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Gordon Peters, Mennonite

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Harry Harder, Mennonite

Sheila Lavender, United

Eric Olfert, Mennonite

Josh Wallace, Mennonite

Heather Peters

MCC Saskatchewan

Restorative Justice Coordinator

Staff:

Peter Oliver, Community  
Chaplain

Dave Feick, Coordinator

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### **The Times They Are A Changing**

Bob Dylan's song certainly speaks to life in our fast changing world. The song's lyrics probably don't really speak to the changes taking place at the Micah Mission, but the times are definitely a changing here.

On March 30, Darren Friesen left his position as Community Chaplain to pursue other things. We are truly thankful to Darren for his many years of service in this position and wish him well in whatever lies ahead for he and his family.

On April 1, Peter Oliver, former Chaplain at both Saskatoon Correctional Centre and Regional Psychiatric Center began working for the Micah Mission as Community Chaplain with an emphasis on reintegration. One of Peter's goals over the next year is to build partnerships with faith communities to provide support for persons being released from prison. A Forward Step program will be the basis for supporting people reintegrating into society. Please give him a call if you or your faith community would like to explore being part of this program.

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Last summer, our chairperson, Sharon Wright and her family took off to Costa Rica for a one year sabbatical. Sharon has been using this time to research and write as well as to join her family in a number of projects with the local people. She has been able to Skype in for many of our board meetings and to keep in touch with us through emails. In the interim, three of our board members have quite ably filled in as interim board chairs for several months at a time. First Cam Harder, then Harry Harder and now Sheila Lavender. We are thankful to all of these people for giving leadership to the board at this time and to all the board members for their interest in and commitment to the work of the Micah Mission. We also look forward to Sharon's return this summer as well as to reading her new book!

We have also recently begun partnering in a somewhat informal manner with STR8 UP, an anti gang organization here in the city. Their previous partnership with another organization had come to an end and they were looking for a new place to call home. The offer was made to them to share our space at 121 20th Street as our use of the building is quite limited and we knew that our landlord would appreciate more revenue from the building. STR8 UP members and their board felt this to be a good location and as we work to formalize this partnership the members have begun gathering here for their weekly meetings. Kathie Pruden, volunteer staff person has also begun availing herself of the office space.

Unfortunately, there are also less positive changes. In the midst of this new partnership, we were informed by our landlord that our neighbours next door are requiring more space and as a result, we were given three months notice. It actually amounts to almost 4 months notice as we need to vacate the premises by the end of August. Thus, the Micah Mission now joins STR8 UP in searching for a new home. If you are aware of a space for rent or possibly even for purchase that would provide office and meeting space, please let us know. Somewhere in or close to the Riversdale or Mayfair areas of Saskatoon would be ideal.

Finally, we have had to say farewell to one of our long time Person to Person volunteers. Herman Guenther and his wife Anne served for many years with Person to Person, beginning in Prince Albert. One of the people they visited told how Herman brought him to church when he was first released from prison. Herman was the kind of person who touched many lives, not only through Person to Person but through his strong faith and commitment to Jesus Christ and his desire to tell others about that faith. He also had a wonderful sense of humour. Herman passed away on April 29, just two weeks after his 81st birthday. He will be missed by his family and his many friends and acquaintances.

An interesting article from the Globe and Mail follows:

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# Federal crime legislation casts 'dark shadow' on principles of justice, Ontario judge says

**KIRK MAKIN**

JUSTICE REPORTER — The Globe and Mail  
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An Ontario judge has mounted an unusual attack on federal crime legislation, accusing the government of turning bedrock principles of criminal law upside down.

In an article written for a legal publication, Justice Melvyn Green of the Ontario Court of Justice said that sentencing reforms “have cast a dark shadow on the sentencing principles of proportionality and restraint.”

A broad range of measures rooted in the desire to punish offenders are profoundly at odds with common law and a century of social science research into rehabilitation and recidivism, Justice Green said in the article, published in the spring edition of the Criminal Lawyers Association newsletter.

He said that the federal provisions are driven by “an ideology of unabashed Puritanism, marketed through fear-mongering and the invidious exploitation of communal differences.”

A prominent member of the defence bar before his appointment in 2005, Justice Green is widely respected for his careful, erudite approach to judging. His statements add fuel to a simmering battle over a mounting list of mandatory minimum prison terms and harsh penal reforms.

CLA president Norman Boxall said in an interview that Justice Green has bravely stated a belief that is widely held by judges and lawyers who work in the busy criminal court system.

“The trend to longer sentences through the use of mandatory minimums and the elimination of conditional sentences is, in many cases, ill-advised and not supported either by research or common sense opinions held by judges and counsel who work in the Ontario Court of Justice on a daily basis,” Mr. Boxall said.

In his article, Justice Green enumerated a swath of changes under the Conservative government that he said have set back the justice system. These include the dismantling of the conditional sentencing regime, the eradication of pardons, and virtually automatic deportation orders for those convicted of minor offences.

“Mandatory sentences have proliferated,” Justice Green added. “Conditional sentencing is all but eliminated. Pre-sentence custody credit is tightly capped. Federal parole eligibility is delayed and circumscribed. ... A policy of punishment, incapacitation and stigmatization has replaced one premised on the prospect of rehabilitation, restoration and reform.”

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He said that, with 95 per cent of criminal cases now being decided by guilty pleas, every player in the justice system recognizes that sentencing lies at the core of what the court system does. Accordingly, he said, it is imperative that policies be crafted with care.

Justice Green also pointed out that, if punishment alone could make the community safer, the United States would be the safest place on the planet. Instead, he said, the brutalizing U.S. prison system disgorges hardened ex-convicts who feel they have no stake in their society.

Justice Green said that the federal reversal is particularly troubling in view of federal commissions that were struck in the 1970s and 1980s to arrive at sound sentencing policy. He said that the vice-chairman of one of the most enlightened of these – the Daubney commission – has since become justice minister: Rob Nicholson.

Mr. Nicholson's government has repudiated what the Daubney commission stood for, turning its back on the very careful, proportionate blend of punishment and restraint it espoused, he said.

“Draconian penalties will never address the rewiring and therapy necessary to make damaged persons, if not whole, then at least, productive and responsible participants in the community we share,” Justice Green said.

Justice Green certainly makes some interesting points. It seems that as a result of the legislation referred to, there is an even greater need for restorative justice ministries. Too often, in my visits with people in the Correctional Centre, it seems that had they gone to mediation instead, they would not have to be incarcerated. Disagreements or conflicts could have been resolved by talking rather than with arrests.

Of course, this legislation also means that prisons are going to continue to be full and overflowing and people will continue to need visits as well as support upon their release. As the article states, ex-convicts are released with little hope. They are not prepared for life on the outside.

We need to continue to do what we can to provide support and to find new ways to support the people inside and those who are released. Some have jobs to go back to, others don't even have the identification, skills or even ability to get to a job interview. There are certainly those in the prisons whose job it is to help with these sorts of things, but as populations inside rise there is no way these people can meet all the needs.

What can we do to help?

Volunteer. Visit those on the inside and be there to support them upon their release through CoSAs or Forward Step. Ask to serve on the board of The Micah Mission or STR8 UP, or simply offer suggestions and prayerful and financial support to these and other organizations.

As the Forgiven/Forgotten play portrayed, victims are often left out of the picture, there is little support for them. But there are victims services with which you can also volunteer. As the play also portrayed, people from all walks of life end up in prison. Those of us who work with the incarcerated or recently released often find ourselves thinking, “There but for the grace of God, go I.”

Think it over, then give us a call.

Dave Feick

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