

Our Place Society 2010 Annual Report

December 31, 2009 marks the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. It also marks the end of our first full year in our new home on Pandora Avenue. Both events give cause for reflection.

These ten years have been memorable in the battle to end homelessness. The Mayor's Task Force filed its report in October 2007 and the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness was formed in 2008. Since then, the Coalition reports success in housing the homeless as well as protecting units for supportive and transitional housing.

Our Place Society is a committed partner of the Coalition. For instance, we are working with the Coalition in the newly launched "Streets to Homes" program. This program will see Our Place Society coordinating its housing and support services with other agencies to more effectively help the chronically homeless secure and retain housing.

This past decade also saw the formation of the Our Place Society in June 2005, an alliance of Victoria Presbytery's Open Door Ministry and the Upper Room. A new facility was built for the combined operations on Pandora Avenue and our official opening occurred in June 2008. It is fitting to acknowledge the visionary leadership of Larry Scyner, Robin Krause, John Ronald and Reverends David Stewart and Allen Tysick in making this dream a reality. It is, likewise, appropriate to recognize the hard work and dedication of many others—staff and volunteers alike—who work tirelessly on a vision of one agency greater than the sum of its two parts.

2009 has been a year of considerable success for Our Place Society – although we use the term 'success' guardedly. We have been successful in that we responded to our inner-city family: our drop-in centre is full everyday, our showers and hygiene centre runs constantly, the number of meals and lunches provided exceeds budget and our supportive housing units are at capacity. We worked out the 'kinks' of our new building, albeit administration is over-crowded. And, we continue to provide creative, new programs—Potlatch in November, a good example—and maintain worthwhile initiatives like Angel Gifts.

But we are not happy with this 'success' in that it means our inner-city family grows larger. To cite just one example, we used to be astonished when we served 900 meals-a-day; now 1200 is commonplace. We even hear babies cry in the dining room. Clearly, homelessness, poverty and suffering have not abated. How staff and volunteers continually rise to this challenge is source of wonder to my Board colleagues and me. We are indebted to the continued leadership of Rev. Allen Tysick and his team in bringing it all together into a coordinated whole.

Our Place's 'successes' manifest themselves in so many ways it is difficult to pinpoint the most important. Suffice to say, two events in 2009 warrant specific mention: finalizing our revised strategic

plan and achieving our fund-raising goals. In both, the United Church of Canada and its members have been instrumental.

After an extensive process, including consultation with the Victoria Presbytery, we confirmed our strategic plan. The strategy has ambitious goals including, when funds become available, opening seven days a week, twelve hours a day. The home we provide for our inner-city family should not be closed more than it is open. We also decided on a tag line that captures the essence of Our Place: hope and belonging. We believe a caring community must endeavour to end the loneliness and isolation of the vulnerable and support human relationships and belonging. Belonging can set in motion hope and initiative for a better life.

Finally, thanks to the Victoria Presbytery and its congregations, as well as countless other donors, we met our 2008/09 fund-raising goals. One of our Board members calls it, "the re-occurring miracle". We are so very grateful for without this financial assistance our work would, quite simply, be impossible. Our Place is a special calling. The rewards are not material. They are indescribable and proceed from a sense of devotion to the service of others. We are delighted to have your support in this most splendid endeavour.

Sincerely,
Dennis M. Anholt, Ph.D.
Board Chair