



THE ARK
Christmas '17 Newsletter



Tis the Season?

We have a friend who volunteered with us here for several years. She has suffered a lot of trauma and consequently deals with complicated effects. You could say she is 'messed up' but on the other hand, it was that 'mess' that helped her survive. We have helped her in various ways but most importantly by loving her unconditionally, supporting her through her messy times and becoming her 'family.' Frankly, she will tell you she would be dead without the *Ark* family. Because of treatment options, she now lives in another city. We

keep in touch and support her with counsel, prayer and friendship as she needs it. Thankfully, she has found another group of loving, supportive people at her church there. In a recent conversation she told me this story.

She has a family doctor who wants her to see a psychiatrist to oversee her medication. She had to call the central registry for psychiatrists there, who told her it would be a one-time visit, for 30-40 minutes in 8-10 months. When asked how to get longer term care, she was told to call each psychiatrist to see who would accept her. Fortunately, when she is doing well she is capable of doing that. But, she said to me, imagine requiring people dealing with their mental health and trying to manage medication having to do all that. Many healthy people would not even start and you can be sure many of those who need this help would be discouraged from trying even if they are capable.

You might think this is a singular problem. It's not – it's systemic. This same person was very depressed last Christmas and while in the psych hospital drank hand sanitizer. After they treated her, the doctor released her from the hospital, saying he had never released anyone from that treatment ward.

When asked why he was doing it now, he said it was because it was not safe for her to be there. When further asked if she was safer out of the hospital, he shrugged. That happened to a person trying to get help. Those whose illness convinces them they are not ill, everyone else is, get nothing – like our other friend who has been homeless for the past year and a half. No one is looking out for her or for our dozens of other friends here who can't or won't look out for themselves.

In any given year, 1 in 5 people in Canada will personally experience a mental health problem or illness

We don't have a mental health treatment system. At best, we have a mental health containment system, much of which is downloaded to the police and front line social agencies never intended to deal with mental health. In recent years, there have been efforts to reduce stigma around mental health. That is necessary and good. But then what? Unless you have your own or family resources, which can quickly be exhausted, you are only a step or two away from being a client here, coping as best you can. Little wonder people self-medicate and we deal with addiction. No one should be indifferent to this – mental health can affect any family, any time. I know – it has affected two of our three children, who thankfully are doing well.

This is not a sunny, Christmas meditation. But it is the reason we have Christmas – God's grace in a world of brokenness. This year, our provincial government said we have a balanced budget. We don't. We have not paid the bills owing to our most vulnerable people. Not gracious, I know, but I'm frustrated. You would be, too. So, during this season of good will, by all means remember those who struggle with their physical or mental health, poverty or addiction. There are many who deserve our help. We know them by name. We appreciate and use all the funds, food and clothing that will be donated in the next few weeks. Remember them, too next year when it comes time to vote.

That would be a real Christmas gift.

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New Cooler

Thanks to the *Jack and Barbara Hay Foundation* here in London, we have a new cooler. The old, 3 door unit, which was donated several years ago no longer kept up in warm weather. This one is quite spacious and efficient and we are very grateful.

Our next project, for which we have received some donations already is to re-do our front serving area, giving us more space and a dishwasher so we won't have to carry cups back and forth to the kitchen, interfering with Chad's food prep. Hopefully, all the pieces for that will come together soon.

We also plan on replacing a rented water heater with a high efficiency storage tank and let our boiler provide all our hot water as well as placing a 50" TV in the Fireside Room for our Sunday Connection and other meetings. We always need funds for operations but if you would like to help with these projects, we would be grateful!

Food Coalition Update

The *London Food Coalition*, which we have worked on over the past year is up and running, launched October 13 when the new, refrigerated van was revealed at London City Chrysler, one of the van sponsors. It was also funded by *Healthy Kids Community Challenge* and *Child Youth Network*, both of which are keen to have families, children and youth consuming healthy food. The City was represented by two of our Councillors, Michael van Holst and Jesse Helmer who helped back the project. The *Ark* operates the van on behalf of the *Coalition*, taking the food to the Distribution Centre at the *Centre of Hope*. In the first two weeks, it picked up 3000 lbs of food, which extrapolated over a year amounts to 36 tons. You can see why it was prudent to purchase the van! If you would like more information or to get involved visit *London Food Coalition* on Facebook or the web.



New Art



This original re-imagining of "The Last Supper" painting is hanging in our dining room. Created by this year's Canada Summer Jobs student, Sarah Wright with collaboration by the New School of Colour artists, the painting, measuring 32 x 66.5 inches captures both the transcendent meaning of our meals and the actors in our Easter play, *The Living Last Supper*. Come by to

see it and more work by our artists, much of which is for sale and makes a unique gift. Presently, we have a number of works, including our Canada150 pieces on display at *The Healing Palette* in St. Thomas.

Thanks For Your Support

Thanks for your gifts this year. You have accomplished much! Of course, the Christmas season is when many people give a special gift to help those who need it. To all those who choose to do so through the *Ark*, thank you! We will use it wisely to make a difference. There are many ways to give:

- gifts of food: see the list on the website, turkeys, grocery store gift certificates, etc.
- gifts in honour or on behalf of someone: check the box on the response card to receive a special card from the *Ark* to inform your honoree of the gift.
- set up convenient monthly donations: by credit card – visit our website; by bank withdrawal – check the box on the response card or download the form on our Donation webpage.
- credit or debit card donations can be done right on our website.
- gifts of stocks and mutual funds can also be done from the website.
- credit card donations and cheques can be mailed in the provided response envelope.

We live in a strange world of plenty where some people have too much and some, nothing at all. In sharing gifts this season, let us also work to ensure everyone is cared for and nothing is carelessly wasted. Wayne joins me in expressing our appreciation of your trust in us and in wishing you a blessed Christmas season.

Doug Whitelaw
Executive Director

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