

Sharing Space: Using Your Church Building for Outreach

Giving Space: Considering Out of the Cold Ministry

Welcoming Space: Developing Relationships  
with Aboriginal People

Tori Smit & Gordon Haynes

Associate Secretaries

*Canadian Ministries/The Vine*

The Presbyterian Church in Canada

tsmit@presbyterian.ca, ghaynes@presbyterian.ca

1-800-619-7301


August 2011

## Sharing Space:

### Using Your Church Building for Outreach

The Rev. Matthew Ruttan, Teaching Elder

Don Hickey, Ruling Elder, Rental Liaison



We've all said it and done the actions: "Here is the church, and here is the steeple; open up the doors, and see all the people!" Well, at Westminster in Barrie we don't have a steeple; and actually, most of the people in our neighbourhood are not inside our doors! That in itself is cause to rethink how we use our space in an out-reaching way.

Our mission statement is "Serving Christ, Serving our Neighbours." One of the ways we can serve our neighbours is with an ethic of community hospitality. Continuing

the heritage of the synagogue (which means "house of gathering"), we envision our space to be a centre-point for the community. So how does it work?

EQUIPPING FOR . . . . Evangelism & Outreach

### **First, the space needs to be welcoming.**

When a new Fellowship Hall was added in the 1990s, the church ensured the new space was wheelchair accessible. For many community groups, that's the first thing they ask - even before "How much?" We have a ramp to the main door; the sanctuary has a special pew cut-out for wheelchairs; and our Fellowship Hall, main bathrooms, kitchen, office and minister's study are all accessible. We have also recently cleaned, resealed and line painted our two parking lots (which are a real blessing!) because how we look is the first step to hospitality. We figured that if a car-passing glance from the street said "closed" more than "open," no one would even pick up the phone.

### **But "accessible" is also a theological outlook.**

We have many tenants who are community members, looking to be welcomed. We are that place. And so, although there are safety-first practices, we are not out primarily to make money. We ensure that all groups comply with Leading with Care and that they carry their own insurance. (In fact, we've had to turn some groups away because of this.) Although we have our own insurance, this is important if we are to continue to offer our space going forward. Each community group signs a "facility rental agreement" so that the terms-of-use are clear. As a church, we also found a new church-specific insurance provider - something that gave us greater coverage (because the company knows the specific needs of their clients) for literally half the cost. For a fairly small congregation, this was a major savings, which equalled us signing a major annual renter.

### **"Accessible" also means financially accessible.**

We seek to welcome groups who have limited finances. Since we see our space as part of our mandate to "Serve Christ and our Neighbours," we are flexible, and have sometimes even invited a freewill offering from those groups who really don't have much money, but who are long-time positive contributors to our community. We host (and have recently hosted) groups such as Girl Guides, young person's Karate, a community choir, a drumming group, Kindermusic, and another worshipping congregation. Other ministries that are congregationally run are our Parents & Tots Playgroup, a 50+ Singles Outreach, and our Vacation Bible Camp and March Break Camps. The more we open our doors, the more people seem to know where

we are. The reality is that today, many people might not even know your church exists even if they drive past it to work every day. Only when people seek you out, or go there for a community event, are they made aware of an open faith community. We consider open doors to be a metaphor for God: Open hands.

Because of this clarity and openness to the community, we have been able to host an H1N1 Flu Assessment Centre at the request of the local chief medical officer of health. Our hospital was in a bind at the end of 2009 and requested our help. This allowed us to be host to our community for several weeks and hundreds of patients. A major challenge was the other groups who were already using the church. But since we try to foster that sense of openness, the other groups were very gracious in their own flexibility. As the leader of one of our groups has stated, "We always want to see the church be able to do its work (like hosting a dinner or a presbytery meeting), even if it means we need to cancel a week or change a night."

### **We have also been proactive about letting people know about our space.**

This goes beyond putting out ads. Instead of just sitting back and "waiting for people to come," we have contacted local schools to offer our space to put on spring or Easter concerts for free. This, in turn, prompted a call to ask if we could be a "code red" location if they needed to marshal at-risk students down the street in case of an emergency. We said yes. I guess you could say we work on the three "C" principle: Communication, Cooperation (with our groups) and Community (by opening our building through outreach to serve others). It was a highlight when a Haitian doctor was recently in town to speak to health care professionals about his mission to the under-cared-for and impoverished people in his home country, and the CEO of the hospital asked where he was speaking. He said, "In a church called Westminster." The CEO responded, "Oh, of course!"

So: "Here is the church, and here is the steeple; open up the doors, and see all the people!" Again, we say no steeple. But when you open up the doors - there are actually more people than you think. This wider group is our real congregation. A building is more than walls. It is another way to say, "Welcome!"

*The Rev. Matthew Ruttan is minister of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Barrie, Ontario*

# Giving Space:

## Considering Out of the Cold Ministry

Will Ingram



The Great Hall at St. Andrew's King Street in Toronto is a fairly typical church hall - chairs and tables are stacked in neat piles, a kitchen runs along one wall of the room, bulletin boards have been hung along the walls to publicize events in the congregation and the community, and washrooms can be found in close proximity.

But the Great Hall is so much more than a gathering space. It is, in its own way, a very holy space - each and every day.

For the past 19 years, the Great Hall has been used in the congregation's Out of the Cold program. The Out of the Cold program offers a warm welcome and a nutritious meal to hundreds of guests every Monday night and Tuesday morning, between November and April. Over the 2010-2011 winter season, well over 5,000 dinners were served to our guests, many of whom struggle with issues related to substance abuse, mental health, poverty, inadequate housing, and social marginalization on the streets of Toronto. A clothing

boutique is set up in the hallway between the Great Hall and the sanctuary and provides good used clothing and basic toiletry items to those in need, through generous donations from the volunteers and friends of the program. Every Monday night a health bus also pulls up outside the doors of the Great Hall and offers opportunities for our guests to receive medical attention for their various concerns.

At one time we used to offer a warm place to sleep on cold winter nights, but due to changes in bed availability in other parts of the city, we decided to focus our energy on providing meals only. The preparation of the meals is a significant undertaking each week. The food orders are delivered starting late in the previous week. Then, after the congregational coffee hour on Sunday afternoon, the first crew of volunteers comes into the Great Hall to start peeling carrots and potatoes, cutting vegetables, and making the initial preparations for the Monday evening dinner. During the day on Monday, different shifts of volunteers arrive at different times and each has a

series of tasks to fulfill so that the dinner will be ready to serve by the time the guests arrive at 6:00 p.m. (Of course, the guests usually arrive well before 6:00 p.m., which means that a long line has formed down Simcoe Street by the time the doors are opened.) A spirit of genuine hospitality and friendship greets them at the door, and many of the volunteers get to know the guests by name as they interact from week to week. More volunteers arrive throughout the evening to help with different shifts of serving, cleaning up and distributing the clothing. Finally, after the guests have left, the dishes have been washed and the tables have been cleaned, the volunteers make their way home.

On Tuesday mornings, bright and early (well, often dark and early!), another crew of volunteers arrives at the church well before 6:00 a.m. to begin to cook for the morning breakfast program, which continues to welcome 125-150 guests each week for a hot, nutritious breakfast at the beginning of their day.

The success of the program is bittersweet. On one hand, it is great to see the Great Hall used in this way - and it is an honour to welcome so many people to dinner. The benefits to the volunteers are equally significant, as there is a great blessing in having the opportunity to serve in such a direct way. And yet, on the other hand, there is something quite troubling about the immensity of need. Rather than try to address and solve all of the complex problems that the presence of our guests reveals, however, the Out of the Cold volunteers simply seek to provide a place of genuine hospitality, humble service and great food to those in need.

## If your church wants to consider an Out of the Cold program...

Starting an Out of the Cold program is not an easy undertaking - it requires an awareness of the contextual issues in the community that surrounds a church, a solid base of financial and volunteer support, and a willingness to persevere in times of challenge. The benefits are immense, however, and in many parts of the country, the needs are equally significant. While it is difficult to formulate a checklist for starting an Out of the Cold program, the following are offered as helpful points to ponder.

### **Assess needs**

St. Andrew's program started in response to a particular need in the wider community. In the early 1990s, a significant increase in the number of poor, homeless and mentally ill people began to be noticed on the streets of Toronto, and members of the congregation asked what they might do to help.

In a similar way - and regardless of your own context - a first step is to assess the needs in your community. Pay attention to what is happening beyond the walls of the church; consult with your local municipal counsellor and with representatives from other social agencies to find out what they have been noticing; talk with the members of the congregation to see what new ministry initiatives should be undertaken. As well, find out what other local churches, synagogues and social organizations are already doing - you may be wiser to support or partner with another organization rather than start your own ministry.

### **Evaluate capacity**

No one expected the level of volunteer and financial support from the congregation, local businesses, and the wider community that St. Andrew's has received over the past 19 years - but it is nonetheless important to try to assess the capacity for new ministry initiatives in the planning stages.

In the case of a program like Out of the Cold, there are many different capacities to be evaluated. Do you have sufficient physical facilities, including a good



meeting space, sufficient washrooms and adequate kitchen facilities? Do you have sufficient financial support, or a solid plan to raise support as the program gets underway? Do you have sufficient volunteer support, or will the volunteers that you have recruited become burned out? An honest assessment of these capacities will help to determine what types of help

you will be able to offer.

### **Leadership and delegation**

The Out of the Cold program was blessed to have two great champions in its earliest days - the minister, Cameron Brett, and the first coordinator, Stevie Cameron. Both of them would agree, however, that without a large number of volunteers, the program would never have survived.

One of the reasons why the program has continued to flourish, even though neither of the original champions is still in

a leadership position, is because of the clear delegation of duties. Each year, there is a cook who designs the menus, ensures that the proper foods are ordered, and gives direction to the various shifts of volunteers about what they need to accomplish. Another person is delegated to be in charge of the clothing boutique. Another person is the main volunteer coordinator - which, in a typical year, involves between 150 and 200 volunteers. These are, of course, only a few of the significant delegated positions.

### **Care for the volunteers**

Even though the primary goal is to care for the guests, one of the previous coordinators has often mentioned

the importance of taking care of the volunteers as well. Volunteers give a tremendous amount of time, energy, emotion, money and compassion to the program - and they receive great benefits from these gifts - but it is incredibly important to care for the volunteers. This care is reflected in respect, clarity of roles and expectations, and the expression of gratitude.

- Respect: Take time to listen to volunteers and adapt to their suggestions.
- Clarity of Roles: Make clear guidelines and policies for conduct and responsibilities for volunteers and guests. It must be clear that the safety of volunteers is a paramount concern. Children under the age of 16 are not allowed to serve meals, and there are always strong and stable greeters at the door.
- Most importantly, express gratitude to the volunteers in formal as well as informal ways!

### **Evaluate and evolve**

Over the past 19 years, the program has evolved in significant ways. Although it was originally intended as a pizza and donut drop-in evening at the church, it quickly evolved into a large dinner, overnight accommodation and breakfast program. Years later, due to the opening of more shelter beds in Toronto and increased safety concerns for volunteers and guests, the decision was made to stop providing overnight accommodation in the church and shift to an evening dinner and a morning breakfast program. And, as the years unfold, we are aware that the program will shift and evolve in new ways as well.

Which brings us right back to the first step - that is, even after the program is up and running, do not be hesitant to re-assess the needs, re-evaluate capacity, re-designate and re-delegate tasks, take care of the volunteers, and evaluate and evolve some more!

If your congregation is interested in creating such a ministry, there are a large number of experienced volunteers at St. Andrew's who would be happy to discuss the creation of such a program in more detail.

*The Rev. William Ingram is the senior minister at St. Andrew's Church at King and Simcoe Streets in the heart of Toronto, Ontario, and a volunteer in the congregation's Out of the Cold program.*



# Welcoming Space: Developing Relationships with Aboriginal People

Margaret Mullin

A roof. Four walls. Sacred Space. A place to belong, to heal, and to grow. That is Anishinabe Place of Hope - Endaayaang (APOH). It is operated by Winnipeg Inner City Missions (WICM), The Presbyterian Church in Canada, in the inner city of Winnipeg Manitoba. It is a church and a transitional housing project all under one

Aboriginal people worship together in the building. The mission offices are located in the building, and there are 20 one-bedroom apartments housing single, unemployed men or women aged 30-55 who are all participating in a First Steps to Employment project. The church sanctuary also serves as a common



roof. It is a place to meet God, to be challenged by the gospel, and to grow in Christ. It is a place to minister every day to individuals and families in our neighbourhood who are living with the crippling effects of poverty in their lives.

APOH is a church (Anishinabe Presbyterian Fellowship); it is a mission during the week serving the needs of the inner-city community; and it is a transitional housing project. Many wonderful things are happening under the big red roof. Every Sunday, 70-80

gathering room for tenants in the building and a meeting place for community events during the week.

The building is alive with activity 24/7. The Ojibway word Endaayaang means "Our home - It embraces you - You belong there." More than just an apartment block, APOH has become a safe haven for 20 single adults who have been long-term unemployed. They have been referred and accepted into the First Steps to Employment project. Project participants are provided with safe, clean, affordable housing on ground that is

dedicated to be sacred space. (In 2007, traditional Aboriginal and Christian ceremonies claimed this piece of land, the building, and the activities of the ministry team for God/Creator's work.)

The mission ministry team (Ordained Minister, Aboriginal Elder, Parish Social Worker, Outreach Nurse, and Child and Youth Program Coordinator) help church members, tenants and members of the local community who are accessing the mission's services achieve wholesome and productive lifestyles. We listen, we pray, we guide, we counsel, we advocate for, and we support a diverse community. For details about the services offered, please see our website: [www.wicm.ca](http://www.wicm.ca).

Seventy percent of our tenants, 80% of the people who enter our doors and 95% of the people who worship at APOH are Aboriginal people. By virtue of who we are (The Presbyterian Church in Canada), we are engaged daily in the work of healing and reconciliation between

resources we are blessed to have. Wherever the church is, there is a community with its own unique needs. If you are building up a ministry team, your leadership could consider social workers and nurses being brought onto the team to provide counselling, support, advocacy, and teaching, to more adequately meet the physical, emotional, intellectual, as well as the spiritual needs of the people you serve. Jesus ministered to the whole person.

Every church can become involved in the ministry of healing and reconciliation. You can prayerfully discover your own unique way to connect with Aboriginal people in your area (Aboriginal communities are all around) and to start developing relationships with them. Go to where they are; extend your hand to them; ask to be taught about their traditions and their understanding of God; develop trusting relationships over time; invite them to a feast at the church to honour them; offer your sacred space to them for their



the church and Aboriginal peoples. Four of our five professional staff members are of Aboriginal descent. Christian and Aboriginal Spiritual teachings and ceremonies are used to help our people heal, forgive, reconcile and grow into the person God created them to be.

How can your church be a holy space for the stranger? More churches could become multi-use facilities like ours, becoming better stewards of the physical

use in traditional healing circles and/or restorative justice circles.

A roof. Four walls. Sacred Space. Most congregations have that. How are you using yours?

*The Rev. Margaret Mullin, Thundering Eagle Woman, is the Executive Director of Winnipeg Inner City Missions, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She is Ojibway-Irish and began her ministry at WICM in 1999.*

# Some opportunities for churches to become welcoming spaces!

If your church wants to explore ways to share Holy Space with Aboriginal people, here are some suggestions:

1. Invite an Aboriginal speaker or Aboriginal Elder to talk to members of your church, adult group or youth group on any topic of interest, such as Aboriginal history, culture or modern-day concerns. They may be able to bring musical instruments and dancers to share some artistic culture as well. To locate potential speakers, contact a local Native Friendship Centre, Native women's organization, or post-secondary campus Aboriginal association. If you live near a First Nation community, you could contact the First Nation band administrator, or the First Nation education or cultural officer for assistance.
2. Host an informal social or recreational gathering and invite representatives of a local Native Friendship Centre, Native women's organization, local First Nation or Metis group join you.
3. Talk to an Aboriginal service group in your community about a joint project that members of both groups can work on together, providing an opportunity to get to know each other better in the process.
4. Arrange a visit to a local Aboriginal community to learn about your neighbours first hand. This could include talking with leaders in the community, attending a pow wow or a spiritual event, or taking a tour.
5. Hold a service of worship at your church reflecting on how people are meant to live in community with each other in the Canadian context. The National Day of Healing and Reconciliation for the PCC is mid-May and National Aboriginal Day is in June.

Justice Ministries of the PCC can help with resources and funding for congregations wanting to engage in projects of healing and reconciliation with Aboriginal people or communities. For information, contact Justice Ministries at 1-800-619-7301.

## **Aboriginal ministries of the Presbyterian Church in Canada**

Cariboo Ministry – Central British Columbia

Hummingbird Ministries – British Columbia

Mistawasis Memorial Presbyterian Church – Saskatchewan

Saskatoon Native Circle Ministry (SNCM) – Saskatchewan

Edmonton Urban Native Ministries (EUNM) – Alberta

Winnipeg Inner City Missions (WICM) – Manitoba

Anawiewigummig (Kenora Fellowship Centre) – Kenora, Ontario