



MY NAME IS EJAY TUPE AND I AM THE URBAN
MISSIONARY IN DOWNTOWN TORONTO FOR MISSION
CANADA. I SERVE AND LIVE IN DOWNTOWN TORONTO
WITH MY FAMILY. THE URBAN CORE OF TORONTO IS MY
MISSION FIELD. I SERVE TO SHOW THE
TRANSFORMATIVE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST
THROUGH WORD AND DEED TO MY RICH AND
VULNERABLE NEIGHBOURS WHO LIVE IN THE CITY.
THESE ARE SOME OF OUR STORIES.

CATCHING OUR BREATH

REFLECTING ON THE YEAR

FOODBANK TURNS 1

WINTER IS COMING

PREPARING TO SERVE THE UNDERHOUSED

OUR CITIES MATTER





It's amazing how fast time seems to pass when caught in the rhythm of what I can only describe as a holy adventure. This time last year, I accidentally stumbled upon the African refugee crisis where my original intentions of simply dropping food from the food bank, transformed into becoming an important piece amongst a complicated machine, an odd collection of people formulating into a team helping displaced newcomers, living in church sanctuaries. We only officially closed the last emergency shelter site in February earlier this year. Yet the aftermath still required work as we had to figure out how to sort all the materials used and appropriately support those who have been moved to other cities.

Earlier this year in January, we had an opportunity to go to the Philippines and introduce Gemma to her other culture. We spent some time in ministry in a church called People of Grace, teaching about generational trauma and emerging out of the shackles of culture among the Filipino people. It was remarkable to teach in the culture of my childhood and share about my own growth and challenges as a person of faith. Cheryl was also able to connect with international ministry partners who intentionally spent time with us and encouraged our ministry with the church.





We spent the spring season advocating for the city to recognize the people who sacrificed working endless hours serving the refugees. We asked for people's hours to be compensated by a modicum amount from the city (still amounted to a 1.4 million dollar ask). The reimbursement we asked for is not a get-rich-quick scheme. It was simply an admonition from the city churches did worthy work in serving the refugees and deserved some compensation for countless hours. In my mind, what they did was simply sacred, something Jesus would be proud of.



Considering all the stress involved with making all this work being one part of a very complicated project, I've made new friends (see photo below) who are also passionate for caring for those in the margins. We served together with passion and intensity and even at times were at odds with one another. And yet our resolve to serve gave us strength, encouragement, and hope. After closing the last site and advocating with the city, we were simply tired. Our summer season brought some much-needed rest. as serving in the city is a marathon, not a sprint. The stories on this newsletter are our reflection of us having a moment to pause and recognize the busyness of the last year in the Grace God has bestowed upon us as we serve others.



Crisis in the city members (left to right): Rev. Alexa Gilmour, Adi Yemane, Nadine Miller, Pastor Eddie Jjumba and me.



Earlier this year, the administrator for Stone Church Danforth site asked me for ideas on how to honour the volunteers of the food bank, considering it was approaching the one-year mark since opening. What was a pleasant surprise as the busyness of the year made it all feel like it was five years. But indeed, the Danforth foodshare is only one year old and it has been and still is an incredibly beautiful expression of serving our neighbours with dignity and great compassion. There are a few times where we've had people cry in the food bank not because of any big gesture that we have done but because they were surprised by the great dignity and care they received. They notice that atmosphere is different with volunteers who are gracious and kind. We trust people to pick and choose what food they need instead of deciding for them. What seems like a small thing for us has moved some of our food bank friends to tears because we deeply believe in and affirm their autonomy and worthiness. For those of us of the Faith, this should almost be an automatic assumption because all human beings bear the image of God.

I would rather that we lived in a world where food banks are unnecessary. I wish we lived in a world where there was enough food for everybody. Maybe this internal conflict is nothing but an echo of God's future plan, the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. A kingdom where nobody goes hungry. But for now, we can only dispense but a small portion of Grace in the form of a food bank. But I also know that there are some who come for more than food. I spoke with one person a few weeks ago who told me that sometimes she signs up to come even though she doesn't need food just so she can have a chat and receive prayer and encouragement from the volunteers. What a beautiful thing for her to say that our food bank gives more than just food. That she considers this place as also a source of spiritual and emotional nourishment.

It seems others are beginning to share with friends of our little food bank as we have started to get an influx of new people the past few months. It's quite amazing to see the Holy Spirit at work where last year I wasn't sure how to even run a food bank and here we are now serving over 200 people.





As part of the post-emergency shelter work, some of us have split into working teams anticipating future problems regarding homelessness in the city. The group has decided to allow me to chair the emergency crisis winter response group because we are not confident that the city will have a comprehensive response regarding our under-housed friends in the looming winter. It is an overwhelming task as many tent communities are constantly growing in different areas of the city. Our daughter Gemma was in a soccer program this past summer in a program run by one of the community centres in the city and two tents were in the same field that seem to be a mainstay. This is not unusual as almost every park in the city also has this same scenario as shelters still report over 100% occupancy, and average 1-bedroom apartments still hover around \$2500+ a month making it unaffordable for our financially challenged friends to get any housing. The homelessness situation is a systemic issue that's at the forefront of many people including our city officials. Earlier this year, fellow neighbours and myself organized a "community matters" event to gather people along with city officials to talk about possible housing solutions. Our mayor Olivia Chow was gracious enough to also join us and share her thoughts and love for our community as she started her community work after university in this neighbourhood. We pray that these gatherings can help spark the imagination and willingness of people in the city to move towards creative solutions to help those without a home as it is an endemic issue spreading around the country.

Earlier this week I received a collect call from jail (not an uncommon thing for our household) and essentially my friend told me that he thinks he subconsciously committed a crime to get himself arrested as he was tired of sleeping outside. This desperation is felt by many as its almost impossible to find housing if you're poor. I have been part of some dialogues regarding housing solutions. Some creative solutions are similar to what's been done in Peterborough (tiny homes), but as we all keep talking about the issues at hand, we realize that nothing will be done quickly enough to sort out this winter.

I'm beginning to pivot on a new strategy with some friends to figure out some respite strategies to provide hot food, hot drinks and movable warming stations for this coming winter. Please pray as we are trying to figure out this plan.















Final Words

We love our city, and as we continue to live and journey towards being peace-builders, placemakers and gatherers in our neighbourhood, we realize that this posture of serving the city shouldn't be an exclusively Toronto thing. As I've started to reflect on the Our City Toronto Urban Conferences we produce, we're joyful to see others imagine, dream and enact their own gatherings in their own respective cities. Earlier this year, Kevin Rogers produced Our City Windsor and later this year, friends in Calgary will be launching their own "un-conference" inspired by the Our City moniker. I'm excited to see this passion grow in other cities because truly, our cities matter. Below is an article submitted to the Pentecostal Testimony to be part of the upcoming publication. It captures the urgency for ministry in Canadian cities and perhaps, a lightning rod for Pentecostals to revisit our past as the lens for imagining our future.

Before you read the early release of the article below, we express our gratitude for your support and prayers. We covet them, we need them and more importantly, we feel them. I've never seen the city so fragile in this season with violent acts happening almost daily and crime at its highest levels in history. We are committed to being part of showing a different path, but we cannot and do not do this alone. You are all part of this incredible journey and we are incredibly grateful that you are with us

5 "Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. 6 Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! 7 And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare." - Jer. 29:5-7



Cheryl and Gemma successfully planting a garden on the city planter in front of our apartment

OUR CITIES MATTER

Pentecostal roots

Like many other denominations and their historical beginnings, our Pentecostal movement also started in the city. The mission on Queen St., East led by Ellen Hebden was one of the most unlikely places for Canadian Pentecostalism similar to the American Pentecostal movement starting with William Seymour in Los Angeles, California. To society at large, they were unqualified, of lesser stock, yet they were ordained by God to help usher a new movement in church history. Ellen Hebden, was a woman in a patriarchal city (there were heated discussion as to women's toilets should belong in the library)¹. William Seymour, was a legally blind black man in 1906 when racism and slavery were still a mainstay in the United States of America. These two pioneers were unlikely leaders with a vision for ministry expressions dissonant with societal norms. William Seymour was insistent that the work of the Holy Spirit was a uniting force amid the racial divisions of his time. An LA Times article openly mocked their gatherings in an article titled, "Weird Babel of Tongues, New sect of fanatics is breaking loose..." where the interracial gatherings were mocked and their worship were described as "...howlings of worshippers, swaying back and forth in a nerve-racking attitude of prayer and supplication"2. What they could not see was a prophetic vision of God's imagination where superficial racial divisions, the"...'color line' was washed away by the blood (of Jesus).³ What was unlawful and unimaginable to society at large during that time was in fact a prophetic vision of God's future plan for where "...every nation, tribe, people and language stand(ing) before the throne and before the Lamb."4 A foretaste of the future kingdom, manifesting within the city.

Our fellowship's history traces its beginnings in a small Queen East mission on 651 Queen Street East where Ellen Hebden later describes an atmosphere where "the peace of God filled the place". People encountered God's presence, the work of the Holy Spirit manifesting in their gathering, and commissioned others who would later become future Pentecostal leaders. Toronto is the historical epicentre of "...the historical Pentecostal outpouring in Canada". What would it look like if we

Women were specifically excluded from any urban projects in the city to the point where even the board of a new public library, north of Hebden Mission refused to furnish a public toilet for women inside the building

¹ Flanagan, Maureen A. Constructing the Patriarchal City: Gender and the Built Environments of London, Dublin, Toronto, and Chicago, 1870s into the 1940s. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018. p.190

² "Weird Babel of Tongues - New Sect of Fanatics Is Breaking Loose." 1906. Oldmagazinearticles.com. April 18, 1906. http://www.oldmagazinearticles.com/azusa-street-revival-pdf.

³ Bartleman, Frank, and Horz Pentersost name to Los Anneles. What Really Happened at "Azuza Street?" Northridge, California: Voice Christian Publications Inc., 4962, p.54

⁴ Rev. 7:9

⁵ Sloos, William. "The Story of James and Ellen Hebden: The First Family of Pentecost in Canada." *Pneuma* 32, no. 2 (2010): 181–202. doi:10.1163/157007410X509100. p.191

⁶ ibid. Sloos, William. p.182

⁷ ibid. Slcos, William. p.182

revisited our past as the lens for our future? Could we begin to see the city as the launching pad for ministry once again?

The numbers

Despite being the second largest country in the world⁸, nearly 3 out of four Canadians live in Urban centres.⁹ Our immigration targets project an influx of almost 1.5 million people from 2024-26 with the vast majority moving into urban centres.¹⁰ Our cities will not only be home to the vast majority of Canadians, but the diversity in our cities are intentionally designed in correllation to our immigration targets; meaning every nation, every tribe, people and language are moving into our cities. As my old mentor Rick Tobias would regularly say to me, "God's plan may have started in a garden, but it ends in the city".¹¹

What does this mean?

Our cities represent both an incredible opportunity and challenge as though country wide, 53.3% indicated that they are Christian in the last 2021 census, 12 less people identify as Christian in Urban Centres. 13 Our cities are a mission field! Could we imagine what it would like for the Holy Spirit to ordain unlikely leaders once again? Could a new dynamic work of the Spirit manifest a glimpse of a church being a prophetic model of God's transcendent design for the future Kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven? Could we imagine and craft our future as Pentecostals through the lens of our past? May this be a Holy challenge for us to dream once more for God's spirit to be poured in the city once again... Because, OUR CITIES MATTER!

In 2021, nearly three in four Canadians (73.7%) lived in one of Canada's large urban centres, up from 73.2% five years earlier.

¹⁰ N.d. Canada.Ca. Accessed September 6, 2024. https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/transparency/committees/cimm-nov-07-2023/immigration-levels-plan-2024-2026.html.

The 2024-2026 Immigration Levels Plan, tabled in Parliament on November 1, 2023, projects stabilized levels in permanent resident admissions with targets of 485,000 in 2024; 500,000 in 2025; and 500,000 in 2026.

¹¹ Rothenburger, Reverend Jan. n.d. "Dr. Rick Tobias: A Gentle Giant." Ysm.Ca. Accessed September 6, 2024. https://www.ysm.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/YSM_UrbanLights_Fall2022_WEB.pdf.

Rick Tobias is the former CEO of Yonge Street Mission, champion of Urban Ministry and Leadership. Recently passed away May 18, 2022.

¹² "The Canadian Census: A Rich Portrait of the Country's Religious and Ethnocultural Diversity." n.d. Statcan.Gc.Ca. Accessed September 6, 2024. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026b-eng.pdf?st=cSDYCt9n. p.1

13 ibid. p.16

The proportion of the population who reported a non-Christian religion was seven times higher in large urban centres than in rural areas

⁸ "Geography." 2011. Statcan.Gc.Ca. September 30, 2011. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-402-x/2011000/chap/geo/geo-eng.htm.

⁹ Government of Canada, and Statistics Canada. 2022. "Canada's Large Urban Centres Continue to Grow and Spread." Statcan.Gc.Ca. February 9, 2022. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220209/dg220209b-eng.htm