

FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE

Welcoming Arms & Society of St. Vincent de Paul

By Stephen Somerville

Judging by some rudimentary statistics and scant anecdotal evidence, it seems that most people in Aurora can afford nice things. Aurora abounds with lots of nice houses, flourishing summer children's sports programs, and according to Wikipedia, 'In 2010, average household income in Aurora was \$155,463, making it one of Canada's most affluent towns.'

So, on the surface, everything looks fine. But this veneer is deceiving.

There are a considerable amount of people in Aurora who cannot afford to purchase the basic necessities for their loved ones.

These parents could be your next-door neighbours, your friends or your co-workers.

Thankfully however, there are two local groups who, because of your donations, make our community a better and happier place in which to live.

The weekly Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church bulletin contained the annual reports of these two organizations last week.

The first group is called the Welcoming Arms Ministry.

Their Mission Statement: 'In loving partnership, we seek to be the hands and feet of Christ promoting human, physical and spiritual well-being within our community'.

This registered charity is an ecumenical outreach partnership serving those in need in Aurora.

Originally, there were four Aurora churches involved; Aurora United, Our Lady of Grace Catholic, St. Andrew's Presbyterian and Trinity Anglican.

After much discussion and many meetings over the years, they joined forces in October 2006 according to a church circular, to 'jointly continue what each had been doing separately in the way of benevolence and thus be able to offer more in services, resources, support, as well as providing connections to other community based help groups.'

This group was strengthened with the addition of Aurora Cornerstone Church in 2009 and Community Bible Church in 2010.

Each church contributes monthly towards the operating costs at Welcoming Arms. They also receive donations from individuals and community groups.

100% of the monthly donations are used to assist the needy in Aurora.

The Welcoming Arms Centre is staffed by dedicated volunteers from the six partner churches.

According to the annual report, this group 'helps those who don't know where to turn.'

'We help direct these individuals to the right resources or we provide actual assistance to them. We provide our 'visitors' with a warm greeting, a caring, listening ear, encouragement and hope wrapped in a sense of dignity.'

I was astonished at some of the figures and the number of lives reached while reading the 2012 annual report:

'Had 1,825 visits (8 per cent increase over 2011) from 2,755 adults and 2,027 children.

'Provided \$85,206 in food vouchers, bus tickets, gift cards and special assistance (medical/dental).

The Welcoming Arms Centre, currently located at 44 Metcalfe Avenue is open Mondays from 9.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m.; Wednesdays from 6.30 p.m. to 8.30 p.m. and Thursdays from 9.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m.

As the Annual report concludes, 'We provide an informal atmosphere for our 'visitors' offering a warm greeting, a caring and listening ear, encouragement and hope, wrapped in a sense of dignity.'

The second group is the Society of St. Vincent de Paul conference of Our Lady of Grace Parish which has a mission to live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice and joy.

A Society of St. Vincent de Paul conference has been operating in the parish since 1966. The conference currently has six members, as well as a number of committee volunteers who help out with special projects. The group meets monthly and schedule home visitations as needed.

Home visitations have been at the core and work of Vincentians.

They assist individuals and families in need within the Aurora community by providing food vouchers, bus tickets and other forms of emergency financial assistance (i.e. assistance with rent or utility bills, medical or dental care expenses).

They also co-ordinate the annual Christmas Hamper program. In 2012 they prepared 102 hampers for local families, assisting a total of 157 adults and 116 children.

They also register children for the Marygrove Camp and Camp Ozanam; subsidized, residential camps for children from families that are experiencing financial or domestic hardships. This spring, they registered three boys and four girls for the camp.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a registered charity and 100 per cent of the donations that are given to the Society go the direct service. They rely entirely on donations from members of the parish and the community.

Contact one of the parish offices if you are interesting in volunteering for either of these two organizations.

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