

Points of Connection

Northwest Mennonite Conference Newsletter

June 2011

Slave Lake Fire Relief

On Sunday, May 15th an out-of-control forest fire destroyed a third of the homes in Slave Lake, Alberta. The whole town of 7,000 people was evacuated.

One of our churches, Bethany Christian Church in Smith, is just 45 minutes from Slave Lake and many of the residents work and shop there. The Community Hall across from the church was set up as an Evacuation Center and the church opened its doors as a cleanup center, since there were no showers in the hall. The church also had donations of clothing and bedding available for those in need.

From Sunday morning on that first week the church people had very busy 12-16 hour days. Some cooked at the community hall while

others manned the church. They had up to 60 people coming through for showers in a day.

Pastor Joe Mrak said, "As a church, there are families who have been affected either directly or indirectly." Some former church people had moved to Slave Lake and lost their homes, and many had family and friends affected since Slave Lake is the main centre that Smith people relate to.

Nearing the end of the week the church people were feeling stretched and stressed, so Jeff and Ardith Neufeld and their two sons of West Zion church in Carstairs
Continued on back side



In the pictures below church member Sylvia Johnston is seen carrying a fresh stack of towels for the showers, an evacuee selects some clothing and Ardith Neufeld completes the cleanup process with a haircut.



Slave Lake Fire Relief cont'd

headed up to Smith on the Friday of the May long weekend to help out. West Zion people had baked and sent food which were packed into care boxes for the people. Fresh fruit and vegetables were particularly appreciated.

Jeff and Ardith manned the church while evacuees came and went, and Ardith gave many haircuts to the men! As she cut, they talked, sharing story after story, and spilling out sadness, anger, grief and shock. Pastor's wife Cathy Mrak said, "Jeff and Ardith were like manna from heaven!"

Church leader Darren Fulmore is a Councilor for the Municipal District of Slave Lake and found himself spending long days in Slave Lake dealing with the many issues that arose. Pastor Joe was with a busload of evacuated people who returned to see the devastation.

Jeff and Ardith and sons Sam and Daniel formed the praise team for Sunday morning worship and led the Children's program. In the Adult Sunday School class hard questions were raised, tears were shed, and prayers sent up.

Pastor Joe spoke on Psalms 34 and 42:

"Why are you downcast, O my soul...Put your hope in God."

Carstairs Youth Drop-in Centre

Colton Donhauser saw a need and said, "God, if this is what you want me to do then send me and I'll go do it."

The 22-year-old man from the West Zion Church in Carstairs is spearheading a project to open a Youth Drop-in Centre. Colton and his team, Josh Tiel, B.J.Thompson, Jo Kellsey, Tori Lamb and Jesse Sayer are working together to bring about this dream.

Colton had looked at available buildings and been frustrated by the cost. He brought the idea to the Town and the town's vacant medical clinic was made available for their use! On May 10th Carstairs Town Council voted in favour of the agreement. The team is renovating it to make it appealing to youth and hope to open by September of this year.



The centre will be run by volunteers from Carstairs churches.

Newspoint

Did you know...

***The Chestermere Hispanic Church** baptized 11 people in May and celebrated their 7th Anniversary with a delicious steak barbecue on June 5th.

***Pastor Joe Mrak** is performing the marriage of his son Keith to Jamieann Schapansky on June 11. Keith and Jamieann attend the Hines Creek Lighthouse Fellowship pastored by Daryl King.

*Long-time Church pillars **Boyd Stauffer** of Salem Mennonite Church in Tofield and **Roy Buschert** of West Zion Church in Carstairs both passed away in June at the age of 98.

***Edson Mennonite Church** has raised the needed funds for renovations and hired a contractor who hopes to begin in late summer.

