

# PENNIES & SPARROWS

EASTER NEWSLETTER BY TERENCE AND JASMINE CHANDRA

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## Reflections on Running an Emergency Shelter

Even among the homeless there are morning people. As I'm in the very act of making the 6 AM wakeup call at our church's emergency out of the cold shelter, Alan\* already has his blanket, pillow and sleeping bag neatly packed into his plastic bin. Once he's finished getting dressed, he'll be standing with a few others around the front door of our church, puffing on the half-smoked joint he's kept stowed in his coat pocket since the previous night. Others, however, stay in their sleeping bags until the last possible moment and beyond. Dallas\* is notorious for this. Each morning a volunteer has to stroll over to his spot on our church floor, lean over his comatose form and— in as polite but firm a tone as possible— remind him that he needs to get going. Each time he'll flutter his eyelids, groan, cuss us out, role over again and fall back into a seemingly *deeper* sleep. This happens about four or five times before finally waking up, packing his things and heading out the door.

Even though I'm a morning person myself, I can understand Dallas' desire to sleep-in far more than I can understand Alan's eagerness to get up and get going. After all, once they're out the door, it's another 12 hours of life on the street— hustling for food, drugs or spare change, herded from place to place by security guards, all in the eternal struggle to escape the cruel wind and unforgiving cold. By the time six-o'clock roles around, they'll be back at the front doors of our church, waiting to be let in— some sporting literal battle scars from a day spent on the street. Finally, between 6:30 and 7:00 the doors will open to take them in for another night. This went on each evening starting Monday, January 24th and continuing until Monday, February 28th— a total of 36 days.

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\* All names have been changed



It wasn't our idea to launch an emergency shelter. We were approached by our local MLA, Arlene Dunn who— like so many members of her constituency— was deeply worried about the dramatic spike in homelessness we've seen this winter. Every knowledgeable voice we consulted in the days that followed warned us against the undertaking. It's too difficult and dangerous, we were told. You haven't made the necessary preparations and, by the time you do, the cold season will be over. But, thanks to Provincial funding freed up by the MLA and her office, we were able to purchase the necessary materials needed for shelter: mats, sleeping bags, blankets and pillows for our guests; K-N95 masks and gloves for our volunteers. Most importantly, we were able to hire nightly

security guards, able to help ensure the safety of everyone present, both volunteers and guests.

I'll be honest with you: the running of this temporary emergency shelter was one of the most difficult challenges we've ever faced in our ministry. For a more thorough breakdown of my thoughts on the subject, I recommend that you check out our latest blog post on the Pennies and Sparrows website (*Can Churches Double as Homeless Shelters: A Response Based on Painful Experience*). For now, though, we'd simply like to thank all of the volunteers who sacrificed many sleepless nights in service of our guests. If it weren't for your genuine love for your neighbours, if it weren't for your commitment to your community, this ministry would not have been possible.

## The Stone Café

From the very outset, the shelter was only meant to be a temporary response to a sudden spike in homelessness - a bandaid solution that could not safely be applied indefinitely. However, just because we're not able to provide ongoing *nightly* accommodations to the homeless population doesn't mean that we can't offer people a place to come in the *daytime*. Therefore, shortly after the closing of the emergency shelter, we decided to launch the Stone Café, a drop-in program that runs every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday afternoon at our church. Here, our guests can get out of the cold for a few hours without being told to move on, get a hot cup of coffee, enjoy a puzzle or a card game, check their email or social media accounts, watch TV, chat and relax. As an increasing number of people learn about our drop-in program, we hope to run it on a daily basis— each Monday to Friday afternoon. We also hope it can be a place where our guests gain referral to other services in our community: drug rehab programs, mental health services, employment and housing programs, etc. Please pray for us as we discern how best to grow and expand the Stone Café.

It goes without saying that the running of the Stone Café has been made possible by the kindness and generosity of our volunteers and donors. Thank you so much for your help! Through your help, some of the most vulnerable people in our community are finding, not only shelter from the cold, but a place of genuine hospitality and welcome.

## Housing Solutions Lab

For the last year we have been participating in a Housing Lab to explore solutions to the housing crisis that we now find ourselves in. Part of this exploration has been to look at new ways for people to share living space and to build a more holistic approach to having a home. We were able to hold a prototyping event in March that allowed participants to think creatively about their housing needs. It was interesting how quickly this exercise allowed people to get to know each other and how much it made everyone think about the supports they may need and the skills they could offer others.



# Emmaus Way Teams

As the child of an immigrant family, I've heard enough stories from my parents to know that starting a new life in a new country can be extremely difficult. Even if you come from a country that speaks one of our two official languages, there are still the additional challenges of getting enrolled in an education program, securing employment, learning the subtleties of the culture and simply making friends. I don't think this is a journey any one person— *or any one family*— should have to walk alone. Therefore, we're proud to announce that, as of March 30th, a new Emmaus Way Team has been launched— this one formed around two women and their children who recently emigrated to Canada from a country in Eastern Africa.

This Emmaus Way team is unique because it is the first team we've ever launched outside of the Saint John area. These two families have settled in Fredericton and the people that comprise their team all hail from churches based in the area. Over the course of the next year, they will all journey together, living out a familiar story that is known to so many immigrants and refugees who have made Canada their home. Please pray for them along with the other Emmaus Way teams that are presently running.

## Meeting Needs

We continue to offer assistance to people to meet their various needs. In the last few months this has meant helping people with paying damage deposits so they can get settled into an apartment, providing bus tickets to people trying to get home or get into rehab, getting items of clothing or basic necessities to those

who need them, buying food or groceries for individuals and families, helping with hydro bills, and providing gift cards to Tim Horton's or Giant Tiger. Many who come to us needing help are in pretty desperate situations and we are grateful that we currently have the funding to be able to help in these ways.

## Other Programs and Projects

Jasmine continues to chair the Waterloo Village Neighbourhood Association meetings. These meetings are a great way for non-profit groups and residents of the area to get together and share information and ideas. Involvement in the WVNA has also helped us to be part of the conversations with other priority neighbourhoods as we seek to improve our communities together.

We also continue our involvement with PULSE by helping pack groceries for the Food Purchasing Club which is a cost-saving program to access fresh produce.

Terence continues his work with the Saint John Pregnancy Resource Centre, volunteering his time to mentor new dads. He recently introduced a young father to a writing program that would help him clearly articulate his vision for the future. This writing program helps people clarify exactly what goals they'd like to pursue- goals relating to education, finances, health, work and especially family.

## SENIORS LEARN AND GROOVE

We recently found out that funding has been renewed for another year for us to continue to run our monthly seniors program. This well anticipated event gathers seniors from different parts of the city to socialize, listen to live entertainment, and hear speakers address issues that are pertinent to them such as - seniors resources, dealing with Alzheimers and Dementia, nutrition, heart care, stroke prevention, Diabetes, to name a few.



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# Thanks to all who support us!

We are extremely grateful to all those who support our ministry, whether through financial donation, volunteering or prayer. Please contact us if you have any questions or would like more information about Pennies & Sparrows. Donations can be made in several ways:

1. Online through Canada Helps (using the drop down tab on the page to select Pennies and Sparrows) <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/dn/13778>.
2. By cheque sent to the Diocese of Fredericton with Pennies and Sparrows in the memo line - 168 Church Street Fredericton, NB E3B 4C9.
3. By cheque sent to Stone Church again with Pennies and Sparrows in the memo line - 87 Carleton Street Saint John NB E2L 2Z2.
4. By etransfer to Stone Church with a note that the funds are to go to Pennies and Sparrows [stjstone@nb.aibn.com](mailto:stjstone@nb.aibn.com).



The past two years have been defined, in part, by change and loss. Some have had to say goodbye to beloved church communities or family businesses. Others have even experienced the loss of loved ones. In this, the third Easter since the outbreak of the

pandemic, our prayer is that you would all take hope. The hope we speak of is rooted in something far deeper than a decline in Covid cases or the introduction of vaccines and other medical treatments. Rather, our hope lies ultimately in Jesus' resurrection from the grave and, hence, eternal victory over sin and death. The Lord is Risen! May the strength of this proclamation continue to sustain you and yours in your journey forward.

Terence and Jasmine Chandra

