

A History of the Regina Rescue Mission

By Vicki Hack

February 2005

The history of the Regina Rescue Mission begins with the story of Ken & Michelle Porter. They met at Millar College of the Bible where they both graduated from their third year program. Mrs Porter says: "Ken and I didn't always plan to be Rescue Missionaries. In fact, we had committed our lives to full time foreign mission work". At their first *Love Your Neighbour Banquet*, the Porters shared how God developed compassion in them for the poor and homeless in Canada while they lived in Winnipeg:

Ken: After Bible School in the summer of 1989 Michelle and I decided to move to Winnipeg for summer jobs. Since we were poor students, we took the cheapest apartments we could find in the heart of downtown Winnipeg, on a street called Furby street.

Michelle: Now we didn't realize it at the time, but we actually moved into an inner city neighbourhood known as the "War-Zone". One night walking home we followed a trail of blood for several blocks down to our house. More than once houses were barricaded with yellow police tape saying, "Do not cross." Watching the news that night would reveal another murder. We quickly discovered that our neighbours were not the clean, polite, Christian folk from rural Saskatchewan. Every day we saw men and women staggering home from the bars. Young children frequently ran through the streets fighting, swearing, and even throwing lawn darts at each other, while their parents were gone for nights of drinking and gambling. Teenage girls stood on the street corners in short skirts trying to make money by prostituting their young bodies.

Ken: I ended up taking a security guard job and watched in shock as I saw the other security guards abuse homeless people as they kicked them out of lobbies and stairwells where they were sleeping or huddling from the cold. We began to feel a tremendous sense of compassion and urgency. Our question was, "Lord, how do we love our new neighbours?" God began to speak to us. We gave people some food on the street. We even let a homeless man sleep in the back seat of our car. We talked to the children about going home at night. We passed out Gospel tracts to every house on our block. And then we called a Rescue Mission.

This Rescue Mission was the Union Gospel Mission in Winnipeg, MB. Mrs. Porter shared what happened after that phone call:

Union Gospel Mission eagerly accepted our help. I volunteered as a receptionist, and Ken was hired as a night watchman. After that summer, happily married, we went back to Bible College more eager than ever to serve the Lord with all our hearts. It was all Ken could do to finish his course so he could get to do more hands on ministry. But what?

We searched high and low looking for opportunities to do full time Christian service, but no one seemed to want our help. We were told we didn't have enough experience. Or we didn't have a big enough church backing us. Then, just before the grad ceremonies, we found a pamphlet in our student mailbox, which said, "International Union of Gospel Missions Leadership Training Program." It was a one-year course of study to train as a Rescue Mission leader or planter. We looked in other student boxes and no one seemed to have this brochure. So, we phoned and were received with

encouragement by the Director of Education. He told us we had to find a training mission in Canada, and Union Gospel Mission gladly took on our internship.

Around the very same time, we were offered a summer position at the New Life Mission in Kamloops, BC. I believe it was no coincidence that the Lord led us to a summer job in a Rescue Mission. No one knew of our plan to go to Winnipeg for a year of training, so it was very definitely a confirmation by the leading of the Holy Spirit. So, we spent the summer working in Kamloops, and began our training in Winnipeg that fall. We served at this large, well-established Mission for seven years, most of them as the Senior Chaplains, with one summer on a leave of absence to work as interim directors at the Prince George Gospel Mission, in BC.

This one year internship was called Rescue College. This is an accredited, award-winning distance education program through the International Union of Gospel Missions, which is now the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions. During their time at Union Gospel Mission, God was preparing them for another work. They lived at the Mission and were able to put away a fair amount of money, without knowing what God would later ask them to do with it. God also trained them in leadership, as well as the workings of an addiction recovery program. They had an amazing ministry at UGM for seven years but felt that God was calling them somewhere else, so in March of 1999 they began their search for where God wanted them to be.

God used a summer job as security guards and a summer in the “War-zone” to develop a heart for ministry to the poor in Ken and Michelle. But how did they get from Winnipeg to Regina? Michelle relates this journey:

Our venture began when we left our positions after seven years as Senior Chaplains at a large established Rescue Mission in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Following a time of rest, prayer, and fasting, we felt drawn to Regina, and were urged by Evy Thiessen, a deaconess in our church, to seek the counsel of Harold and Charlene Lutzer, Directors of Canadian Revival Fellowship. The Lutzer’s received us well, and encouraged us to come and work amongst the disadvantaged of Regina’s inner city. At the same time, the International Union of Gospel Missions asked us to consider planting a mission in Regina.

On the first scouting trip to Regina, the Porters met a realtor named Lionel Popescu who showed Ken and Michelle around the city and had them for dinner. Mr. Popescu is a Christian and was a well known individual in the community. He introduced the Porters to key people who were leading ministry in the city. Lionel Popescu was an amazing godly man, who served on the board at the Rescue Mission until his passing in the summer of 2002.

During that first visit to Regina, the Porters stayed at Canadian Revival Fellowship (CRF). The Lutzers were also excited about the prospect of starting a Rescue Mission and they wanted to back it up in

anyway that they could. Harold Lutzer became a Founding Board Member and has now taken on the position of Chairman of the Board.

The Porters also began talking to the other charities in Regina. They wanted to know what the needs were and make sure that they did not duplicate services. After talking to ministries such as the Salvation Army and Soul's Harbour (a local soup kitchen) they realized that the greatest need was for a Christian recovery program. Therefore they decided to make their mission a place where men and women with addictions could come to conquer them while learning more about having a relationship with God. The overall feeling after talking with these groups was that of encouragement that the city really needed them to come and work in the downtown area.

God's provision has always been very evident at the Regina Rescue Mission. When the Porters started the mission, they had only their life savings of \$20,000 to live off of and start a mission. They developed the discipline of asking God for everything before they bought it. Time and time again, He provided exactly what was needed. The following stories display the miracles of God's provision. They are inspiring because they remind us that God is real and active. They also remind us that God works through the obedience of His people to provide for the poor.

These miracles began before Ken and Michelle moved to Regina: "By faith, we asked the Lord to sell our house and furnishings so we could move to Regina. In less than two weeks He did. And we moved to Regina on October 31st, 1999." This provided much of the money that was used to found the RRM.

The second miracle, and perhaps the story that is told most often, is the provision of a building for Ken and Michelle to begin their ministry. They began praying for a building. In order to focus on a LifeChange Program, as they had planned after assessing the needs of the city, the building they would begin with needed certain qualities. The Porters prayed for God to give them a castle that would meet their needs. And by the way, it needed to be free.

God answered their prayers! They phoned up Lloyd Realtors who introduced them to a man by the name of Mike. Mike was taking care of a building that was located downtown, but he was unable to keep up with the building and the tenants. Mike gave Ken and Michelle the grand tour of the building, which would soon become the building for the Regina Rescue Mission. . .

This house [was] the perfect building for the needs of a mission, it had a kitchen, a classroom, an office, and a lot of rooms on the second and third floor. Ken made an appointment to meet with the landowner of the building. In that meeting they discussed what it would be used for and that they were willing to take care of the home and make it into a rescue mission, which the landowner agreed to. On December 15, 1999, 16 days before their "due date" for the Lord to provide, they had their building.

The owners of this building were Robert and Anne Gardikiotis. Thanks to their philanthropy, the Regina Rescue Mission had a building to work out of before January 1st. They allowed the Porters to use the building, free of charge, and run programs which would benefit the downtown core area community of Regina. All the Porters needed to do was forward the rent from any tenants to the Gardikiotis'. In a few years, however, they started to charge rent.

Though this building did have a turret, like a castle, it didn't look quite as nice on the inside as it did on the outside:

The building was currently being used as a drug house. The house sure didn't look like much, it was very dark and the dirt and garbage that was in this house was tremendous! Everywhere you looked there was graffiti, used needles, human waste, just a whole lot of filth.

To make matters worse, the tenants were not pleased that their crack house was going to become a mission. They threw a party on Christmas Eve.

There was a lot of vandalism done to the house; a room on fire, broke a banister and many windows. The Love of God [shone] through the next morning when Ken and Michelle walked around the house and handed out Christmas presents.

This did not discourage the Porters! They had learned that God will provide what is needed for us to do the work He has called us to do:

By faith, [the Porters] gave notice at our apartment, so that we could move into the Mission by March 1st, trusting that God would provide the help we needed to renovate and secure the suite.

As always, God provided. This time, He did it through the obedience of His people:

Many churches and Bible Colleges in the area came and helped out. They filled dumpster after dumpster with all the garbage they hauled out of the building. They scrubbed the building from top to bottom and painted over the horrific graffiti. By February it was ready.

On the day that they decided to move there was a group of 20 Briercrest Bible College students who helped them load and unload. With so many people helping it only took an hour and twenty minutes to load and unload everything!

Throughout the life of the Regina Rescue Mission, God has continued to provide as the need arose. Here are a few stories from the first few months:

The beds were filthy beyond use, and had bedbugs. The Lord has provided a

donation of 30 beds and bedding for them all. My Mom won a Porsche from an internet contest worth more than 40K US and used some of the money to buy the Mission a computer and to carpet the suite in the area of the Mission where we live. I won an all-in-one machine from an Internet contest that faxes, photocopies, scans and prints laser copies. This was the next thing on our list of big purchases for the Mission. Ken said to me, "We need a van." "No one is going to donate a van to us", I told him, rolling my eyes. The very next day Harold Lutzer asked us if we wanted his van. I'm not kidding you!

I was giving the men toiletries and as I reluctantly poured the last of my good shampoo into their bottle, I bargained with God. "Well, Lord, you know how hard it is to give up my good shampoo; you're going to have to replace this somehow." The next day, we came home and someone had dropped off 6 huge jugs of salon shampoo! The day we ran out of dish detergent AND sandwich fixings for the men, a man came to our door and said, rather sheepishly, "The Lord told me to bring these items to you." What were they? Dish soap and a case of canned salmon. A simple gift, an act of obedience, an answer to prayer. . .It is just so exciting to see the Lord work.

Isaiah 65:24, in the Living Bible, says, "I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking to me about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!"

Once the building became livable and Ken and Michelle moved in, the next step was to begin meetings to work towards the goal of a recovery program. Coffee Houses were started in February, and more meetings and programs were added from there:

We have about 20 men living with us at Regina Rescue Mission. They are on a community-housing program. We have also started a long-term recovery program called LifeChange. Jesus Christ does miracles. He answers prayer. And, He changes lives. He takes the worst of sinners and transforms them into His image. We believe a man needs to change from the inside out, and only Christ can do it.

Eventually we also want to start a LifeChange program for women, and we are already looking into possibilities. We have had several Coffee Houses, with about 65 in attendance, and have just begun this as a weekly ministry. It's a chance to share the Gospel, do some singing, play table games and get to know people in the community. We have also started Compassion Teams, which is a street witnessing group going out into the community, in the parks, door to door, in the prisons and hospitals, ministering where there is need.

The LifeChange Program was designed to be a four-phase program, which they had designed and successfully implemented in the Union Gospel Mission of Winnipeg:

LifeChange assists a man from the very first stages of substance withdrawal to where he is working and ready to leave Regina Rescue Mission as a new man. . .

All of the phases revolve around a discipleship and recovery program called

Overcomers In Christ. The 12 goals they learn to live by are Truthfulness, Attitude, Health, Decisions, Faith, Forgiveness, Surrender, Devotions, Fellowship, Inventory, Victory, and Outreach.

In February CRF held a "Love Your Neighbour" banquet where all the proceeds, after costs, went to the Regina Rescue Mission. CRF also offered to help the Mission with their receipting because they were not a registered charity at that point. The RRM was provincially incorporated as a non-profit corporation in February, 2000 but it was not until August that they were federally registered as a Canadian Charity. The CRF continues to this day to receipt the American funds that come into the RRM.

Ken started going to churches and preaching in February. In the month of March the first Board meeting was held to discuss what was happening with the mission. The Porters also came up with their mission statement - "Regina Rescue Mission exists to rescue people from poverty, addiction, and sin by offering emergency help such as food, clothing and shelter, life-changing programs, and the Gospel Message." Their ministry in Regina had begun.

In the next few months many programs started to which those who were living in the house and the community were invited. May 11, 2000 was the first Bible Study where many people came to check out what it was all about, and from that point on it became a weekly meeting. Overcomers In Christ, which still continues, met for the first time on June 12, 2000 and had also continued on a weekly basis. At this point the meetings were voluntary but they still had a good turnout.

The RRM started out solely as a place to house men. However, in July, 2000, the house next door became available to rent. It was a large, Victorian style house with space to house seven people as well as a caretaker's suite. The landlord of the men's home also owned this house and agreed to rent it to the RRM. After extensive renovations, this became a facility for women. The women lived in this building, and walked to the men's home across the alley for meals and classes.

During the first year of founding the RRM, the Porters were walking by faith, receiving no salary or living allowance, which only strengthened [their] walk with Him and desire to serve Him. Through all of the miracles and growth, God confirmed their call to found this ministry in Regina.

In December of 2000, Ken Porter left the Board of Directors and became the first full-time paid staff member at the RRM. In March of 2001, Michelle Porter followed. They had made it through that first, difficult year of ministry and the Mission had been established. By February, 2001, the Porters were ready to start the LifeChange Recovery Program.

After Ken and Michelle became official staff, the mission continued to grow. The mission became an official charity and was able to start receipting. Staff and volunteers joined the team:

Both Ken and Michelle were paid minimum wage. Shortly after this RRM started doing their own receipting. The Lord provided a volunteer CPA, [Cheryl Janson], to do the accounting. In March Jason Rohatyn took the caretaker position at the RRM. He had previously been a live-in volunteer and helped out a lot.

In May of 2001 Matthew and Adelle Juhasz moved into the Women's Home to be caretakers. Matt was hired on as a summer student worker and Adelle as cook. In July of 2001 Jarad Welle and Matthew Juhasz started Rescue College. [Dr.] Jack Katzberg also started an internship in the summer with Canadian Bible College. Jack started several ministries of RRM and currently volunteers keeping those ministries alive. Sherry Giesbrecht lived in the Women's Home and volunteered as caretaker for the summer. With these people's help and many others the RRM was able to expand its ministries.

Ken Porter had been looking for a permanent home for the LifeChange Program. In 2002, the Sisters who ran the Ursuline Convent on 3535 3th Avenue decided that they could not run it anymore, and put it up for sale for \$375,000. The Regina Rescue Mission put in a bid for exactly that amount. Others, including businesses that wanted to change the convent into a nursing home, made much higher bids. The Sisters decided that they wanted the building to continue to house a ministry, so they gave it to the Regina Rescue Mission. Once again the friends of the Mission pulled through, and the purchase was officially made in February, 2003. The Ursuline Sisters also sold all of the furniture in the convent to the RRM for \$3000, even though it was worth much more than that.

The RRM took possession of what is now the LifeChange Program Campus in August, 2003. The building has a beautiful chapel, office space, two dining rooms, a classroom, family style kitchen, walk-in cooler, and twenty-six rooms. It also has an elevator, and pull chords in each room which sound an alarm at the Night Watchman's desk. The only renovation that had to be made before the LifeChange Program could move in was to build a wall separating the Men's wing from the Women's wing. A company did this work for free during August, and in September, the LifeChange Program residents moved in!

The residents really enjoyed the new building. As all the programs which welcomed the general public remained at the building on 2076 Scarth street, they found the new Campus to be very peaceful. The building on Scarth Street was soon referred to as the Shelter, as it holds the Low-Income Housing and Emergency Shelter. There were no longer hostellers offering the program residents drugs and alcohol, and the chaos of people constantly coming and going was greatly reduced.

Melanie Van Herk was hired as the Women's Program Manager, and she created a program catered especially to the women. The men's and women's programs gradually became more and more separate, until the only things they did together were LifeSkills classes and a games night on Fridays. Both men and women in the program have expressed

appreciation for the separation, saying that they feel they can be more open with only those of their own gender in the room. In June of 2004, Larry Wright, a program graduate, was hired as Resident Manager, and soon after completed the Rescue College course. His focus is on the Men's side of the LifeChange Program.

In November 2003, Jonathan Hack was hired as the Shelter Manager. As part of this position, he started a Drop-in. The Shelter now opens it's doors Monday through Thursday afternoons to serve soup, coffee, and whatever else is available. Coffee Houses are still held every Friday. In January of 2005, Dr. Katzberg began a program at the Shelter for those who are waiting to join the Program at the Campus.

There are now eight full time staff members employed by the Regina Rescue Mission, as well as a few part-time supervisors, and many interns. The Porters continue to dream and plan for the future. They are hoping to find a permanent home for the Men's Shelter and Low-Income housing, as well as a separate building for the Women's Program. Melanie Van Herk dreams of starting a literacy program in the future. Through all the change and growth, the hand of God has remained evident. He constantly provides the people, resources, and food needed to keep the ministry running. He will no doubt continue to do this as His people work to provide a place where lives can be changed.

Sources

The information compiled in this document was taken from transcripts of various talks the Porters have given to Churches and other groups since the Mission started in 1999. It is also from the different histories of the RRM written up by Rescue College students for their final project of Course 301 Rescue Mission History.