

News from ANDREW & AMIE REIMER

Serving in Winnipeg's North End with Inner City Youth Alive

ADVENT 2014

Dear Friends and Family,

In most of our letters I share stories emerging from my work as a community minister in the North End with Inner City Youth Alive. I share these stories because I want you to know the exciting and meaningful ways we believe God is using us in the neighbourhood. I plan to continue sharing more of these stories in the future, but in this letter I thought I would try to describe some of the complexities and challenges Amie and I face as we live and raise our family in the North End.



Walking in the "North Side" (North End) with our three girls and a rabbit

SOLIDARITY and SUSTAINABILITY

After 13 years living and serving here, we still believe we are called to live incarnationally in the neighbourhood and we believe that this is part of the way we are making an impact here *, however, sometimes it doesn't feel this way. Living in the 'hood often does not feel as meaningful, effective or heroic as it might sound. Sometimes we wrestle with how to both live in solidarity with the neighbourhood and live in ways that are healthy and sustainable for us as a family. This is a struggle that is common for many people who are ministering across cultures and especially across lines of relative wealth and poverty.

The way we live in the neighbourhood has changed in the different seasons of our lives. When Amie and I first moved into the North End as a young couple with no children, we had neighbourhood friends in our home on a daily basis for visits, coffee, meals or gatherings. Although I was employed as a full-time ministry worker, Amie also devoted much of her time and energy to building relationships with local youth and families.

Since we started having children 10 years ago, Amie and I have done less and less ministry together as a couple or in our home and have generally had less engagement with our neighbours. While community ministry is my full-time work, Amie devotes her days to caring for and home-schooling our three daughters. I spend my days reaching out to and supporting people in the community, but when I get home I make it a priority to be involved and available to Amie and the kids. Amie and I often don't have as much energy or time as we'd like left over to connect with the people on our block. Having people over for meals, for coffee, or for the night, is more stressful and draining than it was before we had kids. It's also a lot more difficult to have pastoral conversations while in the same space as three energetic, noisy

and attention-loving daughters. Amie and I have felt it wise to keep boundaries that give us, and our kids, a certain amount of separation from our neighbourhood. Although this is sometimes at odds with our incarnational ideals, we feel this has made long-term ministry in the neighbourhood sustainable for us.



Men's Bible Study group in our backyard

* If you want to read more about my thoughts on the value of living incarnationally in the neighbourhood, ask me to send you an article I wrote about this entitled, "The Medium is the Message"

But it's complicated: we know that our lifestyle and our boundaries are made possible by the unearned privilege of our ethnic and socio-economic background. Most of our neighbours do not have the *luxury* of choosing the "wise" boundaries Amie and I feel we need. Here are two examples:

1) The house we own has a large backyard and we have built a high wooden fence around it to create a sanctuary for us and our kids to relax or play outside without needing to constantly interact with the neighbourhood. Very few neighbours have this luxury of space and privacy.

2) If our North End friends reach the most minimal level of financial stability (a regular paycheque or government cheque, a home rented in their name, food in their cupboards, a vehicle), they will constantly have family members, friends and acquaintances who need, ask for and expect their help. Sometimes this generosity and interdependence demonstrated by our neighbours is beautiful, but at other times it can become dysfunctional, causing some to be overburdened while others are unhealthily dependent. Meanwhile, when Amie and I know of neighbours who need money, a ride or a place to sleep we can say 'no,' and we often do, for the sake of healthy boundaries and the health of our family. Even when meeting the needs of others is also unsustainable for our neighbours, saying 'no' is much more difficult for them than it is for us; this is partly because Amie and I do not have as many struggling family members and partly because there is a cultural assumption for many here that saying 'no' is a betrayal.

Like I said, it's complicated, and we ourselves often feel conflicted about this. We believe Jesus calls us to cross boundaries and enter into solidarity with those on the margins, but we also have limitations and needs. We are still learning to sort out which of our needs are God-given, which are culturally-rooted and which "needs" are really unhealthy desires. We are trying to accept our limitations, recognizing that every person and family has a different capacity for outward engagement. How we do life here will look different than how other mission-oriented families do life here. We are learning to trust that God has grace for our limitations, our imperfect love and even our social privilege.

LOVE YOUR (different, difficult, hurting, etc.) NEIGHBOUR

In this spirit of honesty, let me share a few stories illustrating the complications and celebrating the small but meaningful ways our family engages in the neighbourhood.

Our girls have had some unwanted lessons in loving their neighbour and praying for those who mistreat them. Overall, our experiences with our neighbours have been positive. Many of the adults on our block have been very friendly and kind to our kids. In the past, Hannah and Olivia have had a few good friendships with neighbour kids who have now moved away or just grown apart. This year, however, our girls have struggled with some neighbour kids coming uninvited into our yard, playing in the back lane and throwing junk over our fence, and sometimes saying mean things to them. When one of our daughters, frustrated about all this, asked, "Why do kids have to play in the back alley?" I tried to explain that they probably don't have a yard to play in like she does.

Recently some kids came into the backyard without our permission and opened the cages to our girls' beloved pet rabbits. This happened twice within a few days. Thankfully, we were able to find all the escaped rabbits, but this still made our girls feel hurt and angry. The next day, I had to put padlocks on all the rabbit cages. We have led our kids in praying for whoever did this as well as for protection from them.



SUPPORT UPDATE

We have been blessed by some generous one-time donations in recent months. This will allow us to maintain a full salary until June. However, after June, our projected monthly support is still only about 70%.

We continue to gratefully welcome whatever support you are able to give, but our greatest need is for new or increased monthly commitments which will ensure that our needs are met on an ongoing basis.

This Halloween we were trick-or-treating at a house a few blocks away from home, when we discovered *our* bike lying their yard! The bike had disappeared out of our backyard, and, even though it was a bike our girls had outgrown and we were planning to give away, our girls felt deeply violated that someone would steal it. They wanted to get it back. No one was home at the house where we found the bike, so we had to decide how to handle the situation. Amie and I know how it is with kids and bikes in this neighbourhood: the working assumption is that if you find a bike, you take it, when you don't need it anymore, you ditch it, unless someone else steals it from you first – easy come, easy go. We knew that the parents at this home probably did not know where the bike had come from and would not care if we took it back. But we told our girls that we don't want to take things out of other people's yards and that it was possible that the people did not know it was stolen – maybe someone gave or sold it to them. We decided to come back and ask about the bike when the parents were home.

Several days later when my daughter and I came back and explained to the dad about the bike, he immediately showed a desire to help. He asked his son, who said that some other kids had the bike now. The dad told me at which house I should look for it. He felt bad that his kids had been involved with our stolen bike and he seemed surprised but appreciative of our respectful approach to trying to get it back. "People usually don't do this," he said. We didn't end up finding the bike, but the experience served as a lesson in loving neighbours for all of us – our kids, the dad, and for Amie and me.

Amie has recently had the opportunity to support a woman who lives next door. The woman and her family had moved into the apartment less than a year ago and we had only said 'hi' and chatted briefly, but when the woman asked to use our phone a couple of times she began to open up to Amie about some of her struggles. This past week she came over with her young kids to talk and she spent an hour emotionally pouring out her story to Amie. Amie is a wise and caring listener who has developed trust with our neighbour. We are encouraged that our life as a family in the neighbourhood is still making a difference.

Please pray for us: 1) as we navigate raising a family here; 2) that we would have love and strength to relate to our neighbours in Christ-like ways; 3) that we would know when God is calling us to sacrificially come near to our neighbours who are hurting and when God is inviting us to accept our limitations and rest in His grace.

See page four for Highlights and more Prayer Requests...



RECENT HIGHLIGHTS and PRAYER REQUESTS

- I participated in the first four-day training block towards a Certificate of Transformational Ministry on the Margins.
- Together with my team mate, Sol, I started leading a Men's Bible Study group. Please pray that many of the young men we are connected with would experience community, encouragement and spiritual growth.
- Amie and I hosted a reunion of last year's youth discipleship group together with our teammates Jessica and Sol and a visit from Community Ministry alumnus, Jordan. (picture at right)
- Christmas is often a time when some of our friends struggle more intensely with grief, loneliness and depression. Pray that God would comfort and protect.
- Check out my poem, "This Isn't Bethlehem" in this issue of ICYA's *Newsflash*.



Wishing you a blessed Advent and Christmas,

Andrew & Amie

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