

THE CATHOLIC REGISTER

\$1.25 | November 17, 2019

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World Day of the Poor

'The hope of the poor shall not perish forever.'

2019



Facing down poverty

On this World Day of the Poor, the Pope challenges us to extend a helping hand

BY MICHAEL SWAN
The Catholic Register

You would think people might notice the poor.

In the City of Toronto alone there are 63 shelters with more than 6,900 beds, stuffed to the gills. There are 15 Out of the Cold sites run mainly by faith communities that also run at capacity most nights. There are over 100,000 families and individuals in Toronto on a waiting list for subsidized housing.

In Ontario, the Ontario Association of Food Banks claims 130 direct members that support over 1,200 hunger-relief programs. Across Canada, where more than three million people live below the poverty line, one million people were helped last year by a food bank, including 340,000 children.

Capuchin Franciscan Br. John Frampton is astounded by how little we notice. He's had politicians pose as volunteers at St. Francis Table, using the poor as a campaign backdrop. He's given testimony to an endless list of commissions of inquiry and community listening exercises, but nobody seems to want to see or hear from the poor themselves, he said.

"It's not brain surgery," he said on a typical Thursday at St. Francis Table in Toronto's long-troubled Parkdale neighbourhood. "You have to talk to the people."

It's a sentiment that was echoed by Pope Francis, who reminded all that "the poor are not numbers, but people," in his message for the third World Day of the Poor, which is marked on Nov. 17.

The Pope has used the event to invite all people "to do good deeds for the poor and to open their arms for people living in poverty."

In his case, the Pope has opened a temporary, week-long walk-in clinic for the poor in St. Peter's Square, where last year more than 3,500 were treated. And after Mass Nov. 17, he's hosting 1,500 poor for lunch.

At St. Francis Table, the goals are more modest, but no less necessary. It has been serving more than 200 meals a day for over 30 years, relying strictly on donations and the \$1-a-meal charge to patrons.

Despite Canada's goal to reduce the poverty rate by 50 per cent in the next 10 years — and a dip in the number below the poverty line — the problems of the poor can go deeper than dollars and cents, and they are not easy to solve.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



St. Francis Table has been a lifeline for many in Toronto's Parkdale community. Among its patrons are Laurie Brooks and her eight-year-old twin girls Asia and Akasha, top, and Peter Franke, right, and Ruby Eby, far right. (Photos by Michael Swan)

Problems go deeper than dollars and cents

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

Thirty-one year old Ruby Eby is missing several teeth where his smile should be. He's mired in a legal process with his roommate in a supportive housing complex. But the charges of assault laid against his roommate won't go to court for months. In the meantime Eby is afraid to go home.

At school Eby was in the special needs program. When school was done his father got him enrolled in the Ontario Disability Support Program. He lives on about \$1,000 a month, plus whatever he can pick up washing and detailing cars or shovelling snow. He's proud of his willingness to work.

Laurie Brooks, 44, is a regular at St. Francis Table with her eight-year-old twin girls Asia and Akasha. She has a 16-year-old son named Isaiah who eschews the \$1-a-meal restaurant. He wants to be an engineer.

Akasha has sickle cell anemia, which is a worry for Laurie. The province gives Laurie a special diet

allowance. It is supposed to ensure the little girl eats right, but it only comes to \$20. Laurie can't imagine what she could buy with that. A steak?

St. Francis Table is a godsend for Laurie, who admits she finds it difficult to cook for two picky girls.

"I've been coming here for the longest time," she said. "More or less, it's the community."

Laurie introduces herself as a life coach — someone who can help people with the difficult transitions in life, such as a new job or a new city. She pushes back against the idea she might be poor.

"I don't consider myself poor. I'm just rich with family," she said.

In the 1960s Peter Franke was a master of the IBM 1401 programming language — a precursor to FORTRAN in the era of punch-card-controlled business computers.

"It was a beautiful language," Franke said.

Newer languages that came after IBM 1401 don't please Franke. "It's been arbitrarily complexi-

fied," he said.

Out of his \$1,400 a month in pensions, the 84-year-old pays \$725 in rent. He too relies on St. Francis Table.

"If it weren't for this place, how do you make ends meet?" he asks.

He practices Tai Chi twice a day and looks much too young to have been born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1935. He collects his thoughts on computer programming, politics, Plato and Aristotle at peterstao.blogspot.com/.

He worries that we only think we're living in a democracy and in fact the rich and powerful are engineering the system to suit themselves.

"Just you watch it. They system is falling apart," he said.

The number of meals served at St. Francis Table has dropped this year, Frampton reports. As the neighbourhood gentrifies, more and more of the poor have had to move away. For the Franciscans there's no question of closing up shop just yet. They can't abandon these people.



Br. John Frampton, a Capuchin Franciscan, has been serving the poor for 36 years. (Photo by Michael Swan)

The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul provides material help (non-perishable food, clothes, accessories, furniture) to more than 355,000 persons in need on a yearly basis in Canada.

The Society also provides assistance to refugees and immigrants, and to northern communities.

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Poverty: By the numbers

Canada's poverty reduction strategy introduced in August 2018 set goals to reduce the rate of poverty by 20 per cent by 2020 and by 50 per cent by 2030.

Canada's poverty line is established using Market Basket Measure, the cost of a specific basket of goods and services representing a modest, basic standard of living. That cost differs across the country and is measured in 50 regions. For instance, for a family of four in Toronto in 2017 it was \$41,362, while in Halifax it was \$37,449. Some more numbers:

- **3,412,000** (9.5 per cent of total population) live below poverty line in 2017, down from 3,739,000 in 2016.
- **238,000** people 65 and over below line, down from 284,000.
- **622,000** persons under 18 are below poverty line, down from 755,000.
- In 2015-16, **840,000** Canadians entered poverty while 1.1 million left poverty.
- **12.5** per cent of population in 2016 had "unmet housing needs and chronic homelessness," up 1.6 per cent from 2016.

Source: Statistics Canada



Children play outside their house in a slum in Paraguay. Faith leaders and the World Bank have set a goal of ending extreme poverty — defined as living on less than \$1.90 a day — by 2030. (CNS photo/Jorge Adorno, Reuters)

AROUND THE WORLD

- **736 million** people, 10 per cent of the world's population, were living in extreme poverty in 2015, surviving on less than **\$1.90 a day**. Close to 46 per cent of the world's population was living on less than \$5.50 a day.
- More than half of the world's extreme poor, **413 million** people, live in sub-Saharan Africa.
- In the Middle East and North Africa, the number of people living in extreme poverty nearly doubled between 2013 and 2015 from 9.5 million to **18.6 million**, mainly due to the crises in Syria and Yemen.
- **1.3 billion** people in 104 developing countries, which accounts for 74 per cent of the world's population, live in multidimensional poverty, which incorporates education and access to basic utilities like sanitation into the definition.
- **660 million** children are experiencing multidimensional poverty, according to the UN Development Program.
- Sub-Saharan Africa has both the highest rate of children living in extreme poverty at **49 per cent** and the largest share of the world's extremely poor children at **51 per cent**.

Source: World Bank, World Vision

Psalm's words echo today

The World Day of the Poor began in 2017 and is marked every year on the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time. Here is an excerpt from the Pope's message for this third World Day of the Poor on Nov. 17:

The hope of the poor will not perish forever (Ps 9:19).

These words of the psalm remain timely. They express a profound truth that faith impresses above all on the hearts of the poor, restoring lost hope in the face of injustice, sufferings and the uncertainties of life.

The psalmist describes the condition of the poor and the arrogance of those who oppress them (cf. 10, 1-10). He invokes God's judgment to restore justice and overcome evil (cf. 10, 14-15). In his words, we hear an echo of age-old questions.

How can God tolerate this disparity? How can He let the poor be humiliated without coming to their aid? Why does He allow oppressors to prosper instead of condemning their conduct?

The psalm was composed at a time of great economic development that, as often happens, also led to serious social imbalances. The inequitable distribution of wealth created a significant number of poor people, whose condition appeared all the more



The "Homeless Jesus" sculpture by Canadian Timothy Schmalz has been reproduced for dozens of sites around the world, including this one in front of Toronto's Regis College. A prayer vigil for the homeless will be taking place at the St. Joseph Chapel at the college at 3 p.m. Nov. 17 to mark World Day of the Poor. (Register file photo)

dramatic in comparison with the wealth attained by a privileged few. The psalmist, observing the situation, paints a picture as realistic as it is true.

It was a time when arrogant and ungodly people hounded the poor, seeking to take possession even of what little they had, and to reduce them to bondage. The situation is not much different today.

The economic crisis has not prevented large groups of people from accumulating fortunes that often appear all the more incongruous when, in the streets of our cities, we daily encounter great

numbers of the poor who lack the bare necessities of life and are at times harassed and exploited.

The words of Book of Revelation come to mind: "You say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing. You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked" (Rev 3:17).

The centuries pass, but the condition of rich and poor remains constant, as if history has taught us nothing.

The words of the psalm, then, are not about the past, but about our present, as it stands before God's judgment.



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Poverty and giving has a long history

BY MICHAEL SWAN
The Catholic Register

Poverty isn't always misfortune or bad luck. Sometimes it's a vocation.

Catholic religious — nuns, monks, members of religious orders — have been taking vows of poverty, chastity and obedience for nearly two millennia.

Each religious order has put a lot of thought into what exactly they mean by poverty. Much of the way the Church thinks about poverty today can be traced back to a revolution in religious life that occurred 800 years ago, when the mendicant orders emerged.

The Dominican and Franciscan friars who reformed and rebuilt the Church in the 13th century were the first mendicants, or beggars — meaning that they survived and fulfilled their vocations entirely by relying on the free gifts of other Christians. Unlike the monks who had modelled Christian life for 1,000 years before the mendicants came along, in this new kind of religious life wandering Franciscans and Dominicans left behind the safety net of productive land that sustained wealthy

and powerful monasteries.

The first Franciscans, following the austere example of St. Francis, went out into the streets of Assisi with little wooden bowls to collect the food they would eat and share with the poor that day. The next day, they started again with nothing. This wasn't poor planning — it was a radical sense of providence, said Franciscan Capuchin Br. Alan Gaebel.

Providence is not the same thing as mere good luck and it doesn't just drop from Heaven, explained Gaebel. "Providential dependence on God and our neighbour" is the basis of Franciscan life.

"It demands relationship. You cannot be isolated," Gaebel said.

Religious poverty hinges upon a sense of duty to the common good.

"Giving to mendicants, or giving to the poor, was part of social responsibility in a time when you didn't have social service networks," said Dominican Fr. Darren Dias. "Early donations to mendicants — it was given because it was part of the social and cultural world in which they

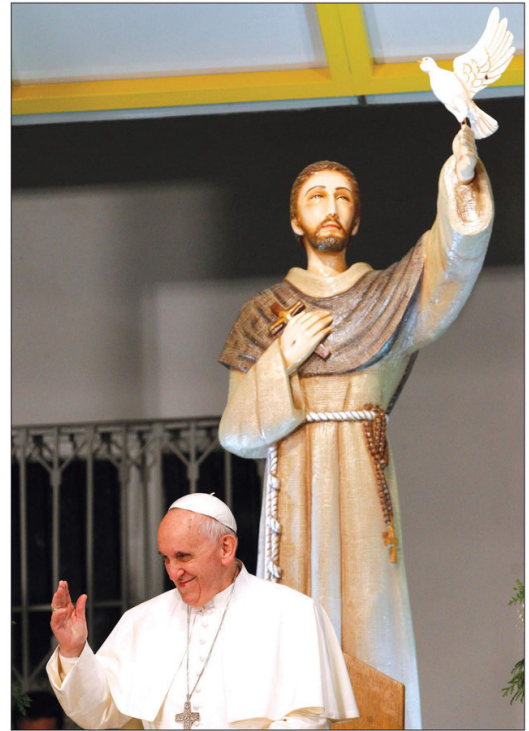
lived. People saw a responsibility to one another, a responsibility to the mendicants who certainly, early-on, owned nothing."

The early Franciscans "found providence from Heaven, yes, from God. But it's through the people of Assisi. It's not something that falls from Heaven, or this anonymous, amorphous thing up in the sky," said Gaebel.

The Franciscans and Dominicans came along at an unsettled time, when European society was shifting. In the high Middle Ages, the old feudal system was breaking down. New urban centres were creating wealth of their own and a huge gap began to open between rich and poor.

"The early mendicant movements were urban movements. They weren't rural or feudal. They were very much city-oriented," said Dias. "They were often at the gates of the city, which were the most dangerous areas, but also the areas where many things passed — different ideas, different cultures, all kinds of things."

To embrace instability and poverty in unstable times was dangerous, but it also inspired



St. Francis of Assisi set a radical example for religious orders to embrace poverty as a way to promote the common good. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

other Christians.

"People could see that there was a need because of the way that they dressed, their simple living, their simple churches," said Dias.

The authenticity and obvious commitment of the mendicant orders attracted some very serious donors, such as the financial and political powerhouse of the Medici family.

"The Medici would have cells in the monastery and the priory, where they would come and make retreats and get spiritual advice," said Dias. "So they were sort of part of the extended community. Likewise the community would pray for benefactors and donors, which we still do."

While communities of dedicated mendicants may have inspired the rich to build and decorate elaborate renaissance churches in Florence, the idea of providence was never the preserve of the rich. Ordinary people of ordinary means knew what it means to rely on providence.

"It rewrites the idea of the common good," said Gaebel. "It gives us another focus. The common good is not just the preserve of the wealthy, but it's everybody's. That was one of the societal changes of the day back then. I think it is even still."

As provincial superior for the Capuchins of Central Canada,

which makes him in some ways the chief fund-raiser, Gaebel never raises money just for his own needs or even the needs of his community. He is the steward of whatever gifts he receives, but also the steward of the cares, wants and needs of others. Gaebel links the idea of stewardship with providence by talking about our collective responsibility to care for each other.

"As Christians, one of the most important tasks we have is that of faithful stewardship," Gaebel writes in a newsletter for donors. "This is beautifully expressed in St. Francis' Canticle of the Creatures, which gives thanks for our interdependent relationship with all of God's creation and all which we share."

Relying on providence is always a little bit scandalous. It wasn't immediately understood or embraced in St. Francis' time, said Dias.

"Francis himself, he wouldn't have been seen as a prophet or some great saint in his time. He would have been seen in the way we might respond to a homeless person who doesn't have access to bathing facilities and clean clothes sitting beside us on the subway," Dias said. "He was really so radical, so out there and so jarring around poverty, that people would have almost been scandalized by his very presence."


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WORLD DAY OF THE POOR



The Society of St. Vincent de Paul aims to improve the customer experience at its stores. (Photo from Google Street View)

St. Vincent looks for personal touch

BY JOSHUA SANTOS
The Catholic Register

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul plans to take its operations to the next level as it moves into the new decade.

The organization has been in Canada since 1846, primarily serving families, the homeless, the poor and neglected in society.

“The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is founded on the principle of serving persons in need,” said Richard Pommainville, executive director of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. “At the centre of the work of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the person-to-person contact; this activity of charity is the fundamental characteristic of the society. Members of the society offer their goods, talents and wealth in the service of their neighbours, persons in need, by primarily conducting home visits.”



Richard Pommainville

Earlier this year Statistics Canada reported a decline in poverty rates. About 622,000 children lived below the poverty line in 2017, down about 18 per cent from 2016.

Pommainville said the numbers do not imply that there is a decline in people in need, stating that most charitable organizations are reporting an increase in demand.

“Currently, in the labour market, there is a lot of precarious work which makes it more difficult for people to stabilize their living environment, such as having access to property or delaying starting a family,” said Pommainville.

He did, however, say adaption is required based on the particular situation. He mentioned the wildfires in Fort McMurray, Alta., in 2016 as an example where they had to make changes.

“There were a lot of people from the Maritimes working in Alberta, making really good money,” said Pommainville. “However, with the fire, and as well since, the economy in Alberta is not running at the same level as previously seen. Many people returned home in their respective communities in the Maritimes.

“At first, they were covered by Employment Insurance (EI). Post-EI, they started chewing up their financial reserves. We now have, in 2019, three years later, specific support activities in Nova Scotia-Cape Breton and in Newfoundland to support some people who were displaced by the Fort McMurray fire and are not able to find stable employment. Statistics would not always point to such a domino effect, but by having that person-to-person contact, we can better understand the root cause of the situation.”

Pommainville said they’re now including visiting the sick in their homes or hospital and visiting those in need of companionship in person or over the phone as part of that person-to-person strategy.

A notable area they plan to focus on is the customer experience in the store. They’re looking for ways to make sure the customer enjoys their experience.

“There used to be a rack in the corner, which is an approach that you may have seen many years ago. Usually today, that’s not what people are expecting,” said Pommainville. “There’s a transition in the personal experience for people shopping.”

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Housing costs put squeeze on food banks

BY MICKEY CONLON
The Catholic Register

A new study echoes what several others have found since the implementation of the Canada Child Benefit: poverty is declining in Canada with a significant drop in food insecurity among low-income families.

“Our study results are yet another piece of evidence that improving household incomes reduces food insecurity,” said Valerie Tarasuk, a scientist in the Joannah & Brian Lawson Centre for Child Nutrition at the University of Toronto and senior author of the study. “If you give poor families more money, they spend it on basic necessities like food — and the more desperate they are, the more likely they are to do this.”

But if that’s the case, it begs the question, why over the past year have visits to Toronto food banks risen by four per cent to more than one million visits? Those numbers were released by the Daily Bread Food Bank, North York Harvest Food Bank, the Mississauga Food Bank and the frontline agencies they work with in early November, the same time as the U of T research was published. The annual study documents the story of the thousands of people who rely on food banks.

“Food is enshrined in the International Declaration of Human Rights,” reads the report. “Yet despite having signed on to this international agreement, over four million Canadians are food insecure.... These stag-



Poverty numbers may be down, but food banks are busier than ever. (CNS photo/Rick Musacchio)

gering numbers tell us that the right to food is not being realized in our communities.”

Jack Panozzo, manager of social justice and advocacy with Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Toronto, agrees the Canada Child Benefit — the tax-free monthly payment to eligible families to help offset costs in raising children under age 18 — has helped raise some people out of poverty. But in the Toronto area, too many other factors lead to food insecurity, key among these the lack of affordable housing in a city that saw its housing market skyrocket over the past decade. That market, after briefly flattening, seems ready to take off again according to recent housing sales figures.

Right now, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in the City of Toronto

is just under \$2,300. That’s before utilities are taken into account.

“Housing is a key factor in this whole business,” said Panozzo.

Most food bank clients are private-market renters who have seen their incomes flatline, yet the percentage of income spent on housing has increased from 68 per cent last year to 74 per cent, according to this year’s study. That leaves little on the table for necessities like food and clothing.

“Rents are continuing to outpace income in Toronto and Mississauga, leaving our respondents only \$7.83 per person per day to afford life’s other necessities,” the report said.

Panozzo sees some positive steps from the federal government in addressing the issue, namely its National Housing Strategy.

This 10-year, \$55 billion-plus plan introduced earlier this year aims to remove 530,000 families from housing need and cut homelessness by half by creating new housing supply, renovating existing affordable housing stock and other tools.

“When you create the ability for people to have housing you find that it changes their whole life,” he said. “When they have a safe, stable place to be, then (families are) able to build a life together.”

Housing alone won’t keep people from relying on food banks. The food bank report said strengthened social assistance, affordable child care, expanded tax benefits, equity policies and a commitment to ensuring affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food are needed to alleviate poverty.

“Food security, affordable housing and the ability to care for our children are three fundamental points upon which every government and every organization should be looking,” said Panozzo. Catholic Charities and its agencies are trying to respond to that, but “we really need government funding input there.... This is important and we have to do it. It’s not an option, it’s a necessity.”

Panozzo believes the current federal minority government may allow this to occur as the Liberals will need NDP support to stay in power.

“If they can come together, and if politics doesn’t get in the way, then the country will be helped and we will move forward.”

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Sisters working in orphanages have a very special calling. They provide loving arms, sage advice, and educational instruction and teach essential life skills so children know how to cook, clean and live independently by the time they become young adults.

In Tanzania, the nuns care for orphans and vulnerable children in the Neema Visitation Orphanage. Here in the remote part of Ruvuma region where there is a lack of water, electricity and proper roads, quality education from the pre-primary level through secondary school is provided. With its warm atmosphere and welcoming attitude the orphanage has a summer camp feel, where the neighborhood kids come by to play and young adults return from their post-secondary studies to celebrate the holidays. This is their family, where they know they are loved and will always be welcomed with open arms and a hot cup of tea.

Another site caring for vulnerable children is our Orissa sponsor site in Berhampur, India where educational support for rural children is provided by enrolling them in their schools and hostels. Sponsorship assists them with the costs of school fees, nutrition and educational materials.

While there is plenty of love and care at the orphanages and hostels where we work, there is also a critical lack of resources, especially as more needy children arrive. Thanks to donations to the gift catalogue extra resources like beds, mattresses, formula, bottles, diapers, blankets and food baskets make a big difference.

Recognizing this need, a new category has been added to the Chalice gift catalogue that directly supports the varying needs of orphanages and caretakers of high-risk babies and children. This category gives supporters the opportunity to impact the lives of the most vulnerable. Thanks to the generosity of a private donor offering gift matching all donations (up to \$100,000) will be doubled increasing the impact of your gift.

Sister Mary Grace, Site Director of our Neema sponsor site says, "On behalf of Neema I ask for your continued prayers and thank you for all the support of the children and community." To make a donation visit chalice.ca or call 1.800.776.6855.

Uplift Day makes life a little easier for needy

BY KYLE GREENHAM
Canadian Catholic News

EDMONTON

Zeny David will have warm clothing this winter and still be able to afford groceries.

In recent years the Edmonton woman has struggled to find steady employment after she suffered a workplace injury, and she has aspirations of becoming a qualified counsellor or social worker. With many challenges in her way, David — along with hundreds of others — was grateful for free clothing, food and services provided by volunteers during the annual Uplift Day of Mercy.

“This has helped me a lot, and I know it’s helping a lot of others too,” David said as she enjoyed a soup and sandwich at St. Alphonsus Parish in central Edmonton. “I got a pair of shoes, a winter coat, a blanket and hat. I know now I’ll be safe this winter. It’s so nice that they did this.”

For four years now, Catholic Social Services has organized the day-long event. Nearly 3,000 coats and jackets were donated this year, mostly through Catholic parishes and schools in Edmonton. Volunteers also provided lunch, family portraits, bike repairs and haircuts.

“It’s a great event, and it’s encouraging to see so many people come by and so many people showing their support,” said Troy Davies, chief executive officer of Catholic



Catholic Social Services CEO Troy Davies said nearly 3,000 winter jackets were donated for this year’s Uplift Day, mostly from Catholic parishes and schools in Edmonton. (Photo by Kyle Greenham)

Social Services. “We couldn’t do this without the support of the community and our partners. When I’m standing in the food line serving soup, there are a lot of ‘thank-you’s offered.”

That gratitude was seen in many of the faces at the Uplift Day of Mercy.

Edward Buckland, who lives on disability benefits, said the free haircut and donated

clothing were a big help to his limited income.

Debbie Gallant attended for the first time this year, and she was amazed by the generosity.

“I live on about \$800 a month so I can rarely afford a coat, boots or anything like that,” she said. “Now I’ve got a wonderful coat and I feel ready for the winter. It really

makes a difference.”

The benefits of Uplift Day also come to the volunteers.

Chris Stambaugh has offered free family portraits at the event since it began. Stambaugh recalled a couple who came to see him last year and told him that the photos would be their wedding pictures. The couple didn’t have enough money to hire a photographer on their actual wedding day.

“That was very touching,” Stambaugh said. “To be able to do something good and charitable with photography is great.”

There was also a spiritual component to Uplift Day. Fr. Adam Lech said a prayer to begin the event. Cree elder Bert Auger offered smudging outside the church.

SkyAnne Krupa describes the Uplift Day as a strong reflection of Catholic Social Services’ core values.

“You see how appreciative and thankful people are of the little things — like finding a bag or some shampoo,” said Krupa, who has volunteered since the event began.

“This really makes a statement that people are loved and valued. We try and show people they are worthy of respect and compassion regardless of what situation they’re in.”

Davies said he hopes it leaves with the community a simple four words: “We care about you.”

(Grandin Media)

“When the cow came to us ... I felt so happy. And seeing the cow, I felt in my heart that my future is going to improve, and definitely my life is going to be changed from now onwards.” —Tavish, a father who can now care for his family after receiving a cow



Your donation toward livestock will enable us to match needy families with the best animal for their specific situation. Your gift will be a stepping stone to a new way of life for a family, both financially and in their relationship with their Creator. Impact a family today—and for years to come!

Income-generating Animals Rescuing Families From Poverty

You can help provide animals like these for needy families!

Go to gfa.ca/animals or call 1-888-946-2742.



Chickens

These simple birds make a big difference to families that are living hand-to-mouth. Chickens and eggs give a destitute family an additional income and provide essential nutrients for malnourished children.



Goats

Goats provide milk to sell or drink. One goat typically produces several goat kids each year, which can expand a family’s herd or be sold to provide essential things for the household.



Lambs

A sheep’s rich milk is an excellent source of calcium, an essential nutrient for children. Offspring, wool and milk can be sold to provide education, food, medical care or a multitude of other valuable needs for families.