jim Gurnett's article on Poverty in Alberta.

Many homeless people are also employed, but lack resources for security deposits, utility deposits and rent. There is a need for Low Income Credit Unions, whereby the working poor and those on small pensions can borrow money of up to \$10,000 at the .25% Bank of Canada Prime rate.

Banks do not want to write small loans (under \$10,000) so the poor with any credit risk have to go to Cash Canada, Money Mart etc. There is a critical need for the poor to access loans to get into housing with interest rates as cheap as the government charges the chartered banks, which is 1/4 of 1%. These low income banks should also supply credit counseling, referral to trustees for people who can not or need help to handle financial issues. We need consumer, tenant, and legal aid advocacy attached to these low income credit unions. There should be at least 15% of the shelter market dedicated to non-profit shelter such as housing co-ops, whereby your shelter costs are secured at 35% of net income. Shelter costs should also include essential utilities (heat, electricity, and water sewage and garbage pick up). The housing co-ops should have internet access and a central location where members can access the internet. The shelter costs being secured would also mean if a tenant leaves the co-op they get their share refunded along with competitive interest if the premises are left with no major damage. The tenant has the security of housing as long as he or she follows reasonable rules and treats the property and neighbours with respect. They can not speculate on the increase in property costs, which leaves resources with the co-op to continue to offer fixed cost housing. The tenant has all the rights of a property owner except the right to speculate on the value of their home.

This housing option is ideal for people who want a safe, secure house and do not wish to tie all available disposable income into real estate costs. Many services like child care, car pooling, community kitchens, crafts, garden plots, landscaping, volunteered skills (income tax preparation, carpentry, etc) can be shared and exchanged by the co-op members. These are not low income ghettos, instead they are communities with secure safe housing and a chance for a community to grow with positive caring values. This will save costs in policing and health care, as people not stigmatized by crushing poverty are healthier, happier, and less inclined to see society as an enemy, but rather as a friend where their talents mean something and basic needs are met in a caring dignified fashion. In my more than 15 years of child welfare work I never had to do a child welfare investigation on families residing in a Housing Co-op in Edmonton.

I also feel social assistance and volunteer agencies should not be responsible for poverty solutions. Enact the two steps above and you destroy the need for a lot of public assistance. Since welfare is a provincial responsibility, which can be delegated to municipalities in some instances, there should be a provincial guaranteed annual income to guarantee all citizens and legal residents (refugee status, landed immigrants) income at LICO (Low Income Cut Off) levels for the community in which they reside. When I left government service in 2004 the province of Alberta spent \$750,000,000 on all income support programs per year. You could take \$150,000,000 out of this for administration and health care costs. This means \$600,000,000 was a cash benefit to over 100,000 Albertans on any given month needing help with dire problems. That is \$6000/year per capita for every destitute Albertan who qualified for help. The unmet needs spill into health care, policing, court, education and institutional care budgets.

By Bob Borreson, Bon Accord

Opinion: The Power of Words

We live in an ocean of words where they serve to inspire us and encourage us or they serve to discourage us and keep us in the pool of "dark" despair". While a community should have trust in their prime minister and his cabinet, this trust evaporates just as fast, when our community continues to be left with a basket full of promises from our government that seem to evaporate as quickly as they were spoken. But when our Premier made a commitment to give himself and his cabinet a 34% wage increase, then mountains were moved and resources were found to fulfill this important commitment.

It is a fact that Canada is not living up to their obligations under the Human Rights Treaty. The signs of the elimination of discrimination against women and children has disappeared into the sunset. Job opportunities for people with disabilities have disappeared in the Easter egg hunt. Protection for people with mental illness and homeless people have disappeared into the night and at the end of the road of despair what is left are those false promises lingering in the air with no action on sight.

The deficiencies are not in the people that need help or in their clear expectations; the deficiencies are in our government that keeps people in an oppressing, denigrating state of poverty where exclusion, violence and social inequity thrives. This is a clear representation of "Social Injustice".

Morally we cannot pretend this is not happening as humanitarian groups, who are the angels of our society, are striving to fulfill the obligations of our government, ensuring that people in distress are being cared for. To me this is the true cornerstone of empathy for human beings.

I am honoured to live in a community based on empathy for one another. Now we just need the government to step out and realize that while the needs of the cabinet have been fulfilled plentifully, on the other side of the spectrum there is a basket full of empty promises.

I challenge our prime minister and his exemplary cabinet to move the same mountains to develop the empathy necessary and to come through with the resources necessary to put actions in motion; the kind of actions that will make a difference in the lives of people in need.

By Maria B.

Mama's Roses

Chapter 17.1 - Rapes
By Sharon Spencer

My only way of dealing with all the pain and rejection in my life was to pretend it didn't exist. I would push it down and forget about it to make it go away because I had no coping skills. But as we all know that stuff just doesn't go away. It just festers and grows silently like a cancer and when you least expect, it breaks out with all of hell's fury. You'll be driven by demons of compulsion and dysfunction making you do the craziest things and you won't know why. At the time it happened, the rapes and rejection didn't extract a price my your soul, and I felt no pain. Well let me tell you something - pay back is a bitch.

A huge door had sprung open in my life and I didn't have the power to shut it. After being at the hospital for almost three years I became sick. Sick of mind with a weariness of soul accompanied by health problems so I could no longer work. I had lost a lot of weight. My landlady was very concerned about me. They called and called for me to come back to the hospital and she would say, "No she's sick and not coming back". She then gently told me it was time to go home. How could I tell her there was no home? My parents had to be very gracious when they were greeted at the door by my landlady, all my belongings, and me, for they could never let her know I was a total outcast. In her presence they greeted me with love and concern. Ah - safe for a while. How long I didn't know.

One of my best friends was a girl named Gloria and we loved to dance. There were community dances everywhere and we knew where the best ones were. There usually was a small problem with transportation so we would hitchhike together. One night we decided to go to a dance in Halifax. We had no problem getting a ride. We drank and danced the night away; At the end of the evening she came and told me the man of her dreams wanted to go home with her.

There I was at about two in the morning, a little drunk and stranded a long way from home on a dark street wondering what I could do next. I left Barrington Street and started walking north. Everything was so hushed and dark and the misty fog of the harbor sent a chill up my spine like someone had just walked over my grave. Somewhere off in a distance a foghorn blew such a mournful sound. It should have been a warning bell saying. 'Be careful little girl. You're in for a big surprise and it's not going to be good.' Sinister spirits were afoot that night lurking in the shadows seeing what mischief or havoc would amuse them for the evening.

A large car was pulled over very close to the curb and a black man stood outside with the back door opened right in my path. As I started to move around him strong arms reached out, lifted me off the ground and threw me into the back seat. There were two other men in the back seat and two in front. They brutally held me down and covered my mouth forcefully with rough hands. Oh my Lord what was going on? I couldn't breathe.

Apprehension and panic flooded my mind as I was unable to make sense of all this. It all happened so quickly that it was like a bad dream. Through the terror I heard them discussing me as if I was not there, as if I was invisible. The car speeded up as they made their plans on where to take me. Although I couldn't see very well I knew it was getting darker and darker with fewer and fewer streetlights until soon there were none. The place where we stopped was very dark and smelled of strong, salty air.

Was this the way I was going to die? Was it tonight? One man remained in the back and held my head while the others got quickly out of the car leaving the other back door open. Violent hands yanked at my dress pulling it up. My panties were brutally torn off. As the first of four brutally tore into me, I screamed until suddenly my breath was cut off by the huge hand that held me. Again and again I tried to cry out to God but my breath was cut off. Soon I got it -shut up and you breathe; scream you don't - so I lay there in silence as they all had a piece of my soul. When it became time for the man who held my

head he declined. Now I was sitting up in the car and a greasy, slimy voice spoke out of the darkness, "We're going to take you somewhere real nice baby."

I have no memory how I got out of the car but I did or why they didn't chase me. But I was like a crazed animal with a few seconds to run from the trap to freedom. Quickly I took in my surroundings. I was on a dead-end road where they were building a new bridge. Vaguely I heard the sound of the motor of an idling car above me on the man-made hill .If only I could get to the top of that hill someone would help me. My thin dancing shoes were not much help. I kept slipping, trying to get a grip. Panic drove me onwards as I dreaded to look backwards in case my assailants would recover me and pull me back into that nightmare.

The dark hill was made of shale that had a mind of its own. It dug and tore at my hands and knees. Terror drove me up the hill that night as I left behind small sacrifices of skin and clothing. Why did they let me go? Why didn't they follow me? I'll never know. Possibly God heard me that night. When I got to the top of the hill there was no car - only a drain running.

There I was at the top of another dead end street just like the one I'd left. My mind was frazzled. What do I do? Where do I go? My clothes were ripped and torn, the heels were broken off my shoes. What could I do?

. Suddenly I saw car lights. Were they coming to get me again? 'Oh God no.' I cried out, 'Not again.' My tears spilled over my torn face, but it was a police car that for some reason was patrolling the area. I waved and yelled frantically, afraid he wouldn't stop.

The police officer took one look at me and helped me into the back seat. Then the horror of the whole situation came crashing down on me and I screamed. He took me to the hospital where I was interviewed by police to no avail, because the next day I could have sat down and had tea and crumpets with the rapists. I couldn't even remember what they looked like!



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Memorial for Homeless Persons

January 23, 2010

3p.m. to 4 p.m.

Boyle Street Community Services

10116-105 Avenue

Everyone Welcome

Round Dance to follow

For information call 780 424-8336

Len Martial - his family shares sobriety



Above: This is the co-op from across the street. It is a reminder that I once crossed those streets to seek help from my friends at the co-op (Boyle Street Community Services). They opened their hearts to me because I was hurting on the inside, because the world I lived was all in black and white. I didn't care who I hurt along the way and then, all of a sudden, people went out of their way to help me, to give color to the world. I am forever grateful to the staff at the co-op.



My name Leonard and I am former street person who lived on the street for many years doing all kinds of drugs and drinking. I didn't care if I stole from my friends. All I needed was that first fix or drink. I did everything in my power to get what I wanted. Now I am still sober after 17 months and all my brothers are also on the right track. We all help each other when the time comes.

Being the youngest in family I was the one who had a hard time with this sobriety thing until my older brother Walter quit and after a while watching him I wanted to be there, too, so I went for it. It has shown me that when my family is involved I get much strength from their caring and love. All of us three brothers are sober now, one less than a year the other over four years. All it took was one brother to get the ball rolling.

I just wanted to let people, who are still struggling to stay sober, know you can find someone you believe in and ask how he or she stayed sober, then take some of their suggestions. You never know what will happen.

I am sober just for today because of the love my brothers and friends, also my sister who is like my mom. May the creator be with you and the red road get easier to travel.

My whole life has been a roller coaster but when it came down to living or dying I chose life. These pictures represent my outlook on life.

Photos and story by Lenoose Martial

Left: This picture of my brother is one I love the most because we have been so through much together and we help each other through our daily struggles. Most people say we are very close because we are always together and I love him with all my heart and being. I would do anything for



out on many things. I have seen people die because of the closed minds of those who think they have the power to say no all because of a simple sign posted on a fence or a door.

Right: The picture of the chief represents pride for my people and their strong ways of survival in the white world of deceit and dishonor. Being native myself I still am followed around the store by the security hoping they can catch me stealing stuff. When they do their chest puffs out and I really think they put a star beside their name saying, "Hey, we caught another red skin." That's only my opinion.



Church is about building relationships

In Hope Mission Community Church I found quality people. Quality people always have a positive influence on my life. My life is better because they are part of it. Positive relationships add value to my life.

How you add value to your life, your work, your family and your community, is your personal brand in progress? At the end of the day a brand is about identity. We all want to be a part of something. We all want to feel great about the choices we make.

Fantastic Hope Mission Community Church's branding happens when the church makes me feel magnificent about choosing and being a part of Hope Mission's products and services. My personal brand is not different. I take just a few steps each day, just a few simple moments of self-reflection and I am on my way to living my personal brand.

Yes, your personal brand exists and has existed, since your first interaction with others. But we need action to make things happen. First, take care of your health. Say "yes" to life everyday.

My favorite saying is "You never know". I'm grateful for my wonderful teacher's, pastors Allan and Norman who inspired me.

Remember that it is not about you, it is about discovering what you can do for others.

I set out to become a connector, and a contributor in the community and a brand ambassador for the Hope Mission. This is the connection model. I like to be not a leader in Church but to be a connector. I can describe it as "selfishness for the common good". I'm an artist in search of myself, and I struggled with my sense of self in the face of success and for all my megalomania I was also a survivor. There is an art to life that must be mastered. The reason I say art is that life is not a science in that there are no specific rules. Mental fitness, praying and meditation are art.

Here, I can turn my visions into reality. Here I

took one wonderful gift and here I finally found the right balance between my personal freedom and responsibility.

There is no such thing as freedom without responsibility - anything else is an illusion. Every decision we make and every action we take through our personal freedom has some impact on others.

I do believe that a balance can be found. It comes by asking a different question, not just, "what do I want", but "how will I serve". When you focus on serving a small group of people, greater levels of insight, skill and power move in your direction, miraculous things come through you and opportunity opens.

Hope Mission Community Church giving people a fresh start. (Hope comes from having a purpose) God says, "I will give you hope and a good future". Knowing your purpose simplifies your life; it defines what you do and what you don't do. Knowing your purpose focuses your life. You can be busy without a purpose, but what is the point?

The Bible says, "Yes, each of us will have to give a personal account to God. God wants us to pass this test, so he has given us the question in advance. Life is test, we must do exam. God expects to see results.

Only I can be me, and only you can be you. God made you to be yourself. Of course

we must learn from models.

Almost three years ago in Hope Mission Community Church I realized that "hope" was all I had. The pastors of this church saved my life. Their high-touch ministry opened the door of interest in becoming a Christian. Both of them, pastors Allen and Norman, demonstrate love to the crowd. They are likable.

How do you become likable? It is simple. Love people. When people know you, they respond to that love. Our thoughts are shaped by the people we associate with, by the books we read, by the words we speak and by our daily physical surroundings. One of the most powerful questions in all of the English language is: "Would you please help me?"

By Edin Viso

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