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throughout this issue
for easy “scatter tactic”
ideas for being missional
in the community!*

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WINTER 2015

Storyline



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It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas



Have you ever wondered what the Bible is all about? Many of us have some idea of the story, but it is a big book, after all! At times we can feel a little lost and easily give up. I've just come across a brand new edition called The Wayfinding Bible (which is available at Cornerstone Marketplace) that really helps with getting started. It gives an overview of God's big story – the story of creation, the disaster of our rebellion, God's choice of a man (Abraham), of a nation (Israel), and the fulfilment of their destiny in Jesus. You'll discover the story of God making everything new, including you!

It helps you find out what each section of the Bible has to do with Jesus, lets you know where you are in the big picture, and is filled with helpful notes (and pretty pictures!).

Even though many of us regularly read our Bible, there are those times when it's difficult to understand or apply it. There are parts I still don't understand very well. So, in January we are going to start **40 Days in the Word**, learning to read, understand, and apply the Bible for ourselves. It's going to be a fantastic church-wide adventure for all ages. I'd love if you'd join me in it.

John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us." This Christmas, my prayer is that you would discover afresh God dwelling in your life. Merry Christmas!

— Pastor James

JAMES ONLINE :



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FACCCALGARY



Building lives that honour God ... all for Jesus.

Who are we? Several thousand come together each week from all walks of life, cultural backgrounds and all ages to "build lives that honour God." The Bible is our plumb line ... the absolute truth that sets in motion our teaching, our music, and how we relate to each other and to God. We want more than anything as individuals and as a church to impact the city of Calgary and beyond – all for Jesus. As part of the Christian and Missionary Alliance of Canada, we also think it's pretty amazing that we get to partner with people around the world as they also "build lives that honour God."

We Value ...

CONNECTING in small groups for regular Bible study, prayer, serving others and building relationships. **SERVING** God by serving other people within the church and our community. **SHARING** Jesus and His love wherever God places us locally and globally.

**"We read to know
that we are not alone."**

— C. S. Lewis in the William Nicholson film, *Shadowlands*.

Storyline is a platform for stories to be shared here at FAC: stories to make us smile, cry, laugh – and ultimately guide us toward a transcendent hope in Jesus in the midst of a broken world. This quarterly publication also leverages the talent of volunteer photographers, writers and graphic designers from within our church community, giving them the opportunity to serve God by connecting their passion and skills to the people behind each story. What has God been doing in your life lately? Have a story to share? We'd love to hear from you: storyline@faccalgary.com. •

JOY —to the— WORLD!

23

people were baptized here at FAC on November 21/22, taking the step to publically show they've trusted in Jesus as their Saviour. Our next baptism weekend is January 16/17, 2016.



Storyline

"Changed lives through the power of story."

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the STARS of Christmas



Invite your "Stars of Christmas" guests back to FAC for Christmas Eve!

"Stars of Christmas" on **Sunday, December 6** welcomed **over 3,500 guests** from the community for lots of free family fun! Our prayer is that first-time visitors will feel compelled to return on Christmas Eve ... and beyond. **THANK YOU** to the many volunteers who made this event happen – we simply couldn't have done it without you!



AWAY IN A MANGER



SILENT NIGHT







SCATRIZED FOR THE KINGDOM

Written by Sterling Hunter

IF APPROACHING either the Cornerstone Café or Bedrock Bistro for your regular Morning Glory muffin and latte, you find yourself halted in a gaze upward at an austere mustached man who ostensibly just dismounted from a Harley and is now planted firmly behind the bar like an oak trunk staring down upon his work like that mighty tree, with unbroken vision upon its subjugates ... relax – it's just Ron.

Ron Hewton's effectiveness as a dedicated Christ-follower and FAC staff team member broke ground in Windsor, Ontario, where as a child his ontogeny spawned in less than ideal circumstances. Neglect, abuse, and most importantly a demoralizing growth of self-loathsome doubt would be the petri dish that early in Ron's life engendered pain and evil, but later would reflect the grace of Jesus.

Ron recounts moving to Vancouver to sell drugs and rent women as was custom in the milieu of his new west coast family. He also tells of a journey back home whereby substance so sullied his mental faculties that he has at best vague memories of freezing to almost death on the side of the highway, getting picked

up and proselytized to by Hare Krishna's, and waking up in his childhood bed in vomit and eggs he made after kicking down the door to his old home. Later in life he would realize that salvation from moments and epochs like these in his life came from God's grace and angel armies, but how myopic we are when plagued by the guilt that follows when our past enjoins its recurrence for our future.

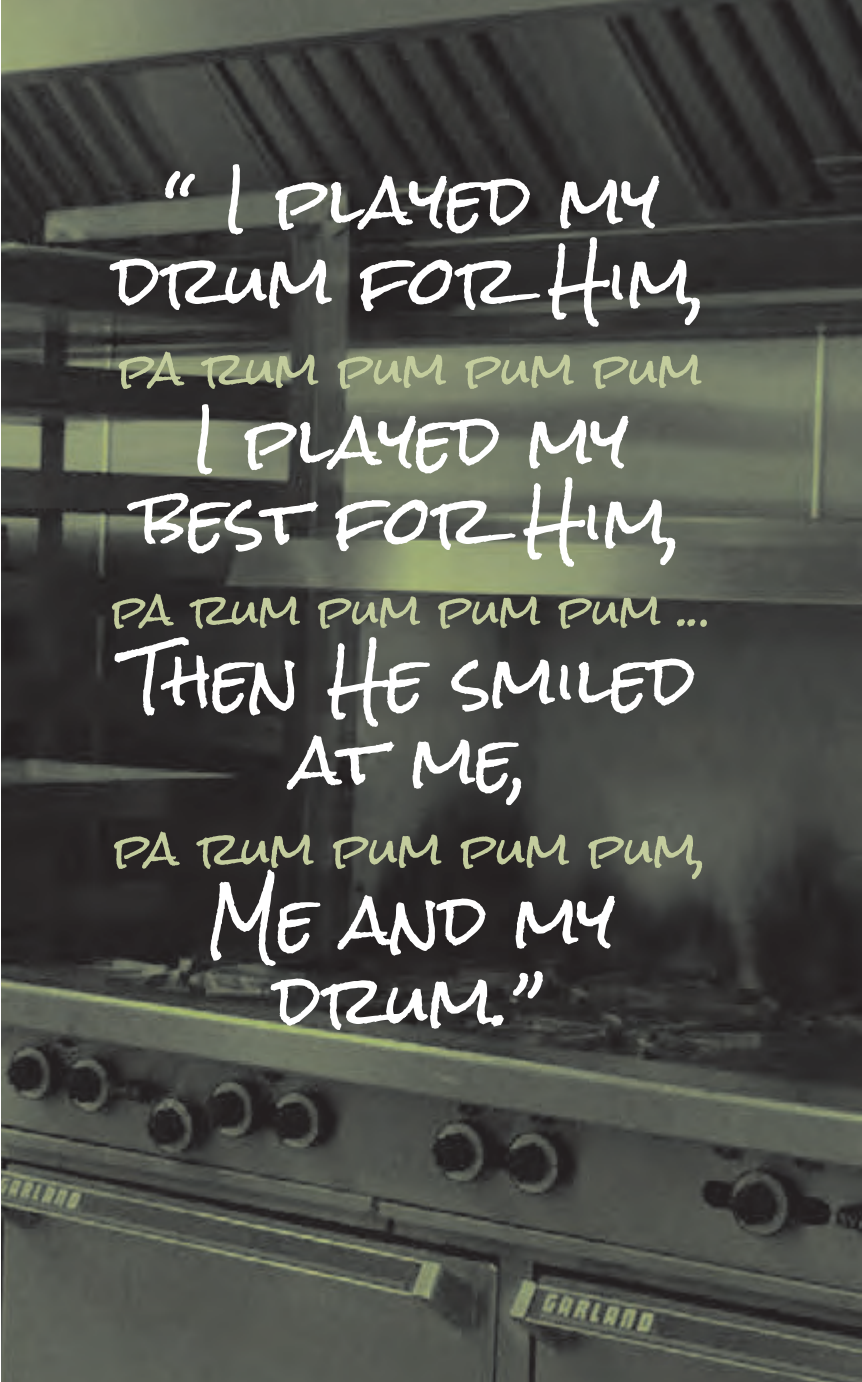
Enter Betty. "A lost cause" was Ron's self-imposed title by this point in his twenties. "She must be an angel sent from God, to have been able to put up with all the garbage I put her through," says Ron – and quite often actually when telling his story, and always with the disbelief of a man who can't fathom the treasure he has in a good woman. Ron made Betty his wife, and Betty made Ron a better man; Betty would show Ron the grace and unconditional love of Jesus he hadn't received as a child.

Soon after this it became clear to Ron that his scars were to the glory of God, not of the devil. He would go on to work in halfway houses where criminal men were being rehabilitated into society, and Ron was there every step of the way. Witnessing violence, violations of probation, and even making friends

with repeat offenders, **Ron was on the front lines, in the “tax collector’s” house, and trusted friend to the most untrusted sinners.** He could do so because of his darkness. Ron’s sordid past unlocked God’s glorious future; **God’s light could shine in the dark of night because Ron’s darkness had been forgiven.**

Pain from a car accident early in his life surfaced and put Ron’s work life on hold, but God would have him tarry just a while longer so to prepare a job for him here at FAC. It is at this point in this article wherein I must break through the façade of one who by now is viewed as an author that only sings the praises about the Jesus in Ron – and I am, but when I first met Ron, I wasn’t. I first met Ron and Betty as they were volunteering for a large conference here at the church, and frankly, he rubbed me the wrong way; I judged him. I heard his resolute speech about what he thought was “gospel,” I saw his indissolubly stern-faced glare (seriously, he didn’t smile at me once ... I’m still a little bitter), and I felt the cold wafting off him. I asked that he not be asked to come back and volunteer. **I judged him without knowing that I was actually judging myself – the part of myself that thought “Christian” meant smiling and being polite at all times.** Three years later I would be begging those same people, to whom I had made a case for his permanent dismissal, for his permanent hire. Ron still bears some of the scars that evil man has cut into his flesh and soul – we all do. But when I was graced by Ron’s heart – for the purity of God’s word, for justice, for Maranatha, and for “Michele’s Café kids” – I too, like Ron had already been doing, saw those scars to the employ of God’s Kingdom.

If you have a moment, and can brave the seemingly barren wasteland frozen over by the sub-zero neutrality of his stare that stands between you and the imposing monolith, talk to him. I guarantee you it won’t be long before a smile and your heart is cracked by him. Have a question about the Bible? He practically has it memorized. Have an issue with a problem child or troubled friend? He’s seen it all – twice. Need prayer? He’s a warrior. Need a joke? ... Maybe don’t ask if you’re offended easily. Need a friend? Be careful – he might become family. •



“ I PLAYED MY
DRUM FOR HIM,
PA TUM PUM PUM PUM
I PLAYED MY
BEST FOR HIM,
PA TUM PUM PUM PUM ...
THEN HE SMILED
AT ME,
PA TUM PUM PUM PUM,
ME AND MY
DRUM.”



*Join our team of volunteers and **gain experience** and **friends** serving in
Cornerstone Café & Bedrock Bistro here at FAC – training provided!*

MIRACLES

Written by Ovi Bindiu

HAPPEN

DECEMBER 16, 1989 –
a normal day, like any other. Actually, my birthday. I was turning 18 – a big boy now. I'll have a little party with my neighbours and friends ...

It wasn't easy to find stuff for parties those days. Even basic foods were hard to find. Romania was a communist country led by a dictator. A country with stressed people that had lost their hope.
For most, the only hope was to leave the country, to run away as far as possible and never come back.

To be honest, these were my dreams too. So, of course this was the main subject debated at my birthday. Hopes, dreams and plans on how to run to "the other side". The side where people were free ... All of my friends would have the same dream. Romania was then a very lonely country, separated from all others and avoided by most of the international communities.

Slowly, my party came to an end, all my friends left, and I remained alone with my thoughts and hopes.

Those days I used to listen a radio station called "Free Europe". It was a station transmitting in Romanian, from somewhere in Europe. It was called illegal in our country but people would still listen, despite the real risk of being caught and persecuted.

I turned on the radio and I started to tune so to find "Free Europe." They were talking about something happening in the next city close to ours. Something about some people who demonstrated against the system ... A church, a priest and the believers ...

The next days I continued to listen to the radio. And what I heard then froze the blood in my veins. The army started to shoot people on the streets. I couldn't believe it ... Was that true?

Even so, people couldn't be stopped. They were ready to take the bullets but not to shut up anymore.
And that was the beginning of the Romanian revolution.

It happened the same in my city. Everybody went on the streets. Me, too.

So I went on the streets and I marched directly to the City Hall, where all the action was. Thousands of people in front of the army tanks. Me, among them. Angry and happy at the same time, excited and ready to "fight." Well, might be too much to

say "fight" ... We, with bare hands, against an army that had the order to shoot people without warning. It was a war situation. I could see the faces of the soldiers who were holding tightly their weapons. They were as scared as us.



Close to the City Hall, there was a big crowd screaming against the system. I started to scream too. The system deserved it ...

At one point, one of the leaders spoke loudly saying that we should all pray. Somehow I thought he was right. We needed a very strong force to protect us from what we were facing. A force much stronger than bullets or tanks.

THERE, ON THE PAVEMENT,
ONE DAY IN DECEMBER '89,
THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE KNELT
AND STARTED TO PRAY:
"OUR FATHER WHO ART
IN HEAVEN" ...

It was already almost Christmas ... There on my knees, saying the prayer, I could swear that time had stopped. That life and death were walking between us and they were making plans ... In a country where for decades we were constantly taught that there is no God, seeing people on the street and praying together ... it was a miracle. A miracle that completely changed my life. A revolution started in my heart

... Days went by, many died, many cried ... but we won. At one point the army turned against the dictator and fraternized with people. He was caught and judged. And so, this was our first Christmas in a free world.

Years went by. Many things have happened since then ... New generations are coming. They learn now from history how those times were.

I still remember ... It is like yesterday. Those people praying together, down on the streets, on a day in December '89. Miracles happen ... •

Ovi Bindiu is a Graphic Designer who arrived in Canada with his family in September 2014.

Story Resources: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanian_Revolution
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9wIFYGyTtY> (min. 22)

"All is calm,
all is bright ..."



PEACE ON EARTH Goodwill TO MEN

Written by Elizabeth Anderson

Christmas is a time for dreaming.

Christmas is a time for dreaming. We may dream about our futures and how we would like them to be. Dreams realized lead us to discover how blessed we are and how far we have come. That's what happens every day at The Dream Centre.

The Dream Centre helps 125 men maintain their sobriety, supports them to dream about the life they want, and helps harness resources to go about getting that life. There is aftercare and supportive housing. Men get well. Families can reunite. Dreams are dreamt and then fulfilled.

The Dream Centre itself has realized a new dream. After mastering the model that helps men start to dream again, they have launched a post-treatment program for women which started just this November.

The Dream Centre wanted to give back to the community and place decorated Christmas trees. Eight years ago, the trees started as a community engagement project for awareness and fundraising. The trees have found a home here at First Alliance Church on Main Street. Each is individually themed and beautiful to behold; each is a gift to us for the Christmas season.

There are lots of stories of lives transformed. One happy ending included a man who was blessed and had come a long way. He had just graduated from The Dream Centre and was leaving with his wife and two daughters after the celebration. The daughters were running ahead, jumping up and down as they approached the car, hardly able to contain their excitement! Suddenly one of the little girls ran back. She took her Dad's hand, put hers in his and held on tightly. "My dad is coming home and he is going to have a sleepover with us every night!" This is why the staff do what they do. It makes sense that their mission is to help by transforming lives while restoring dignity and realizing dreams.

"The Calgary Dream Centre transformed me into the man I always hoped I could become. The ability

I have now with nothing to hide, to live with pride and self-respect is true freedom. This Christmas I can look with joy into the beautiful faces of my three granddaughters." -Jay (Current Community Resident)

How can you partner with The Dream Centre to help people realize their dreams? Here is a wish list of donation blessings:

- RESTAURANT GIFT CARDS
- COFFEE GIFT CARDS
- SOCKS
- UNDERWEAR
- GLOVES/MITTS
- TOQUES
- TOILETRIES
- CANDY
- BUS PASSES
- NOTEBOOKS
- PENS



"Join the Calgary Dream Centre this Season by helping men, women and families experience the joy of Christmas." says Jim Moore, CEO-Executive Director. To learn more contact Jennifer 403-243-5598 (ext. 238) / jlenglish@calgarydreamcentre.com.



WHAT child IS THIS?

Written by The Kletkes

WHEN JEMMA WAS FIRST BORN,

we were given a very grim diagnosis. The doctors' words still ring in my head ... "She will most likely never see, never walk, may not be able to talk, she may never hold her head up ... She has severe brain damage." I was in complete denial. I couldn't comprehend that this beautiful daughter of mine was going to have to endure a list of things I would never choose for her. I knew we were privileged to have her, I knew she was a gift, but it seemed our privilege came at her expense. She was the one with the body that was broken; the one with a brain that wouldn't stop seizing; the one who might never live independently, who probably would never have children of her own. It was an overwhelming sense of fear and loss in the beginning. The road ahead seemed daunting and overwhelming. And if I'm being completely honest, there are still days when those feelings creep back in unexpectedly.

Jemma can now walk short distances with assistance as long as her foot orthotics are on. She has yet to see through her beautiful blue eyes. Jemma is exclusively fed through her G-tube now. She's still in diapers. Her left hand isn't functional due to her Cerebral Palsy.

I was in such denial with her diagnosis as a baby that I never would have thought this would be our reality. Yes, there are a lot of challenges physically with Jemma, and if a stranger were to read all that she has, they might take pity on her – BUT ...

Jemma is a precious gift. She represents Jesus to me more than anyone I know and she asks to pray throughout the day. She truly has the joy of the Lord in her

heart. She teaches me how to slow down, to love deeply, to compete less, to live more fully. She brings hope, light and life. Her joy in life is to make others laugh. Every morning when she wakes up, the first question she asks is, "How was your good sleep, Mommy?" And right when I get her off the bus, she asks, "How was your good day, Mommy?" Despite everything she's been dealt, she's happy, she doesn't complain, and there's never an option for a bad day. All she needs is love. And all she has to give is love. My day is full of hugs, kisses, scratches, and dances with Jemma. She asks me daily, "Mommy, do you laugh?" She makes me really think about whether I've truly laughed that day.

Before I can even blink or catch my breath, my Jems is getting big – and there are a whole new set of challenges with growth. She is getting more and more difficult to carry and lift, and she's only seven. I can easily borrow worries from tomorrow with thoughts like, "How am I going to care for her when she's big?" But I am often reminded through songs, people or the Word that He will give me the strength I need to care for her. **We added Hope to her name when she was a baby – and that is what we'll continue to do ... Hope.**

In the last few weeks, Jemma hasn't been weight-bearing as well and has collapsed several times when walking. Her doctor confirmed that her left hip is completely dislocated and she will need to go for reconstructive surgery on both her hips in January. It will be a 7-hour surgery, potentially 6 or more weeks in a cast and 6 months for full recovery. I desperately wish she didn't have to suffer through more pain and I could take her place. **Prayers would be welcomed for our Jemma.** Thank you, Jesus, that we have the hope of heaven and an eternity of perfect, whole bodies that will SEE. •

{HELLO, MY NAME IS}



Hilarie Forkheim
Women's Ministry Director

to get a good night's sleep. Taking time to care for myself gives me energy and mental clarity for the important things in my life, including quality time with my husband and family and contributing effectively in the church community.

SL: Any parting counsel for women during the busy holiday season?

HF: Pace yourselves. Enjoy the social activities and family excitement, but remember the reason for the season and focus quiet time on reflections of gratitude. Model it for your children.

Hilarie Forkheim has been ministering to women since she became a Christian eighteen years ago. Drawing on her life experiences, she has mentored dozens of individuals through one-on-one discipleship including the trials of being a single mom, navigational skills and strategies for those experiencing the ups and downs of divorce, and how to deepen their faith walk through annual retreats and community building. This fall, Hilarie joined the FAC staff team as Women's Ministry Director. We asked her a few questions to help us all get to know her a bit more.

SL: How long have you been involved at FAC?

HF: Four years ago, my husband (Michael) and I moved from NW to SE Calgary. Although we found ourselves feeling like we'd moved to a new city, we chose to connect here at FAC by jumping into ministry, which helped us quickly establish meaningful community roots.

SL: Tell us about the transition from working in the corporate community to being part of the staff of FAC.

HF: While leaving the corporate world, where I used my business degree in the realm of project management, has involved some changes, the basics have remained the same. I am really excited about this position. With the partnership of the women of FAC, we have an opportunity to accomplish great things for the Lord. Let's link arms and do this together, whatever 'this' is, and leave our mark on this world.

SL: How do you maintain balance in your daily routine?

HF: I start each day reading my Bible and spending time in prayer, flexing my plans when necessary. I schedule regular exercise into my calendar, focus on eating well and make it a priority

a few of my favorite things ...

Favourite Drink: Red Rose Tea and H2O!

What Do You Like to Do in Your Spare Time: I'm an avid golfer with a handicap of 16. I've had 3 holes in 1 (not mini golf). I also love hiking and horses.

Favourite Color: Blue

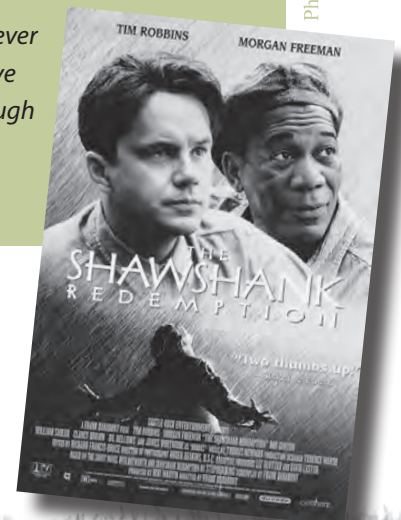
Favourite Movie: *Shawshank Redemption* and period pieces like *Pride and Prejudice* – I love stories of justice and redemption.

Favourite Book: I like to read Christian historical novels like *Chronicles of the King* by Lynn Austin.

February Fun Facts: I have three daughters all born in February – and also two grandchildren.

Favourite Bible Verse: "And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father." (Col. 3:17)

Photo: <https://loftcinema.com/film/the-shawshank-redemption/>



'tis the Season

by Rosalind Coben

WHAT DO YOU WANT
FOR CHRISTMAS,
HONEY?

The other night, as my hubby and I were crawling into bed,

he began a text conversation with his dad, trying to help him think of the perfect gift for his wife (my mother-in-law). I asked him what he'd suggested, and when he told me, I said, "Oh, he absolutely can *NOT* give her that. That is way too cheesy." After a few moments of silence, he let out a frustrated, "AGH! WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?!"



Ahhh, the age-old question that comes up primarily at Christmas, Valentine's Day, birthdays, and anniversaries. The husbands, sons, dads, uncles, and grandfathers of the world – or basically any man who has a woman on his shopping list – understands this frustration. A husband will ask his wife what she would like for Christmas, and she'll reply in one of the following ways:

- a) "Anything, as long as it's from you!"
- b) "I don't need anything."
- c) "The perfume on the third shelf down on the second shelf in from the front of the store ... Ask for Lucy – she helped me pick it out, and is expecting you."
- d) "I want you to be romantic and think about what I might like!"

None of these answers are helpful to a man staring at his shopping list wondering how he can buy a gift for the least amount of money and get the most "WOW!" response.

I gave answer d) to my hubby this year, and I thought I was being very helpful. I wanted to make it easier on him, so I dropped (seemingly) obvious hints. I tagged him in links on Facebook saying, "Here's a hint!" and yet he asked me the other day what I would like

for Christmas. So, apparently I need to think of other methods of hinting. I was thinking that perhaps having a scrolling bar along the edge of his SportsNet App would be a good idea ... something like, "Your wife wants earrings for Christmas" (HINT ALERT) ... or something. Maybe putting it in a magazine would help. But when would I ever do that?!

The good news is, my hubby isn't alone! I sat in a meeting the other day, and all of the men in the meeting were asking each other 'What would be a good gift?' and 'What do women want?' and 'Where do you buy things that women like?' In that moment, I realized that the best part of the whole gift, what would mean the most to each of their wives, would be all of the question-asking, desperate pleas, and anxious frustration. Why? Because all women really want is to be thought about, desperate pleas and all. (HINT ALERT) •





Angels We Have Heard on High

ARTIST IN THE SPOTLIGHT

"It's not about me ... it's never been about me. It is all about the message."

Andrea Apostoaei, solidly grounded in her faith, has learned at the young age of 21 to submit to God's plan for her life and to hold loosely the things of this earth.

It's been a journey. Born in Romania, Andrea studied art and architecture in high school, and developed a love for singing and songwriting. At 18 years of age, Andrea and her family immi-

grated to Canada with her family. She studied Public Relations at Mount Royal University, and kept a journal of phrases and lyrics she could later use in songs.

When she was accepted as a vocalist on the worship team at FAC, she was thrilled. With guidance and encouragement from Pastor David Klob, her interest in music flared into a passion. In January, she heads to Australia to attend Hillsong International Leadership College in the faculty of Worship Music.

For Andrea, worship is the core of everything. It's how people's lives can be transformed and their faith deepened. She is trusting God to direct her steps; whether in singing, songwriting, promoting Christian concerts or conferences, she will use her education and gifts to serve the Lord, to make her life shine for Him.

And the art? She is selling her paintings on Facebook to raise funds for her Hillsong tuition. To check out her work visit:

facebook.com/AndreasartSALE

It's all about the message. All for Jesus. •

The Gift that Keeps on Giving

Written by Terry Schmidt



We've all seen or heard of Ebenezer Scrooge's *A Christmas Carol* conversion in one or more forms – book, movie, or play – and heard his declaration to 'honour Christmas and try to keep it all the year!' But what does that really mean?

It seems throughout December our hearts tenderize and we are more prone to be giving and generous with all we have; resources, time ... and love. Maybe it's because as the celebration of the birth of our Saviour approaches we have a nearer reminder of how much we've been given. So how do we 'keep' Christmas and that spirit of generosity all year?

Here are some examples of serving and giving opportunities we often participate in during the yuletide season, and how they can translate into the year-round 'keeping' of Christmas.

Operation Christmas Child

We all enjoy shopping at the loonie store and picking up toys and toiletries and stuffing as much as we can into those red and green shoeboxes. We write a note and/or send a picture hoping to connect with a child in a far country. This giving has big impact. More than 8 million shoeboxes are collected and given out each year and over half a million of those are collected in Canada. Just this




“Generosity is freedom.”

month FAC collected 3,421 boxes from south Calgary. You may also have spent a 2½ hour shift in the Calgary Distribution Centre for OCC and checked the contents of a hundred or more of these boxes so lovingly packed.

But OCC has more opportunities than stuffing a shoebox or volunteering in the distribution centre. Why not donate your time year-round as a Connect Volunteer on OCC ministry teams like Prayer, Logistics, Church Relations, Community Relations, Media Relations, and Leadership. These shoeboxes are dispersed not just at Christmas but throughout the year by Samaritan's Purse. You can sign up to be a part of a shoebox distribution trip to countries like Uruguay, El Salvador, Senegal and Costa Rica. How would it affect your spirit of generosity to see the up close and personal impact of a child receiving a shoebox directly from your hand? Check the Samaritan's Purse website for these and any number of year-round giving opportunities.

Adopt A Family

There are any number of agencies where you can be connected with a local needy family and help make their Christmas memorable with a hamper of food and gifts for all the family members – check with Briana (bsoutherland@faccalgary.com) for a list of groups FAC already partners with.

 But why not adopt a family year-round? It doesn't need to be a huge monetary investment. Your senior neighbour is looking for a sympathetic ear, shoveled walks, cut lawns and a hot meal or bowl of soup every now and then. And that single mom at work could use some free babysitting for an evening home alone or an evening out. Perhaps she might need a heart to heart and a cup of tea. Ministry staff at FAC could link you with a new-to-church couple to invite into your small group. Let's face it. We all need others with whom to 'do life' together. Companionship, care and compassion come from a generous heart.

While for the past seven years, First Alliance Church has hosted a Christmas Day lunch for shut-ins or others who have no one to spend the holiday with, Harvest Ministries also serves thousands of people throughout the year at regular events like Wednesday Family Suppers, Tuesday Lunch, Bring Back Sunday Lunch, Wings and Things and Breakfast at First. Two casual eateries – Cornerstone Café and Bedrock Bistro – are open during weekend services. And the ministry provides the grub for special events like Stampede Breakfast, Stars of Christmas and Spring Dinner Theatre. Volunteers staff all of these events! Why not become a Harvest volunteer and offer generous Christmas-type hospitality through the church kitchen year-round? There is a place for you to serve here!

Generosity is freedom. It is a release from the burden of our own needs and from smallness of mind or character. It allows us to readily give and to give liberally. It is not just a spirit available to us during the Christmas season. It's larger than that.

Proverb 11:24 (The Message): *The world of the generous gets larger and larger; the world of the stingy gets smaller and smaller.*

This is the great oxymoron of generosity ... that the more we give – of our time and resources and love – somehow we are richer for it, in all these things. So in 'keeping Christmas all the year,' we are in keeping with the blessing of God as well. •



by Joyce Rempel

What do you do when your baptism doesn't go as you'd hoped? When you expected to rise out of the water and see the smiling faces of your spiritual family and instead, all you see is darkness? When what started out as a joyful declaration of your faith in God leaves you feeling isolated, alone and attacked? This is not everyone's story. But it is one.

Pauline's journey of faith began 37 years earlier in a small California town. She formed friendships in the high school band that still exist. "One of the kids noticed that I was in this emotional pain all the time because my home life was hard," Pauline recounts, "and she said, 'Don't you know that Jesus loves you?' And that was it. I was saved."

Over the next few decades, she would marry, have one child, and grow in faith. From youth group to a small town Methodist-Presbyterian Church where she was "sprinkled" at age 14, she went on to spend time in intentional community, serve with a mission in France, worship at The Vineyard, an Eastern Orthodox Church and the United Church. While she loved aspects of each, some weren't suited to the family and she often found herself alone in church.

She would also regularly take "mental health" breaks from attending church because she'd get overly involved or "feel I had to hide who I really was in order to fit in."

Pauline is gifted in intercession, healing prayer and worship. She has a career as a holistic nutritionist and also works with those seeking emotional freedom. Her warmth, insight, and compassion draw others to her. **The relational connection and communion with those in the body of Christ has always been important to Pauline**, but she found subtle expectations from others were a challenge. "It's the tribe that took me in when my own family was too messed up to offer healthy things, and so you don't rock the boat." While she doesn't expect any church to be perfect, sometimes she felt too much subliminal pressure to conform in order to belong.

For a long time, the idea of God's grace hadn't yet fully sunk in. Because of authoritarian parenting in her childhood, she thought she had to earn God's love. "But," she smiles, **"God was constantly showing me He loved me."** After a time away from church, she felt God was lovingly drawing her to go back and not

to shrink. She said at First Alliance, she saw “there was room to be the kind of Christian that I am and not have to hide parts of what I believe.”

“When I look around First Alliance, I see older saints who have loved the Lord for years and their faces are full of joy. I see all ages and many ethnic backgrounds. I see constant outreach, serving. I see opportunities for my teenage daughter. I attend Women2Women where I get to meet like-minded people. I see people who are called to pray and worship like I am. I see there’s room for diversity.”

As she got more involved in serving, Pauline learned being involved in some areas would require membership and a prerequisite for membership at First Alliance is baptism by immersion, so Pauline decided to take this step.

“What a neat opportunity,” she said, “to publicly declare my faith and join a community of believers that I feel called to.” Pauline continued, “I was declaring that after 37 years, there’s still joy. There’s still a testimony to give after all that time.”

Her family agreed to come and she was looking forward to smiling at her family, seeing all the faces and becoming connected and committed to this local congregation. So, she joyfully entered the baptismal tank but when she came up out of the water, “I didn’t see the congregation or my family. Because the spotlight was on, all I saw was blackness.”

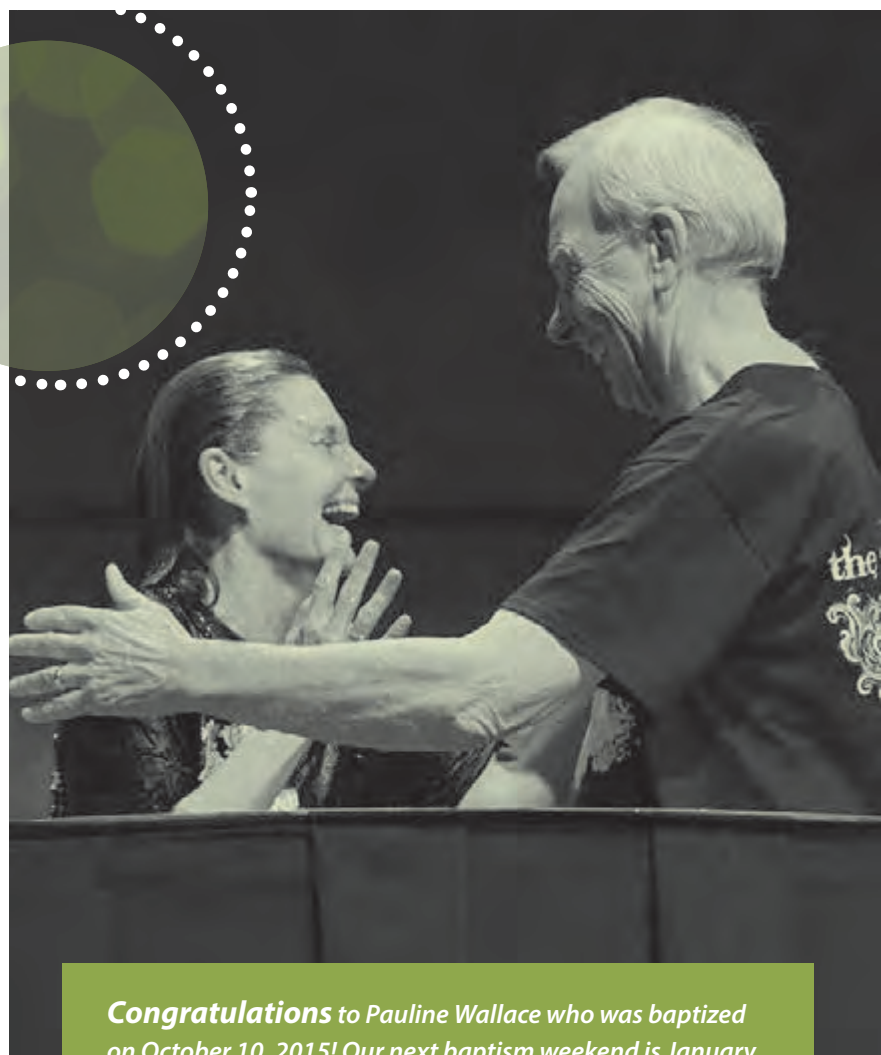
Any time that you publicly testify, and baptism is a public declaration, it can be vulnerable. “I came out of the water,” Pauline recounts, “and I was still glad I was there, that I’d done it, but because I couldn’t see anyone, I felt so isolated, there was this downward spiral. By the time I got home, my mind was in a really dark place.”

It took at least a good day for her to realize she was under spiritual attack. “That doesn’t happen when you lay low,” she said. “When I’m away from church, I don’t get attacked. I get attacked when I’m in church and my giftings start to wake up again.”

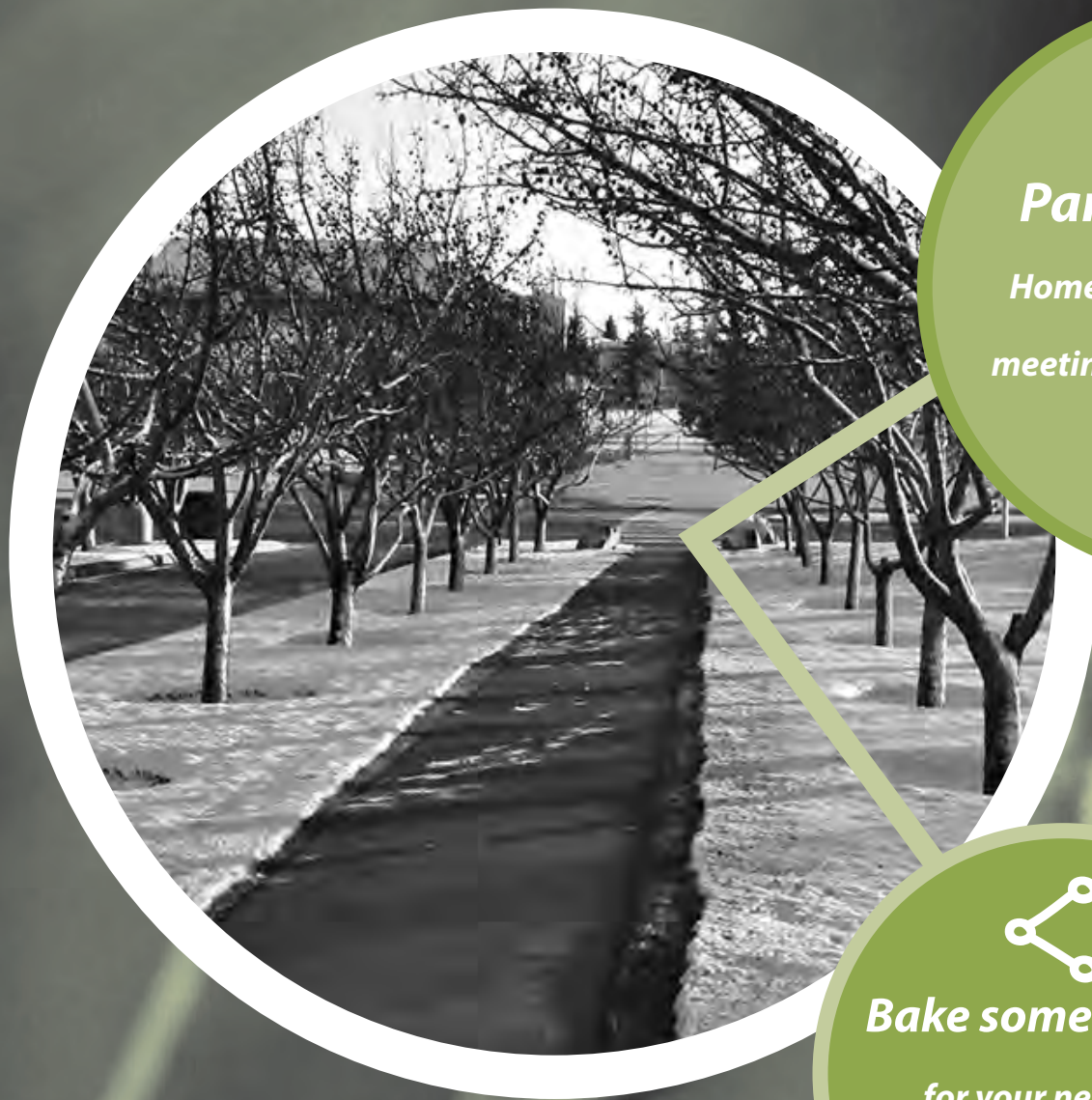
She was grateful for the reminder to expect adversity when you’re making that declaration, standing for Christ, against the darkness. ***“The Bible warns us that it won’t be a cakewalk,” she said, “but the Lord protects us and the gain is so worth the pain. As we grow in faith, we recognize the lies and enemy’s voice.”***

So for those who are considering baptism, she says to prepare for joy and vulnerability. “Before and after your baptism, think about what restores you and connects you to the Lord. Do you need to be alone or do you need to be with people? Do you need prayer? Whatever your support structure is that got you into baptism in the first place, have those people praying. Do you need to worship? There is no room for the enemy when you’re worshipping. What helps you stand in truth? Be ready with what ever brings strength to your heart.”

“Am I glad I got baptized?” Pauline smiles. “Absolutely! The platform where we’re baptized isn’t a stage, it’s an altar: a place where we sacrifice in community and worship together as the body of Christ.” •



Congratulations to Pauline Wallace who was baptized on October 10, 2015! Our next baptism weekend is January 16/17, 2016. Explore what the Bible says about baptism with Pastor Heather Brown and walk through what to expect at a “Preparing for Baptism” info session on Tuesday January 12. To learn more, visit facalgary.com/nextsteps or contact Janet Loewen jloewen@facalgary.com/403-252-7572.



Participate in your
Home Owners Association
meetings and events in 2016



Bake some cookies
for your next door
neighbour

Walking in a Winter Wonder



Look for this symbol throughout this issue for a few practical "scatter tactic" ideas for getting out and being missional in the city and your neighbourhood over the holidays ... and beyond. (Inspired by Verge Network's free eBook, *Simple Ways to be Missional*. Retrieved from www.VergeNetwork.org)

*Invite a neighbour over
to watch the 2015 IIHF
World Junior Championship*



*Shovel your neighbours'
sidewalks this winter*



*Attend the parties
you're invited to
by neighbours*



*Embrace the season
by bundling up and going for a
prayer walk
in your community*



land

What *impact* would


W

40
Days
in the

WORD

make on *your life?*

Starting January 9/10, 2016

   #FAC40DAYS @FACCALGARY