



The Welcome Home

A mission of St. Alphonsus, Inc., serving in Winnipeg, Manitoba

“Houses of hospitality must be built for the poor in every city of every diocese (eparchy).”

Council of Nicaea

Religious life begins on the periphery. The founders of religious communities feel their hearts stretched by some group, some need peripheral to the concerns and interests of the mainstream church and society. This was the experience of St. Alphonsus Liguori, founder of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, the Redemptorists, who realized a strong call from God “to bring the good news to the poor and most abandoned.” This was also the experience of Fr. Achilles Delaere, a Redemptorist priest from Belgium who set aside his native language and culture and his Roman Rite church to selflessly serve Ukrainian pioneers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan in the early 1900s.

Both St. Alphonsus and Fr. Delaere showed a characteristic willingness to respond to those to whom no one else was ministering. They chose to live where others who have a choice would choose not to live. Their dedication to Christ led them to those who were outside the church’s regular pastoral care.

St. Alphonsus requires that Redemptorists live among those to whom they are sent. The members are to have direct and personal contact with the poor—to actively seek them out and to make their common life of prayer and faith available to them. It is in this spirit that one needs to understand The Welcome Home.

In 1989, the Ukrainian Redemptorists began a process of dialogue with Ukrainian Catholic young adults who challenged Redemptorists to return to their roots and live their mission of reaching out to the poor; the young adults declared, “If you be our heart, we will be your hands and legs.” So began a collaborative

effort between Redemptorists and laity to give expression to the Redemptorist charism in our contemporary society. In 1993, The Welcome Home opened its doors to a struggling neighbourhood in Winnipeg. Ever since then it has invited laity to live with Redemptorists the ideals of community life and ministry through a commitment of time and talent to The Welcome Home mission. Lay volunteers are a critical component of our ministry.

The larger context of this effort is the lives of the people who decide to trust and befriend us. As St. John the Compassionate said, “the poor are our masters and teachers.” The Spirit of God forms and directs our ministry through the people we encounter.



We serve families and individuals in the Point Douglas neighbourhood and beyond who are socioeconomically challenged, on low and fixed incomes, and are open to the possibilities of sharing positive and faith-based values in communion with others. Until the pandemic, we offered small-group activities including a women’s cooking class, a recovery group for those struggling with addictions, individual counselling, religious education, a weekly food bank, and the experience of prayer. We assist people with transportation needs through a bus-token program. We host several larger gatherings through the year and an annual barbecue at the end of June, followed by a day camp for the children in July.

Many of the regular members of this community have been participating for more than ten years, some for more than twenty years. About 65 percent are of Indigenous heritage.

One of the highlights of our week is the Thursday evening Vespers and community supper, appropriately dubbed “Family Night.” Here, the Icon of Hospitality comes alive. Both young and old, poor and affluent, the educated and unlettered, the hurting and the healed gather at the table of prayer and fellowship, one body in Christ. This is their “house church” as many have come to call it. Over the years, this gift of relationship has born fruit in the catechesis and baptism of children and adults which leads us to the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist: the Divine Liturgy. It has become a spiritual home for those who did not have one.



Our outreach as a faith-based initiative proposes an understanding of the human person that includes a constitutive spiritual dimension. In caring for people, we care for the whole person, which includes this spiritual dimension. Members of the Ukrainian Catholic Church who share in our ministry have found an avenue for their generosity and a venue for making the gospel meaningful in their lives.

The Welcome Home reflects the mission of the church in the words of Pope Francis: “to heal hurts and warm hearts.” We are constantly invited beyond our personal comfort zones to see life through another lens. How better to see the shortcomings of one’s view of the world than by comparing it with that of others? Our own conversion is deepened, for egoism cannot last long in a place that constantly demands self-giving, and our capacity for compassion grows.

One of the most important outcomes of our work is expressed in a thematic phrase used by Redemptorists: “to evangelize the poor and to be evangelized by the poor.” Relationship is an instrument of evangelization. It invites a mutuality and reciprocity. It is risky and unpredictable, but it calls us into communion with God and each other. The Welcome Home is about building community. It is about a friendship that invites the discovery of one’s dignity and belonging in Christ.

Implicit in this relationship with poor and marginalized people is the common denominator of one's own poverty. Those who come to give or serve often find their own capacity for compassion, patience, and understanding stretched. The wounds of others remind us of our own. While accompanying those who are on the periphery of our society and church, we learn to be less judgmental, more inclusive, and patient as we ask, "What is your story? How did life get to be this way?" The struggles and needs of others will raise questions within us about society, racism, greed, and the way the world works. As St. Pope Paul VI once put it, "There can never be personal conversion without also working for societal transformation."



The Greek word 'diakonia' expresses the act of being called to serve. The Cardus Religious Freedom Institute's Diakonia Project presents a series of eight different initiatives in which Canadians of faith serve their community. This highlights a core aspect of religious freedom: the freedom to live out one's deepest held beliefs through concrete actions that serve the common good.

[This article has been written by a member of the faith community that supports this initiative. All views, opinions, and theological viewpoints are those of the author.]

