



A narrow doorway and staircase leads to Toronto Alliance Church's current meeting place, located above a furniture store on Queen Street West in Downtown Toronto. The church hopes to purchase a new location in the future. [Photo courtesy: Toronto Alliance Church]

# Toronto Alliance Church & partners: Restoring Lives in Jesus' name

by Sandy Hazell

Everyone in life is on a journey. Plans are made, goals are set. But sometimes misfortune happens. Just like to the man who was robbed, beaten and left for dead in Luke 10," says Pastor Bill Dyck, Senior Pastor of Toronto Alliance Church (TAC). "That's the nature of evil – it's dark, powerful and destructive. It leaves people dead or nearly dead."

For the past 21 years Pastor Dyck has been committed to shining the love of Christ by helping the very marginalized of urban Toronto at TAC.

The bulk of humanity may be like the priest and the Levite who saw the beaten man, who was nearly dead, and just walked past. But TAC intentionally reaches out to those who have not heard about the Lord Jesus and are living broken lives.

TAC partners extensively with other churches to accomplish this work. Every Saturday, its doors are opened to the community for a free meal, used clothing, and non-perishable food.

Twenty-five churches partner with TAC on a rotational basis. Each congregation participates in the meal, bringing 350-400

home-made sandwiches or 8-10 crock pots of soup.

Thirty volunteers, mostly from these partner churches, serve and clear tables, assist with the distribution of used clothing or in the non-perishable food pantry, and help with dishes in the tiny kitchen (which has no stove).

More than 125 people attend the weekly Community Night, from all walks of life, from many nations.

Access to TAC, located above a furniture store at 602 Queen Street West, is only by climbing a very steep, very long set of stairs.

There are language and cultural barriers, illnesses, those who feel unlovable, some who have mental illnesses or addictions. All are hungry - very hungry. And for many, not just for food.

People who have mental illnesses often get off their medications which can lead to trouble.

"These people are sometimes unpredictable and have great difficulty controlling themselves. They get into a lot of trouble wherever they go and can cause confusion here too. They are often misunderstood. Helping them is challenging

and requires discernment; it is often a long road."

## More than just a free meal

Staff and volunteers provide a listening ear, an encouraging word, and sometimes pray with clients.

"Most people I've met are always willing to tell their story", says Denise Sweetman, of Unionville Alliance Church who has volunteered at TAC for two years. "They love to share their lives when someone takes the time to listen.

"It's a blessing to be able to offer food and conversation to the young people who attend TAC's Community Night. I know some of them have families that don't know where they are and are praying for them. It's an honour to be the answer to those desperate parent's prayers, even for one evening."

After the meal, a worship service points people to Christ and brings a message of hope.

The Saturday evening Community Night serves as a spring board into a whole world of relationships with people, many of them earnestly seeking God, and many putting their faith in Christ.

During the week, some come seeking prayer and spiritual help to wade through the complexity and heaviness of their lives. Those who are serious about getting off the street and seeking life recovery are invited to discussion groups and discipleship studies throughout the week.

TAC's parish nurse offers care, confidential health counsel, health education, advocacy, and helps connect people to community resources and congregational support networks.

Though licensed counselors are not yet available at TAC, each of the staff members invest much of their time to listen to people share their life stories, burdens and challenges.

"The excitement of life on the streets eventually wears out," explains Pastor Dyck, "but by that time addictions or mental health issues often keep people from leaving the streets."

"The dangers and daily threats to the health of individuals lead to the need for counsel, and often we are some of the very few people who will give time to listen to their concerns and sorrows."

## Challenges

One of the main challenges TAC faces is finances.

"The Lord provides for us and we regularly see His hand of provision. But we are always praying about financial issues," says Pastor Dyck.

The intensity of the need continually confronts staff at TAC - from ongoing minor requests for cash, TTC fare, and clothing to larger needs like housing. Health issues among street involved people are very common and addictions often intensify the issue.

"It's a privilege bringing compassionate help and a message of hope to these people. But the need is constant. After you have served long and hard and have little left emotionally, there are yet more requests for help. One can only do this in the grace of Christ," says Pastor Dyck.

## Re-Building for the Future

TAC's Re-Build fund-giving campaign seeks to purchase a bigger permanent facility with better accessibility for its clients in the Parkdale community of Toronto. Its desire is to be a ministry centre for the training of missional leaders and the planting of churches in the inner city.

"We want to minister effectively to the people who are here, and to maintain our commitment to the poor," says Pastor Dyck. "We are amazed at how generous and faithful others have been as they partner with us to serve the poor and marginalized in our city."

TAC desires to serve as a catalyst for those seeking front-line work with the marginalized in downtown Toronto.

"A building is only a tool for the Body

of Christ to bring the love and Good News of Jesus Christ to those in the inner city," he says.

TAC's congregation is diverse in its make-up: multi-cultural, those with resources and those without, those with education and those without, families with children along with those who have none. Pastors raise their own salaries by asking friends and families to contribute financially.

The vision and passion of TAC as a community of faith is "To be restored and made fully alive as we encounter Jesus, experience community, and extend God's love."

"Compassionate ministry is a key element of our life and service as a church. But it is often difficult, quite honestly, and stretches our hearts, our patience, and demands grace and long-suffering," he says candidly.

"Many of those we serve are not kind due to their hard life, and are very angry with everyone and with God. We often serve with no thanks, and often criticism for what we are not giving out. But we persevere because Christ persevered for us."

To learn more about Toronto Alliance Church or its Re-Build campaign, visit [www.torontoalliancechurch.ca](http://www.torontoalliancechurch.ca)

## Markham Missionary's Street Connection still going strong

The Street Connection ministry of Markham Missionary Church began about 25 years ago, when Fabian Connelly, a former safe cracker for the infamous Boyd Gang of the 1950's before the Lord got a hold of him, spoke at a Missions' meeting at our church. After telling us his story, he asked for help to feed and minister to those in need in downtown Toronto.

Our involvement grew over time as we responded to our Lord's direction in Matthew 25 to feed and clothe the needy and share the Hope that is ours when we ask Jesus to come into our lives.



Currently our converted highway coach, with only 9 of it's 24 seats left, is a 9 passenger private vehicle that can be driven with a G licence.

Our 5 teams, made up of our own members, and others from the larger community, leave our church around 5pm, ev-

ery Monday and the last Thursday of the month and head for the corner of Queen and Sherbourne. The bus will be loaded with hot food, groceries, clothing, scriptures and tracts. We have been blessed by contributions from other churches, businesses, the larger community and our own church family.

We have learned never to question who the Lord sends to the bus. This corner is one of the most dangerous in the city but the Lord is our guide and protector, and those on the corner know that it is the Lord Jesus who brings us there.

- [www.markhamemc.ca](http://www.markhamemc.ca)

### 5n2 Soup Kitchens

The dream of opening a soup kitchen in Scarborough had been in the hearts and minds of Seema and Roopan David since they immigrated to Canada in summer 2007.

Since launching in November 2013, the soup kitchen has expanded to now serve from four locations, five days a week! In an urban centre where many are facing challenging situations and are struggling to meet even their basic needs, this initiative has successfully been providing healthy meals for hundreds of marginalized families, children and newcomers each week. [www.5n2foods.com](http://www.5n2foods.com)

### Laundry Love

The Laundry Love initiative consists of regular opportunities to help people who are struggling financially by assisting them with doing their laundry. For those living below the poverty line, washing clothes presents both a logistical problem and a financial hardship. Laundry Love partners with local laundromats in cleaning the clothes of those living in shelters, motels, cars, garages and on the streets. To date, an estimated: 600,000+ loads of laundry have been done, over 450,000 people cared for. The faith-driven initiative does not have any registered Canadian affiliates as yet. [www.laundrylove.org](http://www.laundrylove.org)

### Mobile Showers

San Francisco-based Lava Mae isn't a Christian ministry, but their embrace of 'radical hospitality' to their city's homeless is undeniably cool.

Founder Doniece Sandoval heard a homeless woman crying that she would never be clean, and started a campaign to bring showers and sanitation facilities to her city's homeless population.

Lava Mae repurposes retired transportation buses, turning them into mobile showers and toilets that can be rolled out quickly wherever there is a need. An affiliate program for other cities is coming in 2016. [www.lavamae.org](http://www.lavamae.org)

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