

PARISH HOUSE

Newmarket Church of Christ



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NEW PARTNERS

Nathan Pickard

We just clinched the semi-finals and were heading to the OMHA finals (for my American friends-- this is a very BIG deal). The kids were excited; the parents were hanging off the rafters of the arena as they celebrated, and for those of us who were part of the coaching staff, we couldn't wipe the grin off our faces. We were fighting for the coveted Red Hat and the banner to be hung in our arena. And then COVID-19 hit us.

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WE REMEMBER

Our community of faith has suffered over the last three months. We have suffered unexpected death, watched addictions take control of people's lives, and we continue to see how social isolation from one another takes a toll on people's health. For a community of faith that is less than 100 people, we have suffered in numerous ways during COVID-19. In this issue we highlight the lives of two individuals whose deaths have impacted us as a community of faith. May the Spirit of God continue to "comfort those who are mourning."

Catherine Nelson

Catherine exhibited confidence, a strong work ethic, and was tenacious. Catherine would never allow her physical disabilities to stop her; she would attempt any challenge. Catherine's love of sports led her to wheelchair basketball where she became a leader and a member of the Ontario Junior Wheelchair basketball team. Her ferocity on the court and her gift of leadership helped propel the team to be highly competitive.

Catherine's death continues to bring challenges to the family as they wrestle with questions of why, what happened, and how to move forward in the midst of tragedy. We continue to pray for God's healing hand to be upon the family as they navigate this treacherous time.



Herman Samuel

Herman Samuel "chased" Joyce from Trinidad to England where they were married. Shortly thereafter they immigrated to Canada where they raised their family.

Herman's quiet demeanor and steadfast presence will be missed. Herman would never give up a chance to watch sports, discuss the latest news in MMA, or simply tell you what was happening in his life. Herman's last gift to us was the lesson that even in death we recognize the presence of God through the other.



New Partners, Cont'd

We received word from the OMHA that all hockey was to be suspended indefinitely. Shortly thereafter society began to shutdown. Restaurants were closed. Grocery stores were running out of supplies. Salons were shuttered. Churches moved their worship services from in-person to on-line just as the educational institutions did the same.

While society shutdown I became increasingly worried about our neighbours. For many of our neighbours who live in the Longford subdivision, the shutdown of society could pose a significant hurdle. Sitting in my office one morning thinking about our neighbours, I reached out to a teacher at Maple Leaf Public School, some residents of the neighbourhood and some people from our community of faith. I wanted to form a small group of people who would be able to work together on behalf of our neighbours.

We held our first zoom gathering. For the most part, we had a level of trust with one another through our interactions over the years. Our first meeting was to simply listen to one another describe what we were seeing in the neighbourhood. We learned that due to the federal government's response it seemed families in the neighbourhood would be able to navigate the shutdown during the month of April. But as we quickly learned, during the month of May families would start to struggle unless the economy opened up.

Each week this small group of people would gather on-line and listen to one another. Over the next couple of weeks it became painfully aware that food equality would become an issue. As we worked through some possible scenarios, I contacted a friend who owned a grocery store and asked if he could help us out. Without hesitation we were allowed to purchase food at cost. Our own chefs, Claes and Nicky, put together a possible menu which served as a template for our food boxes.

By this time our small group of people had expanded by a few more people as we sought help from others who were intricately aware of the ethos of the neighbourhood. With the ability to purchase food at cost, a menu, and now a date for the first food box, we started walking the streets and making phone calls so that we could discover families who needed some food assistance.

While Jenny and I were walking the neighbourhood together we knocked on doors of friends. We told them what we were doing. Immediately (and because of the trust we have in the neighbourhood), we were told stories:

- Of the mom who worked construction jobs for cash but now is unemployed and unable to be part of the government's social assistance program
- Of the single mom who just recently moved into a basement apartment but lost her part time job because of the shutdown in the food industry
- Of the father of four whose employer closed the business down due to the shutdown of his industry
- Of the new immigrant that could hardly speak English and now due to the shutdown of society, found all employment opportunities washed away
- Of the grandfather whose cancer treatments were put on hold

It didn't take us long and soon a list of thirty families was made who could use some help with food assistance. We made the appropriate arrangements and soon thirty boxes of food were prepared and delivered.

Reflecting on our experience of preparing and delivering food boxes, we quickly became aware that additional boxes of food were needed. Again, we walked the streets and made some phone calls. To date, 180 boxes of food have been prepared and delivered and another 100 boxes are being planned throughout the summer.

As the church worked alongside local residents and volunteers from the local public school to ensure families in our neighbourhood have adequate food supplies, word began to spread of this partnership. As a result of this partnership, unexpected financial partners arose. Teachers and administrators not only delivered food boxes to families, they became financial partners. Residents of the neighbourhood who had additional financial resources became financial donors, along with friends, local businesses, a hockey team, and even complete strangers. At the end of June, with nearly \$10,000 in food purchases, all expenses were covered by the generosity of "outside strangers."

As I continue to allow Luke 10:1-12 to continually define my life and ministry, I am becoming more and more convinced how the hospitality of strangers allows us as a community of faith to proclaim and embody God's kingdom. Without the hospitality of volunteers from Maple Leaf Public School, residents of the Longford subdivision and complete strangers, this story would not be possible. Not only is the hospitality of strangers making these food boxes possible, we are discovering that as we pray for God to send out additional workers into the harvest, it's not just the church being sent out, it's the church walking alongside others as together we embody and make known the various ways God is healing this world.



"To be most effective in bringing about change in a community or a neighborhood, it helps if you live there."

Larry James, *The Wealth of the poor*

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God through friendship
with the neighbourhood

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