



# *The Bishop's Journal*

## **It's not about us**



**O**n a couple of occasions this past summer I was able to visit the Kitchener-Waterloo Conference Habitat for Humanity build site. Each time, I left with a huge smile on my face and a warm glow in my heart. The spirit of the place was infectious. People were excited! They were enjoying themselves! Good fellowship, good fun and plenty of good hard work. There were men and women, some young and some not so young, some skilled and others not so skilled. But they all worked together as a harmonious unit. Everyone had a job to do. All were welcome. Everyone's contributions were valued and appreciated.

One of the volunteers described it this way. "We have all these people working together – expressing their faith together – contributing whatever they can toward achieving a common goal. It's church work without the politics and quarrelling! It's church work the way it's supposed to be!"

His comments set me to thinking. What made this particular experience of "church work" different from that which we typically experience? What kept all those volunteers coming back day after day, after day? I think it's the focus. Habitat's work is totally and completely other-directed. It's all about serving God and serving our neighbour. That's the sole agenda and that's where most of the energy gets directed. It all flows outward.

Of course, that's the way it's always supposed to be in the church. But is that actually the case? Sadly, I suspect not. No, in spite of the pious things we say, an awful lot of the church's energy and attention is actually directed toward serving ourselves - our likes and dislikes, our needs and wants, our cares and concerns. And are there ever a lot of them! No wonder there's so much bickering and grumbling!

In the past two years, countless Eastern Synod congregation have experienced gifts of renewal and new life through the establishment of Community Ministry Initiatives. They've set up food and clothing banks, community gardens and out-of-the-cold shelters. They've sponsored low-income housing initiatives; youth support networks and HIV/AIDS awareness programmes. They've hosted community health fairs, conversation circles with new Canadians and senior support programmes. What a powerful witness! What a powerful testimony of our belief in the power of the Gospel to shine brightly in the midst of so much darkness!

From time to time, we all need to be reminded that the church does not exist to meet the needs of its present membership. We exist for others. In fact, as Kelly Fryer reminded us at our recent Synod Assembly, the church may be the only organization on the planet that exists entirely for the sake of those people who don't yet belong to it! We exist to serve others with the Gospel of reconciliation and hope that has been entrusted to us, a gift to be shared for the world's salvation.

Surprisingly, in answering that call, we end up receiving much, much more in return. Through our service we experience a profound encounter with the Christ who has promised to be present within those of his children who are often considered to be the least!

The real work of the church isn't about us! It's about God. It's about others. We dare not forget it.

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