

The URBAN EDGE

It's messy

PHOTO BY MAX BÖHME ON UNSPLASH

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Life has become so complicated these days. Gone are the simpler days where a rotary phone hung on the wall, ringing a few times a day. You'd pick it up not knowing who might say hello on the other end. Then you'd plan a time to sit face to face, drink coffee, and pour out your life. And also to listen.

These days even that which appears simple is not. Even spending a few minutes on Instagram scrolling through memes, pictures, and some sappy quotes is complicated. In the background your preferences and interests are being mined in order to target you with an advertising campaign. They want to get into your mind. It appears simple but it's complicated.

Early in ministry I realized that simple solutions to complex problems were no solution at all. When it comes to poverty people have proffered all kinds of simple solutions. We need housing! It's about abolishing racism! It's about education - people who are educated climb out of poverty! It seems like many of these "simple solutions" are offered with a sort of condescending tone. Like, don't you get it?? It's obvious! You know the people I am talking about. Awkwardly, many of the self-assured proponents of simple solutions don't agree with each other.

This past winter we've been seeing some of this around the issue of homeless folks sleeping in bus shelters during our cold Winnipeg nights. You'd have to be pretty callous to ignore the problem, so indeed everyone seems to be talking about this. And simple solutions abound. Homeless shelters should be taking them in! What about churches? Schools are empty at night, why not that?

If the root of the problem was simply the lack of a home, maybe we could just open up every church, school, and public facility for the homeless so they didn't have to freeze at night and then, voila, the problem would be solved. If your simple answer was, "It's racism!" you would seek to uproot any sign of racism - and you would see it everywhere. If you said it's education you might start an education awareness campaign to address the problem. For some the simple answer doesn't go very far beyond, "People need to take responsibility."

All of these things have some merit but taken on their own, will focusing on them exclusively lead to solutions that work? Take something like "taking responsibility" for instance. It's my least favourite in the list, because it tends to lack a deeper understanding of the reason that folks end up homeless, but you

can't say that taking responsibility, at some point, is not part of the solution. I mean, when you see people who end up leaving street life, it frequently, in my experience, has a lot to do with taking responsibility. But it's not only taking responsibility. It's addressing the pain in their lives. It's education. It's relationships that are supportive. It is a multivariate path to the life people dream of.

There are many factors, and no one set of factors is true across the board. My point is not to make the waters so muddy that you throw up your hands and say "I give up.... there's nothing we can do." My point is to say it is complicated, and providing simple diagnoses to complex problems will lead to solutions that just don't work and end up leading to more harm in the long term.

At some point we need to recognize that it is the coming together of all the fine points that brings about real solutions. All the points of light must zero in on the complex problem - honoring the fact that it takes the insights of many to ameliorate the suffering of the few. This means that we don't get solutions to complex problems without a community that is rich in relationship and good communication.

Years ago one of our youth struggled with homelessness. One of the effects of his homelessness was that his feet deteriorated to the point that he could barely walk. Between frostbite, and never being able to take his shoes off, he was walking around in constant pain. One of our staff took him to a podiatrist for help. His feet

looked horrible from his homelessness but the doctor, in one awkward moment, held his feet in his hands in the most intimate way. It was like he wanted to communicate something deeper. The doctor looked up at the young man and said, "Do you feel that?" The young man nodded vigorously. The doctor replied, "Do you know what that is?" The young man, who had definitely felt something said, "No, what was that?" The doctor simply replied, "That was love."

It was this intimate moment, where one doctor who was a Jesus follower did one simple act of kindness, which became one ray in the gathering light that would help this young man in a deeper way. The doctor didn't become a loud advocate for foot hugs or something like that. He knew what he was doing was just one simple thing. The key though, that it was about him bridging the gap between himself and this young man in this simple act of mercy.

We don't believe that complex problems can be solved by simple one-size-fits-all solutions but we do believe that small acts of mercy can become a part of the big story of transformation that so many communities need. So if we all do the small things God calls us to; together our world will be changed.



Kent Dueck
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

BLESSINGS IN THE MESS

Three rabbis are sitting around discussing Talmud. One of them quotes a certain opinion, which he says was stated by Rabbi Yochanan. The second concurs, but the third and youngest insists that it was actually stated by Rabbi Samuel. The two older men tell him he must be wrong, but he's adamant.

The argument rages on, getting more and more heated, until suddenly the heavens open and a great voice booms out,

"HE IS RIGHT. IT WAS RABBI SAMUEL, NOT RABBI YOCHANAN!"

The heavens close again, and the three sit in stunned silence for a moment. And then the oldest Rabbi says,

" Well, so now it is two against two..."

That joke encapsulates something I love about the Jewish tradition - they wrestle with God. In fact, as some might remember from Sunday School, that's literally what the name "Israel" means. There's an honesty and a directness that you find in the story of the Children of Israel that speaks of genuine relationship - a relationship that gave them the freedom and confidence to enter into that wrestle. They believed there was one true God, and that God was for them, and responsive, like a good parent. I don't think that relationship could have been sustained throughout millennia without a faith like that.

It's a faith that resulted in a story and a people who survived against remarkable odds. I've never met a modern day Hittite or Babylonian, but the Jews are with us to this day. That uniqueness is apparent when you

read the history they wrote about themselves. While the prevailing pattern of ancient cultures was to write histories that glorified (and exaggerated) their triumphs, the Jewish story can seem at times like pretty much a recounting of how things went wrong - and how God was faithful in spite of it.

It seems like if you are committed to living within "God's story," being honest and genuine is non-optional. This theme got real to me recently when Harvey, a "hood pastor" on ICYA's community outreach team, was asked to do a funeral for a young, gang-involved man in our community. Somehow the guy made some street-level mistake and when an attempt by the gang to punish this "sin" went too far, it ended his life. Harvey asked my son and I to provide some music at the funeral, so, without thinking about it too much we chose some songs and headed down to the chapel.

It was not a funeral like I have ever experienced before. The mix of family and gang members, past and current, made for a high-tension situation. At one point in the ceremony there was an outbreak of yelling, cursing, and crying in the lobby. A number of family members ran out of the service to enter the fray but as far as we could tell the best thing for my son and I to do was to just keep on singing those worship songs.

We happened to be singing a song that has grown popular in churches lately, called "The Blessing." It is basically an adaptation of a scripture that I have heard recited as a benediction since I was a kid in church. "The Lord bless you and keep you, and make his face shine upon you and give you his perfect peace." The lyric rises to a pronouncement of God's favour on "your

family and your children and their children, for a thousand generations." It follows with what seemed, in that moment, to be an endless repetition of the phrase, "He is **FOR** you!"

It was hard to sing those words in that context. It led me into an odd, almost combative moment of prayer. I found myself wrestling with God. Am I to believe, Lord, in this context of urban poverty and extreme generational suffering, that You are **FOR** the people I'm singing this song to? What evidence is there for that? And how am I supposed to believably sing them a promise of generations of blessing to come? I found myself praying a prayer that, had it been out loud, might have sounded dangerously close to calling God out. "You better get down here! You are needed! These people need you to show up, now!"

Maybe that's exactly what God wants, for us to know our inadequacy and to call for help? Or maybe I was awkwardly forcing my impoverished understanding of blessing onto the situation? It's too easy to default to a view of blessing that simply equals a lack of suffering, and a desire for all the things that make life easy, and comfortable. And if there is one precious lesson that the North End will teach you time and again, it is that there is more blessing in facing your pain in the middle of the messy collision of all the people who love you than there will ever be in sterile isolation surrounded by nice things. My hunch is that it is somewhere around there - in the honest and painful wrestle with a God who promises to be in the mess with us - that we find the blessing.

John Janzen
DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT



Walking in the Mess



Mel had just woken up and was feeling "dope sick". If she didn't get her first fix of the day soon she would begin to experience excruciating withdrawals. She prepared a shot of "down" (a dangerous mix of heroin and fentanyl) and looked for a vein to shoot up. Looking me in the eye she told me about a friend of hers who had just died of an overdose the day before - while injecting herself with the very same drug. The look in the eye of a person battling serious drug addiction is a mix of pain, resignation, hopelessness - and at times, a plea for help. Our friends know it's killing them, they know it's keeping them from getting healthy and having a relationship with their children, with their families, but knowledge and will power alone are not nearly enough. "I love my kids!" our friend Wayne insisted to me the other day with tears in his eyes. "I want to be there for them - but this addiction, it's just so f----- hard! Promise me," he continued later in our conversation after sharing with me about another recent attempt on his life. "Promise me that you will go to my funeral and tell the

people there that I was a good person - with a heart for people."

As one of four community ministers (lately I've been using the term "hood pastor") on our team here at Inner City Youth Alive, it's not uncommon for us to find ourselves visiting friends in a trap house (drug house) with a bucket of KFC, checking up on friends experiencing homelessness in a tent down by the river, visiting a single mom and her kids in a Manitoba Housing apartment, or going for a drive and praying with a young gang member who just got released from prison. "You're a pastor?" is a question I often get asked. "What are you doing here?" I was asked recently in a room full of addicts shooting up. "So you go around talking to bad people?" one woman asked. "Well, just because a person is struggling with addiction doesn't make them a bad person," I replied.

One of the consistencies in our ministries is that we so often encounter people in pain. Our society often teaches us to avoid facing our pain

(and the trauma experiences behind it) at all costs, to do whatever we can to escape the pain, to numb the pain. That's one of the main reasons that people end up abusing substances and becoming addicts. And yet we have built relationships with so many people who wish that they could be free from their addictions. We've sat and listened and prayed with friends as they cried, begging for help to overcome their addictions.

"What would it take?" I asked a friend the other day. She has struggled with serious addiction since she was twelve. "What would it take to get clean?"

"Jail," was her reply. Everyone nodded. I didn't point out that she has frequently been to jail.

"So, are you wanted (by the police) right now?" I asked her.

"No"

"Well, why don't you punch me in the face right now and I'll charge you with assault," I replied, smiling.

Everyone burst out laughing.

Of course, getting "clean" in jail is very different than learning how to live life sober upon being released. How do you stay sober if you are homeless upon your release, if your family is comprised of homeless addicts and literally 99% of the people you know are addicts?! How can you even begin to imagine a different life? How do you "raise the floor" for a person who has been in and out of jail for the past 15 years? Someone who has been repeatedly victimized, experienced the traumatic loss of loved ones, witnessed horrific violence, even carved the words "F--k Love" into their arm?

This pandemic has exposed so many gaps and shortcomings in the systems, structures and institutions we have built to care for the most vulnerable in our society (i.e. long-term care homes, homeless shelters...) and I believe that it has greatly exacerbated the challenges

faced by those seeking help with their addictions. Having walked alongside friends who have desperately sought to get help (i.e. detox, treatment, income assistance...), we have repeatedly witnessed how difficult it is to attain help – even if one has supports and help with rides to appointments, phone calls, access to voice mail, encouragement, food... For those without, it's almost impossible.


Those struggling with addiction desperately need safe, caring and supportive places to live as they seek help. They need counselling to address trauma and space to grieve. We could open a half dozen more treatment facilities like the Bruce Oake Recovery Centre in Winnipeg and it wouldn't be enough. What role can we play in providing loving and caring community for those who need to cut ties with family and friends in order to stay sober? As followers of Jesus, we know how finding ones identity in Christ renews our sense of value and worth and can bring about healing and transformation. God desire is for all to experience forgiveness, restoration and wholeness in our lives.

Our team recently watched a training video by clinical psychologist Dr. Henry Cloud who has taught extensively on the psychology and neurology of how people respond in times of crisis. He maintains that humanity was designed for structure and healthy connectedness, and that when we lose our sense of "control" and our normal ability to make choices in times of crisis, our tendency is to "unplug" and resign ourselves to a kind of "learned helplessness". As strategies for coping he advises that we create structure and prioritized our connections with others. But what happens when your life is always chaotic? How can we come alongside those for whom Covid-19 barely registers as a blip on their radar in comparison to the daily crisis of trying to survive?

Harvey Rempel
COMMUNITY MINISTER



BIG UPDATES INCOMING!



**This year we will be
launching two new programs
on top of the other ongoing
ICYA programs.**

KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR UPDATES AS WE FILL YOU IN ON THE DETAILS SOON!

Visit: [ICYA.ca](https://www.icya.ca) to subscribe to our e-mail newsletters

Volunteers Needed!

FOR

MAINTENANCE PROJECTS

We have a number of building projects that our facilities manager could use some help with. Experience and knowledge of tools and basic repair is an asset, but not required for all projects.

We could also use help with minor vehicle details, including cleaning vehicles and basic upkeep (checking air pressure, lights, etc). Experience with vehicle mechanics could open the door to bigger projects if interested.

Contact our volunteer coordinator to assess our needs and how your skills or interest in learning might match. Full disclosure, our volunteer coordinator barely knows the difference between a hammer and a screwdriver, but can get you in touch with the facilities manager, who knows that and so much more!

PLEASE NOTE: Changing COVID-19 spread prevention restrictions may impact the format and availability of any of the above opportunities.

For more information email volunteer@icya.ca

JOIN OUR MONTHLY MINISTRY PARTNER LIST

We're so incredibly blessed to have people like you giving and praying for our ministry. Each year we go through cycles of gifts coming in large batches then quieting down for other seasons.

We invite you to consider registering as a monthly supporter. Your ongoing support goes a long way to help us plan out and bring stability to our many ministry activities throughout the year.

Often the spring and summer months are the quietest for donations

IT'S SUPER EASY TO SIGN-UP!

1

Register online at ICYA.CA/DONATE as a monthly supporter

2

Fill out the attached donor card and return to us (postage paid)

3

Call our office Monday to Friday (8:30-5:00): 204-582-8779

QUESTIONS? CALL OR EMAIL US: INFO@ICYA.CA



DONATIONS NEEDED!

Do you have an iPad at home that you are no longer using? We are in need to iPads for helping track attendance and information for drop-in and camp participants.

Staff Needed!

See full job descriptions and how to apply when you visit ICYA.ca/careers

SUMMER INTERNSHIPS:

We've got a number of summer internship positions in both program and administrative roles. Do you know any college-aged students looking for meaningful employment during the summer months (full-time) and/or during the school semesters (part-time)?

BRIDGE DROP-IN TEAM MEMBER:

Full-time ministry positions serving kids and youth (ages 5 to 19) in our community drop-in space.

PROGRAM COORDINATOR:

We're seeking an individual with a keen eye for details and a friendly, team-oriented spirit to help bring support to all our programs.

COMMUNITY MINISTRY DIRECTOR:

Our Community Ministry team is seeking a director to help lead them. We're looking for a leader with a heart for inner city missions and discipleship.

COMMUNITY MINISTRY - WOMEN'S MINISTRY:

The CM team is growing and connecting with more single mothers and young women. This full-time ministry position is needed immediately.

MARKETING / COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR (PT):

ICYA is seeking a part-time marketing person to join our development team. We're seeking a team-oriented, creative individual who loves to tell meaningful stories.



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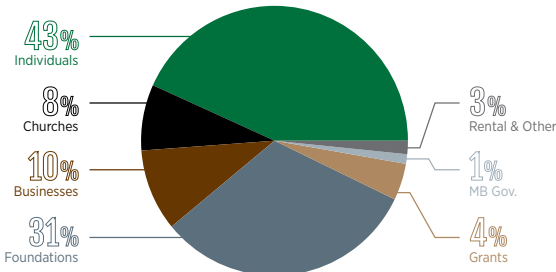
OUR MISSION

To bring hope and a future through Christ to youth and their families in the inner city.

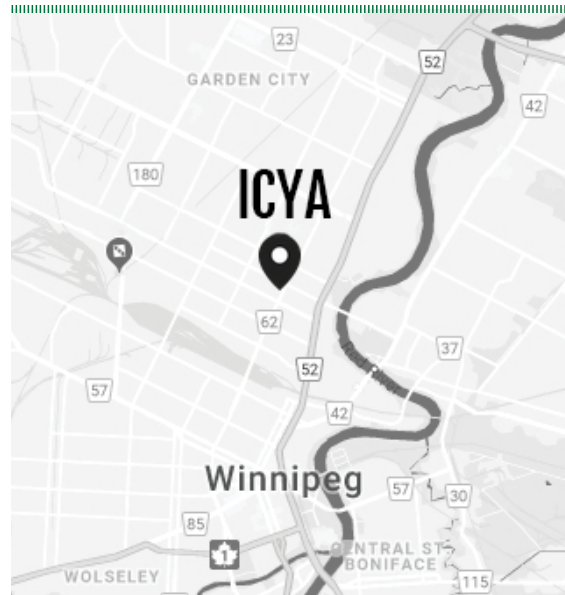
OUR PROGRAMS



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A monthly credit card donation plan is available as well.

