CHURCHATWORK MINISTRY FORMATION

St Marys Reaches Out November 2009

Taking Ministry to the Streets

by Paul Rees & Jack De Vries

oachman Park is a regular haunt for many of the marginalised in the St Marys area. People with issues of substance abuse, homelessness, poverty, and loneliness regularly gather there. Coachman Park is also a busy thoroughfare connecting the main street with a nearby shopping plaza.

In April/May 2009 the church leaders of the Christian Reformed Church of St Marys were asked to endorse an outreach ministry to the local community. It was proposed to commence in June and run for some three months. The ministry would involve handing out good quality warm clothing as well as hot soup, kind words, and listening ears. These session leaders gave their wholehearted support. Approval was also sought from the local council to use Coachman Park for this ministry. The Penrith City Council agreed.



Members of St Marys CRC in NSW turned their focus to those outside the four walls of the church.

The Coachman Park
Ministry commenced
in mid June with the
idea that volunteers
would set up in the
park every second
Sunday. The ministry
was intended to be for
a short term, initially
only three months.
However, the need

remained and relationships had begun to build. So as the warmer months began, soup was replaced with sausage sandwiches and winter clothing with summer.

So every second Sunday since mid June 2009 brothers and sisters from St Marys

CRC have met with the regulars and with those who walk past, providing some food, clothing, and some spiritual conversation. Many of those who pass by find it difficult to understand how people just give something away for nothing. They ask, "Why?" Hearing brothers and sisters provide a gospel explanation for the free gift has indeed been a blessing. This ministry has not been a one

way street
with blessings
flowing only
from the
church family
to the
community.
It has been
humbling to
watch the
Lord at work
in the lives of



Coachman Park in downtown St Marys

the members of the church, watching people grow in confidence and in love.

Kryna, one of the volunteers, had this to say about the Coachman Park outreach: "St Marys Christian Reformed Church started to do something for the community in the form of hot soup and giving away free jumpers, in a local park. They were looking for volunteers to help. I had many excuses as to why I could not help. One Sunday I did go to the park to see what was going on. At first, I stood in the background, I didn't know what to say to these people. I went a few more times and gradually got to talk to some of the people, they were just people who needed some help. They could not believe that we would give away food and clothes for free. We would explain that God had blessed us with so much and especially that he gave his son Jesus. I now look forward

to going when I can. There are quite a few people who come regularly and they have come to know us and enjoy the fellowship. If anyone is afraid to do something like this because they don't know what to say, just go along and try ,it you might be surprised. Pray about it and you may be as surprised as I was."

In December the plan is to close out the year with a Christmas lunch. Chairs and tables will be set up and a baked dinner served by members of St Marys. Small gifts will be distributed. The prayer is that this will continue next year.

For further reading:

The Externally Focused Church by Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson (Group: 2004)

Unleashing Your Potential by Frank R. Tillapaugh (Regal: 1988)

For discussion and reflection:

1. Frank R. Tillapaugh writes: "The ministries that take place in the church are not just enough, if we are to fulfil the Great Commission. We must take our ministries from the fortress to the front lines."

On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate your church?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Very Not at All Fortress-minded Fortress-minded

- 2. What are the needs in your local community? What resources does your church have to begin to address those needs?
- 3. If the sky were the limit, what externally focused ministry or ministries would like to get involved in?
- 4. Of all that your church is currently doing, what should it abandon in order to become more externally focused?