



# Bethlehem Aboriginal Fellowship

December 2013 Newsletter



## WHEN LOVE CAME DOWN

submitted by Jo-Ann Swenson, on behalf of the Board

Why would anyone want to leave a place of comfort, a place where one is adored and cherished, to come to a place where you are hated, beaten, abused and finally killed?

That is exactly what Jesus did!

There is a worship song, *Worthy is the Lamb* where we sing *the darling of heaven crucified*. Every time we sing that I see a vision of the "vestibule" of heaven with the angels standing adoring Jesus. Then Father God says, "mankind is in a terrible state. I need someone to go down and rescue them out of their mess." A gasp goes up from the angels as Jesus steps forward before the throne of God and says "Father I will go; send me."



Jesus, *...being essentially One with God and in the form of God, did not think that equality with God was a thing to be eagerly grasped, but stripped Himself of all privileges and rightful dignity so as to assume the guise of a servant in that He became like men and was born a human being*. Philippians 2: 6 & 7. In a manger in Bethlehem, LOVE was born! Love Himself, clothed in the fragile flesh of a human baby entered the world. A brilliant star shone down from heaven and the angels continued to worship and adore their darling!

As we celebrate Christmas, let us think about the amazing love that Jesus showed as He willingly came to earth, knowing that He would be sacrificed to pay for our sins, and to open the way by His blood, to the Father in the throne room of grace.

As a child, I had a sense of excitement and expectation at Christmas. The lights fascinated me. It wasn't about the presents since we were a poor family and didn't get much, but there was something or "someone" who stirred my heart with expectation. I used to say, "I wish it was Christmas every day." I mentioned this to my sister recently, and she said "but it IS Christmas every day because Christ is with you!" That insight stirs my heart now each morning as I go to my prayer room because I have lit a star with Christmas lights that reminds me of Christ being with me.

We pray that for you it will be Christmas every day as you ponder the truth that LOVE came down for you. We have so much to be thankful for at Bethlehem Aboriginal Fellowship. The Lord has brought us through yet another year with Him as our Shepherd. He has fed our little flock through many wonderful preachers and worship leaders. He continues to provide muffins from Kildonan House and Gunn's Bakery so that we can bless the community with God's Love. Even though someone recently set fire to our rental house behind the church, we know that He is going to bring good out of what the enemy intended for evil.

Thank you Lord for supplying support in prayer and finances, workers for the food bank, helpers who are maintaining the church by painting and repairing, clothing from various churches and individuals, and grace, strength and love for the congregation of BAF who continue to reach out to the community with God's love.

May the Lord bless you at Christmas with His amazing love.

## A FOOD BANK VOLUNTEER

submitted by Jo-Ann Swenson

We have many wonderful food bank volunteers.

Here is a little about one of them.

Jo-Ann: Debra, what brought you to BAF?



Debra: I was in need, needed some snow suits for winter so I came to BAF's clothing bank in November last year. While I was shopping for clothes I noticed a group of people there working as a team for the food bank and I wanted to be part of it. In my past I had caused pain to so many people and I wanted to give something good back to the community.

I enjoy serving the people and bringing smiles to their faces. Even if only one person responds to my smile it is worth it. I benefit in more ways than one as I come to serve at the food bank. I get clothing, food, and spiritual food.

I feel more complete and that void space in me is filling up more and more with Jesus.

Jo-Ann: How long have you known Jesus?

Debra: I've known Him since I was 16, but I was into drugs and immorality for a long time. Three years ago when I was arrested for drug selling, I hid under a blanket in my cell and prayed that Jesus would get me out of there and I would serve Him the rest of my days. Miraculously the police let me go and I knew it was an answer to prayer. So I have been serving Jesus ever since. I am a living example that "prayer changes things". The Lord has since been setting me free from smoking and drinking.

Jo-Ann: Debra, you are a wonderful inspiration to me and to the volunteers at food bank and a beautiful server to the people who come to food bank.

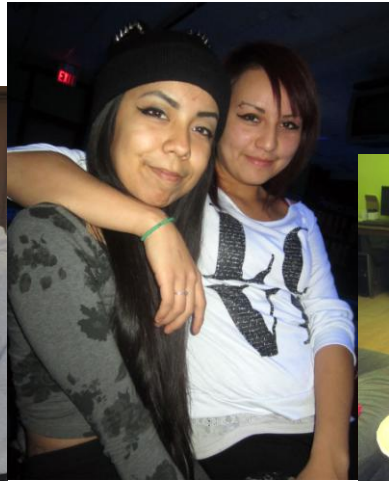
**WorkForce: Job Studio** by Jocelyn Chan

This fall marks the start of the 4<sup>th</sup> Job Studio session I have run. It is such a blessing to see God working and shaping the youth and leaders at the Job Studio. I have been learning more and more that God doesn't usually move in the ways we expect Him to.

This year has been challenging for us in many ways: we've struggled to find funding for the ministry, experienced a lack of volunteers, and youth continued living in heartbreaking situations. However, throughout these trials, we have gotten to practice something very important but difficult: waiting and trusting on the Lord!

God surprised us with funding for this whole school year, and creative ideas in recruiting new volunteers. We have seen His protection on our youth, and it reminds us that He is in control and He sees them, even if others don't.

It is rewarding to keep in touch with previous youth from the program and hear how they are doing now. Earlier this month I received two messages from two boys that had been a part of our 2011/2012 sessions. They have gotten jobs! Hallelujah! I am so excited to continue journeying alongside them and encouraging them in this new step. Please keep these boys, and our current Job Studio youth in your prayers. We have 6 youth set to graduate from the program in December.



**An Interview with Kurt Martens**, submitted by Beth Wilton

*Me:* Tell us a bit about your life growing up...

*Kurt:* I grew up on a farm at Oak Bluff just outside of Winnipeg, in a fairly sheltered Christian environment. My family is Mennonite. I went to church a lot during the week – at least 3 times.

*Me:* How did you begin a relationship with Jesus?

*Kurt:* Because I grew up in a Christian home, it was a gradual process to make my faith my own. At 13 I went to a crusade in Brandon where I prayed the sinner's prayer. My dad found out that I did this and he got me a Bible and said that if I read it right through he'd give me \$20. I got the \$20! By then it had become a habit to read the Bible for my devotions so I read it through again and got another \$20! This formed a base for me to have regular devotions.

*Me:* How did you grow in your relationship with the Lord after this?

*Kurt:* I read Campus Crusade (now called Power to Change) pamphlets and books and they taught me a lot about assurance of my salvation and letting God have control of my life. At school I wanted to hang out with the popular kids but they didn't want me so I hung out with the Christian kids. At church I got involved with the youth group and Brigades. All of these had a very positive effect on me.

*Me:* Was there any stuff you had to deal with growing up that caused problems for you?

*Kurt:* My family didn't talk about our feelings. It was taboo to be angry and talk about it. So I learned to stuff my feelings and stress and didn't know how to deal with them. Eventually I would explode. As an adult I became emotionally sick – manic. My mind would race with elated thoughts but I couldn't control them. It made me act like an extrovert: I was loud and did inappropriate things that drew attention to my family and they didn't like it. I had a stay in the hospital for a month where I was put on medication and that really helped stabilize me. It slowed my thoughts so that I could read again – especially the Bible. Reading the Bible and turning it into prayers gave me peace of mind, encouragement and the growth that I needed.

*Me:* So what is life like for you now?

*Kurt:* When I moved to the city I was doing casual labour jobs and I always got work because of my farm experience. For the last 20 years I've run my own handyman business. I've been married for 15 years now to Marie and have 9 children and 18 grandchildren. I've been slowly maturing in my faith. Through Bible Studies with groups and on my own, I have close communion with the Lord. I love the relationship I have with him now.

*Me:* How did you get involved at Bethlehem?

*Kurt:* I did some repair work at the church and got to know the pastor and some others. About 7 years ago I started to come regularly. I get fed good spiritual food at BAF.

## Why do YOU come to Bethlehem Aboriginal Fellowship?

We recently took a poll and asked people to tell us why they came to BAF and what was special about it. Here are some of the answers:

- This church represents the heart of God to the North End.
- I feel I could bring anyone here and they would feel loved and accepted as they are.
- I love the environment of the church and feel God's presence in a powerful way.
- BAF to me is seeing God in how He provides and changes people to have hope.
- BAF has given me the opportunity to be a part of a church family that includes people of different classes and backgrounds.
- I feel His Spirit here. I feel at home here.
- People have prayed for me especially when I got hurt. If I hadn't been prayed for I wouldn't be here.
- The people who love.
- I feel drawn to BAF because with a small congregation, I felt more as if I was in a family.
- I feel great when I serve the people by volunteering at the food bank.
- I found friends here.
- Nobody tells me what to do. I come for community meals.
- BAF is a place where everyone knows that they are loved.
- It is a place that is safe. I love coming here.
- This community, church and people mean everything to me.
- Thank you Jesus that you have Godly people to pray and follow You, not man.
- They all love one another.

## WorkForce: Infinity by Shaunna Goode



*Work Force is a ministry of Youth for Christ/Winnipeg. We partner with Bethlehem Aboriginal Fellowship in running youth programs in the neighbourhood around the church. Two of Work Force's programs are 1) The Job Studio is for youth 16 to 20 who want to find a job but often don't know how; 2) Infinity is for youth who are exploring their faith. Some have begun a relationship with Jesus and others don't know what they believe.*

Infinity is back up and running for the fall and I have to say that I'm truly excited to see what this year will bring. We've started this year off with two goals: 1) We want the youth to have a better understanding of who Jesus is, and 2) We want Infinity to be a place where the youth feel accepted and have a sense of belonging.

To address our first goal, we've decided to study the book of John with the youth. As we work through the book of John during Infinity, we hope that the youth will come to realize that Jesus is big enough to handle all of their problems. That Jesus loves them no matter who they are and no matter what they have done. That Jesus cares enough to want a deep, personal relationship with them. That Jesus is God and they can trust Him with their lives. Please pray with us that the youth would not be closed to hearing and seeing who Jesus is but that their hearts would be open to encountering Him.

As leaders we want to be able to show God's love to the youth. This is a way to help them experience Jesus practically. It also helps them to see that we think they are special and that we value them. This is something that the youth don't often believe about themselves. That's why our second goal exists. We want to be intentional about making sure that Infinity is a place where the youth feel welcomed. One of the first activities that we did with the youth this year was to have them create a handprint. On that handprint they wrote their name and an adjective that communicated that they were special; someone of value. We then put these up on the wall under a banner that reads "Infinity ... A Place Where You Belong." Now every time they come to Infinity they have a visible reminder of who they truly are. They are someone who is unique and of considerable worth. They are someone created in God's image and they are loved.

Without a doubt I know that God's got some great things in store for us this year at Infinity. I can't wait to see how the year unfolds.