

Street Ministry

Colleagues,

Lutheran Urban Mission Society [LUMS] is a multiplex ecumenical venture in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The society's congregation is the broken people in Vancouver, especially those in the city's downtown "eastside." Pastor Brian Heinrich (Seminex grad '83) is called to be "street priest" in LUMS' ministry. In November '98 we visited Brian and saw LUMS "live." That word "live" fits in more ways than one. Brian's words below are taken from the LUMS Newsletter, Spring 2000.

Peace & Joy!

Ed

"Street Ministry"

The first few words of our LUMS Mission Statement read "In response to the gospel..." then go on to describe what we as a serving community do. But it is those first few words that I want to focus on briefly here. Words too readily overlooked in our hurry to get on with the rest.

All the energy, resources, time, enthusiasm, the whole work & mission of LUMS is evoked, is a response. Response supposes a preceding initiative that stimulates a reaction. That prime mover is the Gospel. LUMS is a reaction of the Gospel. It is because of what God has done in & through Jesus of Nazareth that LUMS has occurred.

This is not incidental – this is intrinsically fundamental. On the surface anyone watching might be unable to distinguish how any of the ministries of LUMS are distinctively different from

many of the other social services available to the people of Vancouver's downtown eastside. But what spawned LUMS was and is the Holy Spirit.

Our starting place is not the social action we do, but instead the gracious loving welcoming God who manifests Himself in the life, death & resurrection of Jesus the Anointed.

This is important because it is our heartbeat. It is our Source. It is what animates & enables everything we do in this neighbourhood.

It could easily be overlooked in the day to day chaos of the demands of survival among the hungry, the addicted, the homeless, the mentally ill, and those living with HIV and AIDS.

Except that folks keep asking "why?" Why do you do this? What enables you to do this? "Author, author!"

And it affects (as well as effects) how we do what we do. It is not just about the quantity, it is about the quality.

Every gesture of loving support, every soul listened to, every mouthful of food offered, and every blanket given has the Christ codicil attached to it.

This is important because it honours, & acknowledges the Divine initiative. Remember the Lukan story commonly known as the prodigal son that we often hear during this Lenten season; Luke reports that while the wayward breast-beating son is making his way homeward reciting his plea for forgiveness, the father scanning the horizon with binoculars sees him while he is still a great way off, then runs out to greet and welcome the child home again. The point is that the father is ceaselessly scanning, searching the horizon for the earliest slightest hint of what might look like his beloved child. Like all parents of

the disappeared he is hoping against hope and never gives up. Then the old man hurries out to embrace the truant child. He takes the initiative and goes to the child not waiting in parental dignity to be approached, but gushing his pleasure at the return before the child has the opportunity to get a word in edgewise about his about-face. This describes the Divine zealous love for us.

This is the character of the God of Jesus. Who before we speak, hears us (Psalm). This is the God we announce by our caring presence in the pain and chaos of the downtown eastside. If we were to press some of the folk we serve to describe the God LUMS proclaims in Word, Sacraments and service they might say "The God of LUMS is one Who welcomes indiscriminately to His feast, the hungry, the cold, the addicted, the HIV positive, the homosexual and transsexual folk, others with psychiatric difficulties, wounded first nations peoples, and assorted other social outcasts and disenfranchised." Sounds like "good news to the poor"!!!

"Why?" "Why do we do these acts of love?" The action of God provokes like [action] in us. So to echo the Apostle, We love because God has first loved us.

And that impacts on how we do what we do. It is not enough just to engage in acts of justice. It is how we engage in these actions. Each is done "in the Name of," not owning the credit ourselves but telling by how we do where & why the credit is truly due. The very practical frontline nitty gritty work of LUMS is mission, is evangelical because it is animated by and perpetuates the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

In a future installment – reflections on the following consequent phrases in our mission statement: "in response to the Gospel and the needs we see around us ..."

Your street priest,
Pastor Brian