

Guests or friends?

The difference is inside us

If you wanted to feel good about participating in Out of the Cold, Blythwood was the place to be on Nov 14. And if you wanted a challenge, this was still the place.

Because Greg Paul, founder of Sanctuary Ministries in downtown Toronto, gave a strong affirmation of what we do, while shining a light on the implications of using the word 'guests' that may not be obvious.

"It's easy for you to get discouraged" he said, and think that things never change.

"Sometimes the story is tragic. And sometimes the story is great. But you're participating in more success than you are aware of."

"You literally save lives . . . and you create community," said Greg, who knows many of our guests because they also are part of the Sanctuary community. "I'm not one of the people who says there should be no Out of the Cold. . . . I've lost too many friends."

Greg's comment on "friends" was the fulcrum for the discussion; his assigned topic was "Turning guests into friends"

He noted that the Gospel – Good News – was originally declared for the poor, but "we discover we have other priorities." He said that whether it's church, politics or in a socially-aware business, "all of us have a disconnect between what we believe and how we live."

He noted Sanctuary's mission statement – "At Sanctuary, we are becoming a healthy, welcoming community where people who are poor or excluded are particularly valued. This community is an expression of the good news embodied in Jesus Christ." So, he said, the focus for them as a community is to "put people who are excluded everywhere else at the very centre of our community."

So one important dynamic is that Sanctuary doesn't have guests. It has community members. No one is



Greg Paul, Founder and Director of Sanctuary on Charles Street in Toronto outlined the distinction between 'guest' and 'friend' in his presentation at Blythwood on Nov. 14, 2012

identified easily as staff; there are no name tags so people have to ask each other for their names; everyone who wishes to can help prepare and serve meals and everyone eats together and cleans up together.

Greg said he understands why social service agencies use the word "client" and empathized with Out of the Cold's desire to avoid that word, and, therefore our choice of the word "guest." But that choice doesn't fit what Sanctuary is striving to be, he said.

The difference between a "guest" and a "friend" he said is that "guests" face boundaries that we create.

To the guest, we unwittingly communicate that "You're welcome here . . . but this is our place: you're here on sufferance." Because the location is "ours" said Greg, "we do all the work. . . . We will provide what you need but you don't have anything to offer to us."

Simple items communicate the relationship: when we portion out food the ladle is a symbol of our power-- we control what people receive.

Greg said his desire to speak of friends rather than guests arises from his own life's journey that saw him move away from seeing himself as above those he intended to serve.

"I wanted to see myself as one who had something to offer to those in need . . . but if I am to have a relationship I need to be open to what they have to give me. . . . I found people of tremendous faith and grace, humility and love, and insight – and deep dysfunction . . . But the closer I looked at people's dysfunction, the more they looked like me."

The essence of friendship, he said, is not in giving answers or solving peoples' problems, but in sharing yourself as a real person with trials, struggles, joys and disappointments. Friends also delight, disappoint and amuse each other. There is a spectrum of friendship, he noted, with some closer than others, and over time one knows which is which. What drives Greg and Sanctuary is that "for our friends we will do whatever is in our power to help . . . "because they are my friends and I love them."

But he cautioned "We can't fix anyone. That is the hell of it. . . one lesson I've learned a thousand times."

"Remember you can't do everything (through one night a week at Out of the Cold). "But you have to trust that what you can do at any given time is enough, if it's all you can give."

--Larry Matthews

FAMILIAR SIGHTS

The welcome team at right: David, Marjorie, Christie, Nicole, Vilma, Bill and Marivic.

Below – getting good use from new sink and washing equipment

Salad chopped and ready for tossing.

Shoes in the clothing room ready for walking. It's been a stellar year for donations of boots!

