

TORONTO 2015 REPORT



After what seemed like a lot of interest, we ended up with just twelve of us. But, from a spiritual maturity standpoint, this was a quality group of people. Also, the trip itself was one of the better ones, as related to good weather, safe travel, smooth border crossings, work sites and fellowship were concerned.

We departed from BFG on Wednesday afternoon, November 25. Traffic was very heavy heading east and we had a significant back-up at the toll bridge from Port Huron to Sarnia. This seems to be largely due to the fact that they had only some of the booths open. The customs/immigration clearing went quickly with no secondary inspection. We arrived safely at Grace CRC in Scarborough (east side of Toronto) around 10:00 PM.

Thursday, Friday and Saturday were ministry days. After breakfast and devotions, we headed to various sites. On Thursday we went to the St Felix Centre, where the homeless are served lunch and dinner several days each week. We prepared the food (healthy food, made from wholesome ingredients), washed and dried dishes; then we served the clients, which number from 75 to over 100 for each meal. We had opportunity to visit with these people and hear their stories.



Our next site was Monsignor Fraiser College, where we assisted with an after-school program for children, run by the Toronto City Mission. We sang praise songs, played games in the gym and helped with homework.



Pete had been dropped off back at Grace in the early afternoon to prepare our "American Thanksgiving" feast. He had cooked a turkey and cut it up before we left GR. Sweet potatoes, broccoli and

cheese, cranberry jello, rolls and pumpkin pie completed the meal.

Friday we served at the Lighthouse, a multi-faceted ministry of the CRC in downtown Toronto. We assisted Pastor Rob Datema with a mailing to solicit end-of-the-year donations, cleaned and organized the food pantry. Some visited with Spanish speaking seniors who come in for English classes and Bible study. Language classes are offered to various immigrant groups throughout the week.



Then, it was time for showers at the local YMCA in Scarborough. They have been quite accommodating about this every year. At 7:00 PM we met Pastor Ray Samaroo, his wife, Meg and the youth group and leaders from the All Nations Christian Fellowship CRC at a local bowling alley. The Americans tried five-pin bowling for the first time. Interesting experience. We had a great time with the ANCF group, ending with a pizza dinner.



Saturday AM is always Kids' Church with Pauline Ho back at the St. Felix Centre. This program has been going for many years and some of the young student leaders grew up in Kids' Church. This area is very depressed with mostly single parent families and much poverty. For these children, KC is a bright spot in their week. They are starving for attention and very open to the love of Jesus. We walk the neighborhoods to round up the kids, bringing them back to St. Felix, where we serve a snack, play

outdoor games, do praise and worship, Bible stories, memory verses, etc. then walk them back home.

We had brought with us several boxes of donated Bible story books and hats, scarves, mittens and gloves. Each child was given several items to take home. The rest of the books were left at The Lighthouse on Sunday.

Since the Grace Church building is rented to a Seventh Day Adventist congregation from Friday PM through Saturday evening, we couldn't go "home" for the few hours between activities. We decided to visit the Eaton Centre Mall. By the way, Black Friday has caught on majorly in Toronto, even though their Thanksgiving holiday is in October! The mall, which takes up several square blocks in downtown and is three stories high, was mobbed. The van didn't fit under the bar at the entrance to the parking ramp, but we were able to back out and find another a block away. The team (or at least those who wished) shopped 'til they dropped. Some of us just looked for a place to sit and watch the people...



Saturday night is always a wonderful time of food, fun and fellowship. The ANCF Church puts on a multi-ethnic dinner. This isn't difficult, since their whole congregation is comprised almost totally of immigrant groups. We had food from India, Philippines, Vietnam, Guyana, and many other places. Oh, and America. A total taste extravaganza! Following the meal, the tables are stored away and the chairs reset for a time of music, prayer and testimony.



Sunday morning came much too quickly. We packed, ate breakfast, had our final devotions and cleaned our living quarters. We then headed back to the Lighthouse for the ANCF worship service. They had already invited us to stay after and share left-overs for lunch and we had politely declined, saying we should not take the time, not knowing how the traffic and border crossing would be. But, they prevailed and agreed to shorten the service by 45 minutes, have the food ready and serve us first. This was truly an offer we couldn't refuse.

We were on the road about 1:00 PM. Traffic was lighter than on Wednesday; there was very little back up at the bridge and again we cleared customs very quickly and efficiently. Praise God for answered prayers!

We arrive back at BFG around 8:00 PM, one of our better times. God is good!



Judy VanderArk, November, 2015

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