



KINGSTON COMMUNITY CHAPLAINCY

HELPING EX-PRISONERS TRANSITION SAFELY INTO OUR COMMUNITY

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2015

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CHAPLAIN'S REFLECTION

Hello dear Friends and Supporters of Kingston Community Chaplaincy,

With the publishing of this newsletter, I am two years into the privileged role of community chaplain. Every day is new, I am learning constantly, and I am continually touched by the compassion and wisdom that clients share with me.

I continue to visit Bath Institution, Collins Bay Minimum Institution and Joyceville Minimum Institution regularly – every six weeks, totalling about twelve clients. In the community, I am presently supporting six to eight individuals with varying degrees of contact – some every week with more frequent telephone contact, some monthly or every six weeks. Individuals repeatedly tell me how important these typically 45 minute (up to 90 minutes in the community) private visits are to their sense of well being – they look forward to me coming and make time in their day to share their latest struggles and successes in a space that is private and confidential. Sometimes these discussions are about the very practical matters of daily living: parole, access to family, work, health, institutional tensions, parole responsibilities, etc. Sometimes they are about God – however that concept may be framed for each of us. The uniqueness of chaplaincy and supporting spiritual health is that together we are able to explore the interconnectedness of everything, the sacredness of what it means to be worried about health or housing upon release. To support another as he or she goes about the task of finding meaning during a time of great, but restricted freedom is very much a privilege.

'How do you spend your days right now?' What we do with our time, reflecting on where we find meaning

around us is an important question when working in the realm of spiritual health. Clients have just as many questions for me as I do for them. The individuals I work with know and respect the varied ways I spend my time and take keen interest in what matters to me – asking what I've been up to and sharing my joy.

One of my greatest joys is to be in nature. I grew up in open spaces - woods and water remain places of comfort and wonder to me – I am soothed as much by the solitude of it all as by the wildness and unpredictability.

How we spend our recreational time – what we have access and freedom to enjoy - is a topic I spend time reflecting on with clients. Caring for my home, making it beautiful, planning and playing in my garden – spending a day hiking or canoeing - these are times and places where much of my figuring out happens – where I feel a sense of accomplishment and pride – where I learn to balance work and rest, receive affirmation and know the sense of a job well done. Similarly, many clients garden – both at the institutions and within the community. At Bath Institution many have places where they can go and look at the water, be still in nature and reflect. To get an institutional job that allows one to work outside is a great prize. The sense of relaxation and ease that comes even with this highly supervised freedom is obvious. Fishing and kayaking are activities of solace for clients in the community, as are running and biking. I have learned however that for those with limited access to parks and other facilities, accessing this type of recreation is a not always easy. Just getting around the city can be difficult for some – if they are not to be within a certain distance from schools, there is a constant sense of fear that a wrong turn may unwittingly bring them too close, that they will be seen and reported for breaching a parole condition.

HELPING CREATE A SAFE COMMUNITY

We believe that when crime happens, it is not only the victim and offender who are affected but the whole community. We seek to promote healing and safety for all people as we learn how to live together in community once again.

The question of recreational time and access to space was one I was privileged to share in the context of Restorative Justice with a group of students in the Master of Urban and Regional Planning Program at Queen's University last January. My thanks to Professor Leela Viswanathan whose community-mindedness has led her to include a week dealing with issues of Incarceration, Integration, and Restorative Justice in her Health and Social Planning course.

My thanks also to the Elizabeth Fry Society for hosting a wonderfully rich conference on May 7th, 2015: Alternatives to Incarceration for Women. This was a great opportunity to hear from a broad spectrum of voices, to recognize community partners who every day work with these same questions. My thanks to the individuals I work with, both within the institutions and broader community who take the time to reach out to me. Thanks to the institutional chaplains and community partners who recognize the value of Kingston Community Chaplaincy and take the time to connect individuals with me. And finally, my thanks to our board of directors who are with me in every encounter – supporting this very important work with their dedication and trust.

Kara Braun, Community Chaplain
B.Ed., Master of Theological Studies

The Peace of Wild Things (excerpt)

**When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water,
and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For the time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.**

By Wendell Berry

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our AGM was held at Kingston Unitarian Fellowship on May 20, 2015. We bade farewell to two retiring board Members, Kate Johnson and Joanne Roston, and welcomed one new member, Karen Raddon. We thank Kate and Joanne for their dedicated service, and look forward to Karen's contribution as we continue to fulfill our mandate.

Interview with Gordon Darrall KCC Chairperson

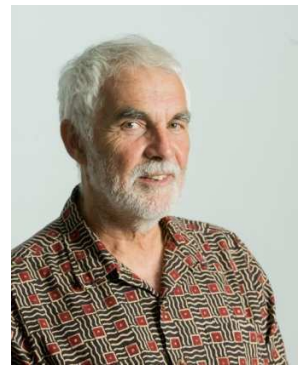
KCC: Gord, can you tell me a bit about yourself?

Gord: Well, I was an elementary school teacher. I started teaching high school science in Jamaica. But later I decided I to be an elementary teacher. One of the one of the highlights of teaching [was when] David Grier and I put on musicals at Central School. We would have a cast of 120.

Everyone in the school would be involved.

KCC: What led you from being a teacher to your interest in prisons?

Gord: It only started about 4 years ago. I'm a member of Kingston



Unitarian Fellowship. Four years ago one of the lay chaplains, Margo Rivera, was retiring. One of the roles of a lay chaplain is officiating at weddings. Margo was doing this in federal institutions, as well as outside. No one was interested in continuing this role and she talked to me about the importance of taking it on. That was what made my mind up to become a lay chaplain. I had never been in a prison before, but this was a social justice initiative that I could do. Before every wedding I get in touch with the institutional chaplain and arrange to meet the groom, ask him why he is getting married, how long he has known the bride and about his life. I became quite touched by the stories they told me: how important it was to have somebody outside who believed in them, who had continued to visit them for years. Sometimes they had children with this person

but had never committed to getting married. I've heard a huge range of stories. I have to say that before that I'd lived in Kingston for 30 years. I didn't want anything to do with the prisons. I would have turned down any opportunity to be a volunteer because I thought I have nothing in common with these guys, nothing to learn from them. But after meeting them, I became more interested. I did the Prison Ministry Workshop at the Catholic Diocese. I met Kate Johnson and got involved in the book club at Pittsburgh Institution. I also decided I wanted to do something outside in the community. I heard about KCC, got in touch with them, and joined the board two and a half years ago.

KCC: How many weddings have you done?

Gord: I've officiated at 66 weddings, 18 of them in an institution - Warkworth, Kingston Pen, Collins Bay, Joyceville, Millhaven or Pittsburgh.

KCC: And you found it was something that changed your belief that you didn't have anything in common with the men?

Gord: Absolutely. It's when you meet people on a 1-1 basis, you begin to see that their lives are not much different from yours; that with a change in circumstances, I could have ended up there or my son could have.

KCC: What do you want to see KCC accomplish?

Gord: I'd like to see more people in the community be aware of what we do. Secondly, I think we'll always be looking for funds, but I'd like to have a sense that we have a system of looking for funds in place. The third goal would be to increase KCC's programming. There are so many ideas of things we could do, not just for the clients that we currently serve, but also for families and children. Even getting dialogue going between victims of crime and some of the people that have been offenders. I think it would be amazing; it's something that Restorative Justice [promotes], to have that dialogue. I think we need to make the whole community, offenders, witnesses, victims and people who have nothing to do with it at all, have more dialogue around what justice means.

KCC: So you would say that a Restorative Justice approach is a better way of dealing with crime?

Gord: Yes, it definitely seems a better way to go. I think our criminal justice system now is going down a wrong path. KCC doesn't have a mandate to be political, but community education is part of our mandate. The fact is that the longer sentences you give people, they're still going to come out, so when they come out - what kinds of skills do they have? How are they going to interact with the Kingston community when they come out? - that is the important message to get out.

KCC: What would you say to those who live in Kingston, but feel that the prison population has nothing to do with them?

Gord: Well, I meet a lot of people like that, and I just share my own story that I know how you're feeling; I was there for 30 years. I say, once you hear the stories and get to know them; hopefully, you'll look at things differently. I don't expect everybody to do that. But we have to make sure enough people recognize those walled communities are also part of our community.

KCC: What do you feel are the greatest challenges prisoners face when they get out?

Gord: I think the analogy would be - if you were given \$50 and dropped in a foreign country, you would recognize a lot of what people were doing, but you would miss the subtleties, and for a lot of guys when they get out, they've seen it on TV while inside, but they miss the subtleties of interactions with other people. Secondly, for anyone who doesn't have financial resources or a support system, life is difficult, and these guys often arrive with neither of them. I can see that it would be easy to end up back inside because it's a world they know.

KCC: Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us.

DOMINO THEATRE FUNDRAISER

Our first annual Domino Theatre Evening was a huge success! We sold 114 tickets and it seemed that everyone had a good time. Not only that, we raised \$1,500 Thank you to everyone who supported this fundraising effort.

KINGSTON COMMUNITY CHAPLAINCY OBJECTIVES

To enact the goals and principles of Restorative Justice in relation to victims, offenders and community.

To accompany men and women from incarceration to successful reintegration in the community by facilitating emotional, spiritual and practical support systems during their transition.

To assist those who are at risk of engaging in criminal activity to find constructive and life affirming community resources.

To dialogue with community groups to further their understanding of and response to the needs of offenders, victims and their families.

Our second annual Domino Theatre night will feature the play **Island Getaway** by John Corrigan. The play takes place in the fictional hamlet of Moseyville on Getaway Island. The cast of characters includes a handful of quaint locals and some shady strangers who show up after taking the ferry to the island and expecting to get off via a bridge on the other side. Unfortunately, although the bridge is shown on the map, it never actually got built, so the only way off the island is the way they came, but the next ferry doesn't go until 2:00 the next day. The show is Wednesday, January 27th, by which time we may need an island getaway. Oh yes, Christmas is less than 6 months away, so we will have tickets available for you to give as gifts to your friends and family. Perhaps you know someone who needs an **Island Getaway**.

Meet Our Website Administrator

We are very pleased to welcome our valuable volunteer **Daniel LaFreniere** (seen here with Bev Hummitzsch, Communications Chair) who has been our Website Administrator since Fall 2014. A native of Alberta, he completed his first degree in Psychology at the University of Alberta and still works remotely for a first-episode psychosis clinic in Edmonton. He is presently working towards a degree in Computer Science at Queen's.



Clients' Corner

~ FREEDOM ~

Freedom is something that I took for granted - until it was taken away. Then things changed!

Being incarcerated is a life changing experience. Being hidden away from society, being punished for the crimes I committed. But the continuing punishment I inflict upon myself is the most excruciating.

Since being released life hasn't been the same. I spend most of my time looking back at my past, thinking about the good times, but mainly looking at the things I regret having done in my life. Wishing I could change them but I cannot. I can only learn from my mistakes. Being released back into society is harder than doing the time. Feeling like I don't fit in. Thinking that people are looking at me and that they know my past. Wondering if that police car that just passed is looking for me. Knowing I have done nothing wrong. And being terrified just the same. Then I have to deal with all the emotions running through my head. One minute feeling scared and guilty, next being angry at myself, and then suddenly being angry with the people around me. Why can't they just forgive and forget?!!

How can I ask people to do something I can't even do myself? Forgiving myself is something I don't think I will ever be able to do. Writing this is hard and scary. I don't in any way want to be misunderstood as asking for sympathy. Or for anyone to think I might for a second compare my suffering to that of my victims. It does not. However, even the smallest amount of understanding, from friends, family and helping professionals, goes miles and days in helping me rebuild my life. Helping me stay healthy for the people that matter. For loved ones whose lives I hope to one day be part of again. Without the support I have had since being released life would be even more of a nightmare. Having positive people around me, helping, listening, telling me I am important, that I am human and humans can make poor choices but that I am not a bad person has been invaluable. Someday I hope to see light at the end of the tunnel and a future for myself. For now I work to right the wrong I have done but know I may never be able to make things right. Every time I do something good for someone else a little piece of me is put back and I hope someday I feel whole again.

I cannot always repair the damage I have caused but I can try to make the world a little bit of a better place. The past is the past and cannot be changed but there is always a future!

Contact Us

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