

ANNUAL REPORT JUNE 2006 (8 months from Oct. 2005-June 2006)

Isn't it amazing! At the Open Door we are grateful to God and you for 31 wonderful years, 6 days per week of being a front-line ministry outreach of the churches of Mississauga, making every effort to minister to people's practical, spiritual and emotional needs. The heart of the ministry is to love God and love and serve His people.

It is with a sense of great joy and thanksgiving to God that I write this annual report. Every day I have many wonderful stories to tell of what God has done in our midst and of all the wonderful happenings, so to try to report on the past 8 months – well, where do I start. It is a wonderful problem to have. One of the most amazing things is the way we experience God's presence with us everyday in so many ways, big and small. To see peoples' lives being touched and in some cases changed, and to see people come in with despair and leave with a measure of hope is so uplifting.

Looking back over these past 8 months, I am amazed at all that has transpired and I thank God for all that He has done. See the section on *Ministry Notes* for some of the stories!

We are especially thankful for the wonderful partnership we have with all our churches and every one of you who participate in this ministry. The people who come to us for help are from all over Mississauga and beyond. We serve people from every walk of life, all different ages, races, religions and cultures for every reason imaginable. As the second largest shopping mall in Canada, located in the heart of the city, Square One is a real city centre. It is easily reached by bus from any area of our city. There are over 5,000 employees, countless shoppers, and also many people who wander around the mall for various reasons. It is surprising the number of people who are in distress who come to the mall and end up at The Open Door. Many different agencies and both hospitals refer people to us, as well as those who find us by word of mouth. People can see the churches of Mississauga wanting to be available to them when they need someone to turn to, whatever the reason. People also appreciate Square One's desire to have us here as an expression of their caring commitment and service to the community, the people of Mississauga.

There are so many wonderful resources available in our churches – but many people do not know they exist. There are parenting groups, alpha groups, bereavement, small home groups, youth groups, sports groups, separated and divorced, financial advising, anger management, etc. There are programs to help youth in difficulty with school work or the law, ESL classes, vacation schools. There are concerts and plays, etc.

This is just a small sampling of the vast resources. We are thankful to be able to connect people who need these resources to our churches. We also network with many agencies in the community to obtain help needed by those who come to us as a part of our referral counseling.

We have a map of Mississauga with all our churches on it plus a file on every church which we try to keep as current as possible. Please make sure that your information is up-to-date.

Thanks to our Lord and to all our churches and the people who partner with us in so many ways. Thank you to those of you who financially support this ministry as we are run entirely by donation and do not receive any grants.

Every day is packed full of ministry both in the centre and on the telephone. A lot of our work is caring for people in distress, for people who are homeless or about to be evicted, for abused women and children, teenagers or young adults in difficulty, for people suffering from marriage breakdowns, joblessness, poverty, bereavement, poor health, people in need of food and for people who do not know where to turn for help in their particular circumstances. Many people who come are hungry for a sense of wholeness, and some people have a deep spiritual hunger. So many people need someone to talk to, and to know that someone cares.

We also have people who come in seeking information on how to access the help they need in order to assist them in their endeavours to help loved ones, ie. aging parents, children with various problems, etc. Some of our pastors and churches call upon us for information as well.

The centre is also a place of comfort, a source of encouraging friendship for people who are lonely, for those who are battling disabilities or chronic illness. Some are new to the country. We have many opportunities to encourage and pray with people and we also try to connect them to groups or places where their needs can be further met.

Every day is different, but there is always so much joy and thankfulness each day for all that has happened. How wonderful when a little family about to be wrongfully evicted is safe because of the instruction they receive from our outreach worker. How beautiful when a terrified, single mother out of an abusive situation is reassured, offered help and regains her hope or when we see someone grieving a loved one, being encouraged by our Lord. We are all so encouraged when we see people overcoming addictions, finding employment, not losing their new job because we were able to provide some bus tickets or work boots; being able to be of help to someone facing critical illness or to journey with people with disabilities or providing food and diapers and clothing for a little baby; watching people come into faith, hope replacing despair, and the lonely comforted.

We had well over 10,000 visits to The Open Door last year. This includes over 2,500 visits to our food cupboard, over 250 people attended our free Christmas dinner and 120 families totaling 443 people were provided with turkeys and gifts in their homes. Every Thursday evening between 25 and 40 people attended the free dinners.

It has been a challenge to keep our food cupboard stocked this year, but thanks to God's amazing provision at just the right time, we haven't had to send anyone away empty handed. It's amazing when our cupboards are totally bare and someone arrives just in time with the groceries we need!

We have a number of churches who faithfully collect food for us, but we need more who will join in on a regular basis. We also receive food gift certificates from a couple of churches which helps so much when people are desperate for milk or margarine, etc. or need special foods such as baby formula or Ensure for adults who are ill.

When people come to us for food, we recognize that it is a symptom that something isn't going well for them and we befriend people and see what we can do to help further with their difficulties.

Christmas at The Open Door is a huge undertaking, but it is worth it when we see how the Lord blesses everyone involved. Over 250 people attended the Christmas dinner and we took care of another 120 families by either matching them with churches or individuals and when we didn't have enough sponsors, we pulled it together in-house somehow.

We use the auditorium for our dinner. After a delicious turkey dinner we invite any children or teens who want to be in a play to come up and we tell them the true story of Christmas, dress them up in costumes and they are the nativity play. For some children and adults this is the first time they have heard the real story. Throughout the dinner carols are sung and there is a loving atmosphere as a large number of volunteers work together to make this a memorable evening. Over 100 new testaments were given to people who expressed a desire to receive one. Afterwards everyone receives Christmas gift bags provided by our churches. Those attending are people we have been ministering to!

In addition, we took care of 120 families. Everyone is interviewed, a gift suggestion list is made of their children's wishes and even the adults and then these families are matched to people to provide for them. This year we had to provide in the Open Door for a large number of families as we didn't have enough sponsors. A number of young adults came and helped us put together things from gifts donated and from gift certificates provided by one of our churches and several people, including a pastor, did last minute deliveries for us.

We heard many beautiful stories of how God touched peoples' lives through all of this and as of May, for 3 people who we helped with Christmas, it was their last one on earth! A huge thank you to all of you who made this Christmas a special celebration for people who needed your help.

We are so encouraged by the number of people from our churches who drop in just at the right moment with bus tickets, or financial donations, food, gift certificates for grocery stores, coffee, leftovers from a function, etc. God manages to send them in just when we need them most! Others have asked for donations at their own parties for The Open Door. At a children's church musical food was collected for admission, a line dancing class brought bus tickets to every session for us, children brought in used toys, people came with jars of change. This list could go on and on. It is always beautiful to see how people's hearts are touched by God to do something to help.

We have wonderful volunteers who come in to give of themselves to help in this ministry, some for half a day per week – others for more. We also thank all the ambassadors for The Open Door in the congregations of Mississauga, in their service clubs or workplaces. We have people who have food drives and people who regularly bring in day-old bread and people who knit for us and people who find so many other ways to help. There are just so many people to thank as there are also so many other ways people participate in this ministry.

Our thanks to the merchants and mall management for the many ways they participate at The Open Door too. The mall management has always been supportive of The Open Door and we thank God for them. We also have a great relationship with security.

The crockpot ministry is growing. We have so many people during the week who are hungry and in the winter cold and hungry. Some people pick a day to provide stew, soup or chili to keep available as we unofficially feed at least 12 people lunch during the day.

Our Thursday evening dinners are packed out with people attending and our churches really enjoy taking turns providing the dinner. In addition to our regulars, a number of new churches have joined our roster this year. Usually a church does the whole evening themselves, but sometimes we have more than one church helping – for example, one night the food and people to serve was provided by one church. A young man from another church played the guitar and sang before and during dinner and a young man from yet another church talked about his journey to faith and helped everyone play a fun game where everyone went home with a gift. We always open our evening with guitars or other worship music, a short Scripture reading, reflection and grace followed by a wonderful home cooked meal with good fellowship around the table. These dinners mean so much to the people who attend and we have many beautiful encounters with them. Thank you to all who so lovingly serve in this ministry.

A special thank you to the “Trinity Purposeful Providers”, City Centre Baptist volunteers and the many other volunteers who help with our clothing and food cupboards. We have monthly clothing days where people can pick out clothes for their family free of charge. Volunteers come regularly to sort the clothes and to bring them over and back from our storage room. This is a huge job and we really appreciate their commitment.

On Wednesdays we have begun providing a free lunch with our noontime Bible Stories and prayer time for anyone who wants to attend. Since we changed the name from Bible Study to Bible Stories, our numbers have grown and we have many stories to tell of how people have been touched by this part of the ministry. Our thanks to those who have helped.

The library and tape ministry is flourishing. Recently a church asked for new Christian books to be brought as a contribution to a small program they were having and we were pleased to receive them! We find books to be very effective in ministry.

We are really in need of more Jesus videos as our supply is depleted, especially English. We lend gospel videos and tapes in all different languages which are very much in demand.

Our thanks to our faithful intercessors, some who pray with us on Friday mornings and others who pray for us in our churches. We are really missing the Mosterts who prayed with us on Fridays as they have moved up north. Prayer is so important to us and we appreciate all the prayer support. Some churches pray for the ministry on a regular basis.

The blessings from our Blessing tree disappear very quickly as many people enjoy taking one. We have lovely stories of how God has used these scriptures to minister to people’s hearts. Encouraging scriptures are written on colourful paper, rolled up and tied with a ribbon to our tree for all to help themselves to.

Last year the Mississauga Waterfront Festival provided us with free tickets and vouchers for children, teens and adults to accompany them. People who otherwise couldn't afford it had an opportunity to have a lovely outing.

Youth groups and students doing their community hours came in to help in various ways. We consider this an important part of our ministry, as for some young people this is their first experience doing volunteer work.. We also mentored a Guelph University student who did their field placement with us. Starting in September we will have a person doing his field work from the Toronto Schools of Theology.

The number of invitations to speak has really increased this year and I have really enjoyed having the opportunity to speak at a number of churches and other groups and to share our powerpoint and the wonderful stories of how we see God at work in people's lives here. It's always great to see so many friends of The Open Door. Pastors from our churches come in and it is always a joy to have them. We recently hosted some pastors from Meadowvale for lunch and a chat about the ministry.

A very special thank you to our board members who serve so faithfully and enthusiastically. Our board meetings begin and end with prayer and there is such a wonderful sense of working together. I always feel inspired and encouraged by our meetings and I value their wisdom. They give freely of themselves to serve our Lord.

In the ministry notes section this year Krista and I will both be sharing stories. It is so wonderful to have Krista ministering to people. Everyone really loves her! Krista, as the Assistant Director, has many other tasks as well and also steps into the leadership role when I need to be elsewhere. It is a real gift to have Krista sharing the load with me and I thank God for her.

A special thank you to Sandra who is our Office Manager. She has a real heart for The Open Door and is a valuable member of our team and we all enjoy working together.

Belma, Violet and Vashti have taken turns part-time on Saturdays and we are thankful for them.

Thank you to all the people who have come in this past year to give thanks for what God has done in their lives through this ministry. It is so encouraging to hear how you are continuing on in His love and care.

Thank you for the love, encouragement, support and friendships that has been extended to me personally and to our staff and for your prayers that mean so much to us.

I thank God for calling me to serve here. It brings great joy to me. It seems that over all the years God's call is the same "Love Me and Love My People". I have an opportunity to be in relationship with so many beautiful people, to walk with others in part of their journey, to experience the joy of being used of God in ministry and to experience the love and fellowship of Christian community. This fills my heart with even more love for God and for His people. I look forward to all that God has planned for us in the coming year.

The rest of my report follows. Please see attached.

Lynne Culham
Executive Director

Lynne and Krista's Ministry Notes June 2006

- A single mom who tries so hard to support herself and her son was very distressed to have her application for disability allowance for her son turned down. It was obvious that he had a very legitimate claim and now she was faced with the whole appeal process and still no help with her son who is a teenager and too old to receive any other benefits so she is supporting him. We have known this lady for a number of years now and she has been faced with so many difficult challenges through out this time. After working for many years for a major company, it closed down the Canadian site and ever since this lady has only been able to get part-time employment, usually working 2 jobs. At times the threat of eviction has been very real as she never knows how many part-time hours she will be able to get. During this time we have been praying with her and encouraging her and helping in any ways we can with food, dinners, help at Christmas and with an outreach worker to help her with applications etc. We also connected her to a new church and she has really grown in her faith and trust and has had some wonderful experiences with God and His people which have really encouraged and strengthened her. We are so happy to hear that she has just won her appeal after so much waiting and paperwork. Her son will finally receive his disability allowance. She still has a difficult time making enough money to live on but she also has new hope, renewed faith and a church family.

- A couple of years ago we encouraged a man to get into a rehab program for his drug and alcohol addiction which he agreed to and for the past year since he came out he has been doing very well. Some terrible things happened to him when he was very young in an orphanage and later he lived in many foster homes. He always wanted to help in some way – scrub the floor, etc. and although he was battling with Hepatitis C, he kept trying to work at whatever he could get – moving jobs, painting, etc. He would also tell others about any jobs available that he found. He always tried to help others even though he was in difficulty himself. We were able to help him with bus tickets to get to work some meals at the Open Door and occasionally some food supplies from our cupboard, and just encouragement, fellowship and lots of times of prayer with him, which he really valued. He was also meeting with a good counselor during this time. His greatest desire was to have some time with his son and just before Christmas his ex-wife agreed to his son staying for 2 days with him. As he wasn't working at the time, thanks to our churches, we were happy to provide him with a turkey and all the supplies to cook a beautiful dinner and we gave gifts for him to give to his son. He was so happy. We didn't know at the time it was his last Christmas on earth. A few months ago he was sitting with us in a lot of pain and Krista urged him to go to the hospital and he never came out again. Krista visited him in hospital a number of times and prayed with him and I was able to go a couple of times. He was still a young man and we were very sad when he died, but at the same time we knew that he had come into a strong loving relationship with God. God had also given him his greatest wish which was to have his son visit.

Lynne and Krista's Ministry Notes June 2006

- A young woman who gave up on high school in frustration and poverty a few years ago began coming in occasionally for food, and then clothing and finally to talk and share. She was very attached to an unhealthy relationship and very stuck in her life. Over a year of two steps forward and 5 back, she has finally freed herself from the relationship bringing her further down in life and has now enrolled in a GED program so that she can obtain an apprenticeship through a program that we directed her to, with the formerly unattainable goal of getting her Early Childhood Education certification well in her sights. She is quite proud of herself right now and we are to. Our relationship, and her story, continues...
- As I prayed with a lady who found her 23 year old son dead just days before she came, in my mind I saw a picture of Jesus having to watch His mother watch him die on the cross, so I put this in my prayer for her that Jesus really understood her pain and just as he would have comforted His mother would he please comfort her. It was amazing how much this helped her. We referred her to a bereavement counselor and she has found him very helpful. She continues to drop in from time to time for prayer.
- The mother of a young woman facing major surgery for cancer came in for prayer for her daughter and the whole family who are under great distress after receiving the news. We are continuing to pray with this lady who also has some health problems herself.
- A woman with 2 young teenagers came in for help when her husband had just left her. We provided her with groceries and some referral numbers that she needed as well as just being there to listen to her story as she really felt the need to talk. After many years of not working she has recently found employment although it is very low paying.
- A lady was referred to us who is a single mom, with a 16 year old son and she is only working part time but looking for another job. Because of her diabetes she is in need of fresh fruit and vegetables and can't afford to buy food at this time. She also wasn't well. Fortunately we had a small grocery gift certificate for her and she also came to our Thursday dinners. We arranged for a Caring and Sharing order for her as well. Unfortunately when they went to deliver her food she was in hospital but we managed to get the food to her as soon as she came out.
- A woman with children was referred to us by Victim Services and we were thankful to be able to help with food and our free dinners on Thursday and clothing and odds and ends that were needed as this woman moved into a basement apartment with her children. They really enjoyed the guitars and fellowship and games at the Thursday dinners and the friendliness of the churches who serve. We also gave the mom a comfort kit (bubblebath, a daily reading book and other toiletries) and gave the children colouring books and crayons as they had lost everything and had been very traumatized. Even though it was small things, it helped to lift their spirits.

Lynne and Krista's Ministry Notes June 2006

- A couple came in for food who have recently immigrated from Cuba. They have 5 children; the youngest is a one-year-old. They all needed mittens, hats, coats, etc. for winter. During the winter we have so many people who come in without adequate clothing for the cold. We often run over to our storage room to meet their needs.
- A young woman from the mall office came in with 2 pies she had made for us. Another came with a gift certificate she had won. So many lovely people stop in to contribute.
- We gave Tim Hortons gift vouchers to a man who couldn't get into the shelters which were full so he could buy some coffee and a sandwich at an all-night Tim's so that he could get out of the cold in the middle of the night. If he is really quiet and well behaved they will let him sit there and stay warm. The next day we would try again to obtain help for him.
- A lady who had just obtained employment and was returning to the work force after caring for two ailing parents needed glasses desperately and had no money for them. We arranged with Lenscrafters to provide glasses for her free of charge. We often call upon them and they are quick to help us.
- We had another man who was always wrestling with spiritual questions and we spent quite a bit of time talking and praying with him. He came into a place of solid faith. He really enjoyed the friendship dinner and was so happy to be at the Christmas dinner and to see the nativity play! Both he and his wife were on disability, although fairly young and appreciated the free dinners. He just had a heart attack followed by a stroke and died. The owners where they had a basement apartment are now selling the house, so not only is his widow coping with grief, but now she suddenly has to find another place to live. She needs a cane to move around. Because they moved within the last year she is not eligible for another moving benefit to help with expenses, but we are hoping our Peel Outreach Worker, Deb, will find a way to help her.
- We are honoured to pray with a lovely Christian woman who just had her second mastectomy and is undergoing chemo. She has a vibrant faith and trust in God to be with her. She is a single mom and also has a friend who she is always trying to help. Her friend who comes in as well is a single woman in her late 50's early 60's who is on disability due to her illness and takes care of an 86-year-old mother who lives with her and has severe medical problems which are costly and require a lot of personal care. Both of them need Ensure as they can't eat very much anymore. We try to help with grocery gift certificates, bus tickets, clothing, encouragement and prayers.

Lynne and Krista's Ministry Notes June 2006

- A ministry update regarding a couple that we have reported on in the past. We have been helping a very nice young couple struggling with all sorts of difficulties in their life. After moving out of a basement apartment into the shelter because the pipes froze and ruined all their possessions which weren't insured they managed to move into another basement apartment which turned out to have mould growing on the walls from an unrepaired overflowing toilet above them. At the time they had a child under one who has asthma and the mother was expecting another baby. It was a high risk pregnancy due to the mother's chronic illness. With all the moving and his pregnant wife's illness the father was doing his best to take care of his wife and child, cleaning, cooking, etc and was unable to keep his low paying part time work that he had. The baby was born, and several months later had viral meningitis. Imagine taking a sick baby to the hospital on a bus. During this time we were helping in various ways, such as with bus tickets to get to us, to the hospital, to our free dinners. We helped with food, diapers, baby formula(as the mother is unable to nurse due to medications), clothing, grocery vouchers for milk etc., Thursday dinners, help at Christmas, and putting them in touch with Deb our outreach worker from the Region who helped them with so many applications and red tape situations etc. Eventually they managed to move into a very modest but decent apartment but it takes almost all their money for rent. Throughout this time with them we have encouraged them and prayed with them and they have really grown in faith. They also invited us to come to the hospital to pray for them when the baby was born. Very recently both children were baptized, dedicated to the Lord and they try to get to church as often as they can. This past Easter a lovely thing happened. We were offered groceries that Caring and Sharing were unable to deliver to a family at the last minute on the late afternoon before Good Friday. As I was praying about whom to give them to, I thought of this family. After I brought the cart of groceries in I opened the top grocery bag and there was a large box of arrowroot cookies. This family always asked if we had any arrowroot cookies as they settled the baby's stomach. Just in case I didn't get it right I felt like the Lord had put an obvious clue in place. We also had received just the right size diapers they needed that day and one turkey. A former volunteer had dropped in to say hello was present to see all this unfolding and offered to deliver everything to the family. They were so encouraged and had a wonderful Easter celebration. With two children in diapers, the pressures of low income and poor health there are still challenges ahead, but this couple continues to do their best with God's help to provide for their little family.
- A woman was brought in by her friends who we have an ongoing relationship with. The lady was exhausted, depressed and unsure of where to turn, after having left her home and country with next to nothing to follow the trail of her ex-husband who had taken her 7 and 12 year old children for whom she had full custody. Although she believed they were in a neighboring province, she came to Mississauga because she had fellow countrymen and friends to stay here with. We were able to direct the mother to the police, and legal aid as well as cross cultural services to begin what has been a frustrating process of regaining her children. Through-out her unplanned, emergency stay, we have been able to help out with food and clothes, bus tickets, toiletries and the like. The most important thing we have been able and privileged to provide this struggling woman though, is ongoing emotional and spiritual support as she walks this tough path, allowing her to vent and in turn be encouraged and strengthened.