



PRAIRIE ASSOCIATE LED TO INNER CITY PASTORAL MINISTRY



By Coby Veeken ~ Born in January 1940 – a cold and white day, unusual in The Netherlands – it was a sign of much more to come. My official schooling ended at Grade 9, proficient in three foreign languages. In August 1958, there was a call for help from Canada! An Aunt, with four children ages 3-10, was dying of brain cancer. So at the end of October, I arrived in Prince George, B.C. Yes, more snow! and a comfortable warm home – compared to Holland with no central heat in those days. The agreement was to stay two years until the youngest child would start school.

Then I married, had seven children, and finished high school by correspondence and evening classes. In my forties, I studied theology. What a great blessing that was. Liberation and wonderful insights. Post-Vatican II church was exciting, indeed.

Sr. Fay Trombley was one of the professors, and, after graduation, invited us to “come and see” regarding association with the Sisters in her congregation. Five of the original associates are still here! Association has enriched my life through friendships and liturgies so unique.

When family no longer required time and energy, a new ministry floated my way. Sr. Marion Garneau wondered whether our parish could sponsor a lunch for 250 people with Edmonton’s Inner City Pastoral Ministry in a couple of weeks’ time. I visited their community of Emmanuel, “a church without walls,” the next Sunday to see, to learn. The worship service and nutritious lunch take place at Bissell Centre, a gathering place for inner city residents and homeless people. That invitation resulted in a semi-annual event for our parish, and I was hooked, deciding to attend every Sunday.

My first job was assistant dishwasher, moving on to lead dishwasher. I recruited several more lead dishwashers who now sign up via e-mail to work on particular Sundays they wish to serve. Friend Jeanne handles the e-mail communications ministry as I am not computer literate. Since Sr. Marion’s move to Saint John, I have taken over Sister’s position behind the coffee service table, keeping the

table clean from cream, sugar and coffee spills. Newly-knit items (toques, mitts, scarves) that grace the community are dispensed here.

Inner City Pastoral Ministry is an ecumenical organization. Presently, an Anglican priest is the pastor. I love the ecumenical service as I believe that is where Christian unity lives. I serve on the Board of ICPM, along with people from a dozen churches in Edmonton, representing the four sponsoring Christian churches: United, Lutheran, Anglican, and Catholic. Eighty-five-plus congregations from Edmonton and environs rotate to provide and serve the Sunday lunch of sandwiches, pickles, vegetables, fruit, and desserts. At Christmas time, our Jewish friends take on that task – God is so good!

A Lutheran church organizes Christmas sacks; and Jeanne and I organize Easter bag blessings donated by Catholic parishioners. When Lent begins, ziploc bags are handed out with a list: personal hygiene items, socks, small games, gift cards, bus tickets, chocolate, and Easter cards made by elementary students. Young Disciples (children and teens) and JETS (young and not-as-young mothers) check the bags for consistency, count and box the gifts, label for a male or a female, and transport all to the Bissell Centre during Holy Week, for disbursement during ICPM's Easter Sunday service. Extra bags are shared with inner city seniors and shelters.

I am an almost-50-year member of the Catholic Women's League, presently holding the Spiritual Development chair in my local parish CWL council. A comfortable suite attached to my daughter's house is now my home, after 38 years on a beautiful acreage. No regrets. There is a manageable garden as compared to the mammoth one on the acreage. Life is good. I am grateful. Thanks be to God who is constantly at my side.